



## Implementing the European Agenda on Migration: Progress Reports on Greece, Italy and the Western Balkans

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Today the Commission has published three Progress Reports on measures to tackle the refugee and migration crisis in Italy, Greece and along the Western Balkans Route. The Reports assess progress on the hotspot system and relocation scheme in Italy and Greece and the measures in the [Leaders Statement](#) adopted after the [Western Balkans Route Leaders Meeting](#) on the 25 October.

The [European Agenda on Migration](#) presented a comprehensive approach to migration management, including a series of immediate measures to address the migratory crisis in the Mediterranean. The Commission proposed a hotspot system to support Italy and Greece in registering and processing asylum claims. The relocation scheme provides for the relocation of 160,000 people in clear need of international protection from Italy and Greece to other Member States.

In October, the Commission took additional measures to deal with the shift in migrant flows to the Western Balkans route. The Commission convened a Leaders' Meeting on 25 October, which concluded with a Joint Statement on 17 immediate actions to provide humanitarian support to migrants and better manage the migratory flows along the route. The Heads of State or Government of Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia took part in the meeting.

#### Progress achieved in Greece

A dedicated Commission team working under the leadership of the Commission's Director-General of the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) with the support of the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) has been on the ground for months, working hand in hand with the Greek authorities to accelerate access to emergency funding, improve the coordination between the various actors, address administrative bottlenecks and facilitate knowledge sharing on border management and relocation. The SRSS played a key role in the launch of the UNHCR rental scheme, which took place on 14 December, to provide 20,000 reception places for asylum seekers in Greece. The SRSS also played an important role in the resumption of Greek programmes for forced returns and Assisted Voluntary Returns. Despite progress made, with the support of the Commission on the ground, there is still a lot of work to be done.

Five **hotspot areas** have been identified by the Greek authorities in Lesbos, Leros, Kos, Chios and Samos. So far, only the hotspot in Lesbos is operational. Greece has appointed hotspot coordinators and has created a central coordination committee, but must complete the construction of the hotspots in line with the planned timetable, and improve the organisation of the hotspots. Member States should continue to support Greece by making available the necessary experts to ensure the full rollout of the hotspots. Frontex will now assist Greece with the registration of migrants in the Northern Border region by deploying additional border guards and will deploy Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT) in the Aegean islands and sea, at [Greece's request](#).

Greece has committed to increasing **reception capacity** to 30,000 places for asylum seekers in Greece by the end of the year, and will be supported by the UNHCR in providing at least 20,000 more – a pre-condition to make the emergency relocation scheme work. On 14 December, the European Commission concluded an agreement with the UNHCR on the financing of a rental scheme to provide for the 20,000 reception capacities through Commission financing of €80 million. The programme would also fund the establishment of 7,000 first reception places in the hotspots. Under this programme Greece is preparing to start the construction of 4,500 additional accommodation spots on Lesbos, Leros and Kos. Greece has also signed a grant agreement with the Council of Europe Development Bank for the construction of up to 700 reception places in Eleonas. In total, 35,000 reception places should be available in Greece by early January 2016 – thus exceeding the commitment taken by Greece at the Western Balkans Leaders' meeting of making 30,000 places available by the end of 2015.

Member States have agreed to support Greece by **relocating** 66,400 people in need of international protection. Relocation has started very slowly, but there have been signs of improvement in recent weeks. The first relocation flight took 30 asylum seekers from Greece to Luxembourg on 4 November. As of today, 64 asylum seekers have been relocated from Greece. Another 370 relocation candidates have been registered and 297 relocation applications have been submitted to other Member States for approval. Only 9 Member States have offered places to Greece for relocations, providing for 305 places, while 14 Member States have appointed Liaison Officers to support the process on the ground. Member States must substantially increase their support to make the system function properly.

Thanks to the Commission's swift work in making €2.5 million in EU funding available, the Assisted Voluntary Return Programme through IOM could resume in December. Since the beginning of 2015, Greece has carried out 16,131 forced returns and 3,460 assisted voluntary returns of economic migrants who had no right to asylum in Europe. Greece still lacks a comprehensive return strategy, and does not have sufficient detention capacities where these are needed to stop people absconding before their return.

### **Progress achieved in Italy**

Six **hotspot areas** have been identified by the Italian authorities in Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Porto Empedocle/Villa Sikanìa, Trapani, Augusta and Taranto. The hotspot in Lampedusa is the only operational site so far, with two additional sites expected to open shortly. The works for Taranto, Trapani and Augusta are still ongoing. Italy needs to take measures to increase the efficiency of screening and fingerprinting and improve the system of transfers from hotspot areas. The expanded Triton Operation in the Central Mediterranean sea has contributed to saving almost 60,000 lives, with improvements being made to help disembarkation at the hotspots. Italy currently has reception capacity for 93,000 asylum seekers, including in the hotspot areas, and dedicated pre-relocation facilities have been identified.

Despite the fact that **relocation** from Italy started earlier than from Greece it is still far behind the rate necessary to achieve the overall target to relocate 39,600 in two years. The first relocation took place on 9 October with 19 Eritreans flying to Sweden. A further 125 transfers have since taken place. Italy has identified another 186 relocation candidates and has submitted 171 relocation applications to Member States. Until today, only 12 Member States have made relocation places available, with pledges to receive 1,041 people. 19 Member States have appointed Liaison Officers to support the process on the ground. Member States need to substantially increase their pledges and reduce their response time to accelerate the rollout of the scheme.

Italy has carried out over 14,000 forced returns of persons with no right to asylum in 2015, and participated in 11 Frontex joint return flights of rejected asylum seekers from other Member States. Italy needs to resume its currently suspended voluntary return scheme as quickly as possible to reduce the large number of rejected asylum seekers who remain in the country.

A dedicated team of Commission officials has been working on the ground for months, hand in hand with the Italian authorities.

### **Progress achieved on the Western Balkans Route**

The unprecedented flows of refugees and migrants starting late summer 2015 and escalating in the autumn put the Western Balkans route at the centre of the challenge faced by Europe, nearly 700,000 people crossing from Turkey to Greece in 2015, most travelling up through the Western Balkans to Central and Northern Europe. The management of the flows in the region revealed a lack of capacity, cooperation and solidarity, as well as basic communication between the countries along the route: a specific problem which required a specific operational and political solution at European level.

Immediately after the Leaders' Meeting on 25 October, all participants appointed high-level contact points to coordinate the follow-up actions through weekly videoconferences organised by the Commission (by 17 December, 8 such videoconferences will have taken place). A **shared tool to provide information** on daily migration flows has been established, and countries on the route have improved their coordination. Better border management and less facilitation of irregular movements have contributed to a better management of the migratory flows. Nevertheless, the report also notes that more efforts are needed to notify partners in advance about policies and measures which impact them and to avoid unilateral de facto nationality based entry conditions and fence constructions.

With regards to **border management**, the report notes that Greece has agreed on important joint operations with Frontex, with 40 guest officers to support fingerprinting and registration of migrants at its Northern borders, 293 guest officers in the Greek islands (on land and at sea), 213 in total outside the hotspots areas and 100 additional Frontex staff to arrive in January 2016. In Slovenia, over 200 guest police officers have been sent by other countries through bilateral arrangements to support border management operations – which however falls short of the 400 police officers requested.

Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece have all activated the **EU's Civil Protection Mechanism**, requesting that other countries send them resources to deal with the humanitarian emergency they are facing on their territories. 15 Member States have so far responded to these requests, providing items such as accommodation, bedding, clothing and medical supplies. Many items have still not yet been provided, and the urgency of the needs will only increase as the weather deteriorates.

In addition to Greece's pledge to provide an additional 50,000 **reception places** for migrants, other countries agreed to create 50,000 additional reception places along the route. Around half of this figure is currently available or being developed. As regards Greece, on 14 December the European Commission concluded an agreement with the UNHCR on the financing of a rental scheme to provide 20,000 reception places. Countries which participated in the Western Balkans Leaders' meeting now need to urgently speed up the provision of reception capacities in light of the worsening weather conditions along the route.

## **Background**

The European Commission has been consistently and continuously working for a coordinated European response on the refugees and migration front.

Upon taking office, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker entrusted a Commissioner with special responsibility for Migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos, to work together with the other Commissioners, coordinated by First Vice-President Frans Timmermans, on a new policy on migration as one of the 10 priorities of the Political Guidelines.

On 13 May 2015, the European Commission presented its European Agenda on Migration, setting out a comprehensive approach for improving the management of migration in all its aspects.

Two implementation packages under the Agenda, on [27 May](#) 2015 and on [9 September](#) 2015 have already been adopted and the measures therein are starting to be deployed.

## **For more information**

FACTSHEET: [Managing the Refugee Crisis - Greece: State of Play Report](#)

FACTSHEET: [Managing the Refugee Crisis - Italy: State of Play Report](#)

FACTSHEET: [Managing the Refugee Crisis - Western Balkans Route: State of Play Report](#)

[Progress Report on the Implementation of the hotspots in Greece](#)

[Progress Report on the Implementation of the hotspots in Italy](#)

[Report on the follow-up to the Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans Route](#)

Press release: [A European Border and Coast Guard to protect Europe's External Borders](#)

[European Agenda on Migration](#)

[Communication of 23 September 2015](#): Managing the refugee crisis: immediate operational, budgetary and legal measures under the European Agenda on Migration

[Communication of 14 October 2015](#): Managing the refugee crisis: State of Play of the Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration

[Western Balkan Leaders' Meeting Statement](#)

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Press contacts:

[Natasha BERTAUD](#) (+32 2 296 74 56)

[Tove ERNST](#) (+32 2 298 67 64)

[Markus LAMMERT](#) (55555)

[Tim McPHIE](#) (+ 32 2 295 86 02)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)