



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL MIGRATION and HOME AFFAIRS

The Deputy Director-General

Brussels,  
Ares 2017 (6277699)

**Action from Switzerland**

**Be Aware And Share (BAAS)**

**Chios Eastern Shore Response  
Team**

**Chios Solidarity**

**Choose Humanity**

**FEOX Rescue Team**

**Humans for Humans**

By email to:

chiosmediateam@gmail.com

Dear Sir/Madam,

In your Open Letter sent to Commissioner Avramopoulos and to us by email on 6 November 2017 you raise the issue of the difficult living conditions for irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the island of Chios.

When looking at the situation of migrants in Greece including the hotspot islands such as Chios, it is important to first recall the stabilising effect brought about by the activation of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016. Moreover, since the beginning of the crisis, the European Union has made available more than EUR 1 billion in support to Greece in tackling the migration and refugee challenges – making Greece the largest beneficiary of EU Home Affairs Funds as well as the exclusive beneficiary of the EU Emergency Support Instrument. The EU funding enabled to upgrade the hotspots and ensure necessary services such as washing, cleaning, catering and food provision, housing, transportation, legal aid, medical services and educational activities which are essential for a dignified treatment all migrants must enjoy. Without EU financial support – directly to the Greek authorities or via implementing partners such as UNHCR and IOM – many refugees and migrants would have been deprived of their fundamental human rights.

But today, as you rightly point out, we are indeed facing again a situation of severe overcrowding on most of the islands, including Chios. This is due to a combination of

facts: the recent increase in arrivals from Turkey since summer 2017, even though limited, together with the still insufficient and not always adequate reception capacity as well as the limited returns to Turkey.

To improve the situation in view of the upcoming winter, the Commission will continue assisting the Greek Government to tackle effectively the situation on the islands and notably on Lesbos, Chios and Samos. Solutions have been identified and concrete steps are being taken to ensure quickly that reception capacities are increased to the extent necessary.

For Chios where, following the closure of the inadequate Souda camp (which was long requested by many stakeholders including the local municipality) Vial is the only camp left, this means concretely that the overcrowded population in that site will be reduced to a target of not more than 1350 persons. To achieve this reduction and increase the existing capacity of Vial to the targeted size, works have already started, in particular with the help of UNHCR and the Hellenic Army (Ministry of Defence). 10.000 sqm will be covered with gravel to place and connect to electricity 40 additional containers as soon as possible. Where no air conditioning is installed, housing units will be provided with heating appliances and connected to electricity. The Hellenic Army will also undertake the necessary cleaning and repair works and ensure the distribution of non-food items. With a more stable target population, food provision will be accelerated and medical care and sanitation ensured through the Hellenic Centre for Disease Control & Prevention (HCDCP) doctors and medical teams.

With regard to the delays for the **processing of asylum claims** on Chios, let me also share with you a few elements:

- The **registration of the asylum applications** is performed by the Greek Asylum Service, supported by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) which deploys Member States' experts, interim staff and interpreters. Since June 2016, EASO has contributed to enhance the processing capacity of the Greek Asylum Service, by complementing the existing workforce with Registration Assistants locally hired. As of 6 November 2017, 23 EASO interim Registration Assistants are supporting the Greek Asylum Service, of which 6 are deployed in Chios. Additional assistants are currently under recruitment, and EASO can further increase their number, if needed.
- As concerns the **first instance procedure**, it is worth mentioning that the average processing time from the moment of lodging of an asylum application till the notification of the decision at first instance has been reduced from 170 days in February to 44 days in October 2017.
- On the **Asylum Support Teams deployed on the ground**, it is to be highlighted that EASO has been working in Chios since March 2017 to accommodate an adequate number of caseworkers to process the existing backlog. The current composition of the EASO Asylum Support Team in Chios is as follows: 25 asylum experts, 21 interpreters and 5 staff with coordination and administrative role. The number of experts planned and confirmed until the end of the year in Chios is 22; other deployments are in the pipeline, so as to further strengthen the existing team until the end of the year and beyond.

In Chios as well as on all other islands, the European Commission, together with the EU Agencies, is following very closely the situation on the ground. We are in permanent contact with the Greek authorities and we will continue to provide all assistance and support required. We also work closely with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and (International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to ensure that on the Greek islands all migrants, including unaccompanied minors and vulnerable persons, will be accommodated in adequate and up-to-standard conditions.

Yours faithfully,

Simon MORDUE

[E-signed]