



## Implementing the European Agenda on Migration: Commission reports on progress in Greece, Italy and the Western Balkans

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Today the Commission reported on progress made on measures to tackle the refugee and migration crisis in Italy, Greece and along the Western Balkans Route. The [European Agenda on Migration](#) presented in May 2015 included a series of measures to address the migratory crisis. In September, the Commission set out the [priority actions](#) under the Agenda to be implemented immediately. Today progress is assessed on the hotspot system and relocation scheme in Italy and Greece and the measures taken to implement the commitments in the [Statement](#) agreed at the [Western Balkans Route Leaders' Meeting](#) in October 2015.

#### Progress achieved in Greece and in Italy

Dedicated Commission teams have been working on the ground with the Greek and Italian authorities for several months to set up the hotspots and reinforce and significantly speed up the procedures for screening, identification and fingerprinting of migrants to facilitate relocation. These migration management support teams are operating in dedicated facilities, and are operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

#### Greece

The rollout of the **five hotspots** identified in the Aegean islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos) has been slow, due in part to the need to build them from scratch and with shortcomings in infrastructure, staffing and coordination. Only one hotspot is currently fully operational (in Lesvos). Work is ongoing in other facilities. The Greek government has called on the support of the Greek army to reach the target date of mid-February. In the meantime, identification and registration are already taking place where possible in temporary structures. The Greek authorities are making improvements to the functioning of the hotspots and have finalised Standard Operating Procedures and new disembarkation procedures, connecting the hotspot facilities directly with people disembarking on the islands. Frontex has started coastal patrols in Lesvos, Chios and Samos that are bearing results.

The proportion of migrants **fingerprinted** has risen markedly from 8% in September 2015 to 78% in January 2016. Once fully operational and equipped, the hotspots in Greece should reach a total fingerprinting capacity of around 11,000 persons per day, which is well above the average arrival numbers for January. Advanced Level Document experts are deployed by Frontex in the islands in order to identify fraudulent documents.

The **relocation** of 66,400 people in need of international protection from Greece, as agreed by the Member States, has started very slowly with only 218 relocations so far. Only 15 Member States have offered places to Greece for relocations, providing for 1081 places, while 16 Member States have appointed Liaison Officers to support the process on the ground. The Greek authorities are improving their registration capacity and have opened a second office in Samos where infrastructure for accommodation and transfers are now in place, with the support of the IOM and the UNHCR. In December 2015, the Commission approved an €80 million programme to support **reception capacity** in Greece, including a network of 20,000 places for asylum seekers run by UNHCR, as well as supporting the establishment of 7,000 places in the hotspots areas. Under this scheme, there are now 14,950 places available. In addition to the 7,181 places that are currently available in temporary and longer-term facilities at the Eastern Aegean islands, Greece has 10,447 places on the mainland. Therefore, the total number of existing reception places in Greece at the moment is 17,628. However, there is still a shortfall of 12 342 places compared to the 50,000 places to which Greece committed in October 2015.

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. This remains insufficient in the context of over 800,000 arrivals in 2015.

## Italy

The foreseen rollout of **six identified hotspot** areas by the Italian authorities (in Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Porto Empedocle/Villa Sikanìa, Trapani, Augusta and Taranto) has been slow, due in part to the need to build them from scratch and shortcomings in infrastructure, staffing and coordination. Two hotspots are fully operational (in Lampedusa and Pozzallo), and a third one (in Trapani) will be fully operational when final refurbishment works are completed. Works are urgently being completed in Taranto. The plans for the hotspots in Augusta and Porto Empedocle/Villa Sikanìa have yet to be finalised; a decision concerning them is essential in view of the likely increase of migratory flows during the summer period.

The two operational hotspots (in Lampedusa and Pozzallo) have reached a 100% **fingerprinting** rate for the most recent disembarkations. The proportion of migrants fingerprinted has risen markedly from 36% in September 2015 to 87% in January 2016. Once fully operational and equipped, the hotspots in Italy are expected to have a fingerprinting capacity of 2,160 migrants per day, which is well above the average arrival numbers for January.

Despite the fact that **relocation** from Italy started a few weeks earlier than from Greece, it is still far behind the rate necessary to achieve the overall target to relocate 39,600 people in need of international protection in two years. In total, 279 applicants have been relocated to date, with 200 outstanding relocation requests having been sent to other Member States. Until today, only 15 Member States have made relocation places available with pledges to receive 966 people, while 20 Member States have appointed Liaison Officers to support the process on the ground. The low implementation rate is largely due to the limited arrivals of eligible migrants on the Italian territory.

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. This remains insufficient in the context of over 160,000 arrivals in 2015.

The Italian **reception system** is already largely sufficient for the needs of its asylum system and dedicated facilities have already been identified for persons to be relocated. On the other hand severe shortcomings are evident in terms of pre-removal accommodation with only 420 places available against the 1252 contained in the roadmap submitted to the European Commission.

In addition, yesterday the Commission adopted a decision modifying the 2007-2013 structural funds programme "Security for development" in Italy, redirecting up to €124 million of the European Regional Development Fund to co-finance measures undertaken by Italy to rescue migrants at sea.

### 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 880,000 people crossed from Turkey to Greece in 2015, with most of them subsequently travelling through the Western Balkans to Central and Northern Europe.

President Juncker took the initiative to convene a Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the **Western Balkans** route on 25 October 2015 and brokered agreement on a 17-point plan to achieve the gradual, controlled and orderly movement of persons along the Western Balkans route. Key issues included border controls, reception capacity and the management of migration flows between the group of countries facing the highest pressure over recent months.

Weekly meetings organised by the Commission have taken place to monitor the 17-point plan agreed at the Leaders' Meeting hosted by President Juncker on refugee flows along the Western Balkans route. At a time when communications had all but broken down, this coordination has been crucial in reducing the risk of unexpected steps being taken in one country having an impact on another. A shared tool for **exchange of information** has been established along with a new approach to cooperation and coordination between countries along the route. A comprehensive exchange between police chiefs on policies and practices at the borders is now taking place and communication and cooperation between border authorities has been improved.

However, there have been regular instances of decisions being taken unilaterally in one country, which have a domino-effect on the countries upstream. Restoring orderly management of borders on the Eastern Mediterranean/Western Balkans route is the most pressing priority for the European Union today. Most importantly, all Member States must commit to end the 'wave-through' and must insist on the application of EU rules on asylum and border management. People arriving in the Union must know that if they need protection they will receive it, but it is not their decision as to where this is in the European Union. If they do not qualify for protection, they will be returned, in full respect of the principle of non-refoulement.

With regards to **border management**, since the agreement of the operational plan with Frontex on 3 December, the Agency is assisting registration at the Greek border with the former Yugoslav Republic

of Macedonia. Such deployment should now be intensified and used to its maximum potential. Whilst it is not possible to deploy a Frontex joint operation directly inside the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, alternative means of Frontex assistance are currently under preparation. Any complementary action taken on the northern side of that border should be carried out within an EU framework.

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. A total of 15 countries have made offers of assistance, providing items such as tents, sleeping bags and bedding, personal protective items, heating and lighting equipment, and electricity generators. However, a large number of requests for assistance have still not been met.

Countries on the route agreed to create 50,000 additional **reception places**. However the current capacity is still short of this target - around half of this figure is currently available or being developed. Countries which participated in the Western Balkans Leaders' meeting now need to urgently speed up the provision of reception capacities.

## **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.

Three implementation packages under the Agenda, on [27 May](#) 2015, on [9 September](#) 2015 and [15 December](#) have already been adopted.

## **For more information**

[Communication on the State of Play of Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration](#)

[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](#)

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

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

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

[Press release – Implementing the European Agenda on Migration: Progress on priority actions](#)

[Press release - Implementing the Common European Asylum System: Commission escalates 9 infringement proceedings](#)

[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

[Communication of 15 December](#): A European Border and Coast Guard and effective management of Europe's external borders

[Western Balkan Leaders' Meeting Statement](#)

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