



SENSITIVE*:
Solidarity Platform "Pact"

**SOLIDARITY PLATFORM 'PACT'
TECHNICAL MEETING ON RELOCATION
THURSDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2022
OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS**

The first technical meeting of the relocation strand of the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism (VSM) took place on 22nd September, chaired by DG HOME's Head of Migration Management Response Unit, Ms Simona ARDOVINO. Participants included representatives from EU Member States, Schengen Associated States, EUAA and OM.

The **objectives of the meeting** were to exchange views and address outstanding issues concerning the operational implementation of the relocation transfers under the mechanism, in view of accelerating the pace of the exercise, ensuring transparent communication and allowing monitoring of the progress achieved, as foreseen under the Declaration of 22 June. Moreover the meeting provides an opportunity for Member States to compare practices and solutions to operational matters encountered.

The Commission stressed the **political importance** of a swift and complete implementing the pledges for relocation in the framework of the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism (July 2023) and therefore of ensuring a higher pace of transfers already ahead of the December Council meeting.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF INDICATIVE PLANNING (DG HOME)

DG HOME presented a VSM monitoring table reflecting the state of play in term of transfers as well as confirmed and expected relocations per each beneficiary and pledging State for each month. Current expectations based on meetings and contacts indicate that only **around 1000** transfers are expected to take place between now and December, falling short of achieving the political goal of relocating **3000 persons by the end of this year**. This will be important to be able to implement all 8289 pledges on a steady basis.

A higher number of transfers will be achieved not only by removing operational hurdles but also by **activating the mechanism as soon as possible in all countries that are parts to the exercise**. It is therefore crucial that all Member State initiate to implement the pledges.

DG HOME, in cooperation with EUAA and IOM, will provide Member States with weekly updates, which they will be asked to review and update with a view to achieve the **goal of 3000 transfers this year**.

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2. TOUR DE TABLE ON MEASURES PLANNED/TAKEN BY EACH PARTNER

CY informed that **more staff and office space is being made available** for the exercise, in view of offering the possibility to pledging Member States to conduct more additional interviews. **CY** is ready to host the **DE** mission planned for conducting the interviews to the pre-accepted candidates as the first mission by a pledging State in Cyprus, and the mission by **FR** is foreseen in the second half of October. A teleconference is planned for 23rd September with **BG** to discuss their pledge. **CY** also informed it continues to work with **EUAA** on its pool of candidates in view of submitting further lists to pledging States.

IT reported about the mission by **FR** end of July that led to the **first transfer of 38 persons end of August**, and which was followed by a first mission of **DE** end of August. The next **FR** missions for additional interviews of candidates are planned respectively for the end of September and October, and a new list of candidates to be proposed to **DE** is being finalised with the support of **EUAA**. Until now, all relocation activities have taken place in Bari. In order to accelerate the activities, **the Ministry of Interior is considering identifying another centre for both identification of candidates and additional interviews**. The pledges by **RO** and **HR** have been received and will be processed, as is already the case with the five candidates proposed to and pre-accepted by **LU**.

MT informed to **have prepared a pool** of 418 candidates, of which 20 would be ready to be proposed to **RO**. On the basis of the pool, lists with proposed candidates can also be prepared for other States who would provide pledges for Malta.

EL thanked **RO** for the pledge for 20 persons. A pool, based on an initial list of possible 1167 candidates, **is being prepared** in collaboration with **EUAA**.

ES reported that the Ministries of Inclusion and of Interior **are discussing internally** and reflecting on a possible first pool of candidates, as well as gathering respective needs to request assistance from **EUAA**, which would require an amendment to the Operating Plan. **No timeline is available** as of the start of the transfers. **COM reiterated availability** to provide assistance and usefulness to discuss pools ahead, also with **EUAA**.

DE is pleased about the possibility to **conduct more interviews in CY** (no expected transfer date available yet) and is keen in starting collaborating with **ES**. The list of candidates accepted after **DE**'s additional interviews in Bari end of August/early September has still **to be communicated to IT in order to organise the transfers**. Another mission to **IT** is foreseen in October.

FR informed that it plans to interview about 50 candidates in its mission to Italy at the end of September. An upcoming 2 weeks mission from the 17th to 28th October to **CY** will allow interviewing about 100 of the 157 candidates from Afghanistan and Syria. **FR** confirmed that the **use of remote interviews is still not possible**, but considerations are being made on **increasing the teams deployed** to conduct interviews, so as to accelerate the exercise. Bilateral discussions are ongoing with **ES**. **FR** is also examining how to provide relevant details bilaterally to the competent authorities of the beneficiary Member States after refusing candidates based on security reasons.

LU confirmed to have received and pre-accepted the list of 5 candidates by **IT**. **LU** plan to transfer **15 candidates in 2022 split between MT, CY and IT**. One month timeframe is to be expected from the reception of the list to the transfer.

RO informed to have sent pledges of 20 persons to each of the five beneficiary countries, and to be **ready to start the process without need of additional interviews** on the ground as soon as the reception of the lists of candidates. Contacts with **IT**, **MT**, **CY** and **EL** have been taken already.

HR pledged for 60, of which a first pledge of 30 for IT, where **HR is waiting for a first list of candidates. No additional interviews needed.**

FI informed that a formal governmental decision confirming the final number of its pledge is expected most likely at the beginning of October, which is expected to be open to all MED5 countries and would further clarify the preferences.

BG has a preference for Syrian nationals, ideally families, and thus sent **a request to CY** for receiving 50 candidates in October, 20 in November and 20 in December, with **no additional interviews needed.** A bilateral meeting is planned on 23rd September with the CY authorities.

NO pledged for 200, but further **political decision from the Ministry is needed** to start with the relocation process.

IE reported about **shortages in the availability of accommodation** that is preventing the country to start with relocations for the time being. The first pledge of 80 initially made for 2022 has to be postponed.

PT is committed to relocate 350, with 70 from each Med5 country. **Transfers in 2022 are unlikely** to be feasible, pending approval of AMIF funds.

LT confirmed that its pledge for 20 persons would be implemented in 2023. **Additional interviews on the ground are required**, possibly in one longer deployment. 4 old pledges are still pending from the previous relocation exercise, and it **remains to be confirmed** when the recently cancelled additional interviews can be held.

BE confirmed the pledge of 100, but its currently **overstretched reception capacity** does not allow it to start the operational part of the mechanism most probably for the entire 2022.

COM thanked EUAA for its support and asked to provide information from its operations in the beneficiary countries. Concerning their deployment to **CY**, EUAA informed to have proposed a list of candidates to FR and DE and to be available in supporting for interpretations, interviews and for the provision of information on relocation to newly arrived asylum seekers. A pool of 250 asylum seekers mainly from Afghanistan and Syria is ready to be matched, with the number of Syrians expected to increase. A small number of vulnerable candidates is also present. **COM** invited Member States to consider planning missions enabling conducting the additional interviews for candidates from different nationalities to speed up the process.

EUAA is also ready to start the support to **EL** and is already in contact with the Greek authorities regarding their proposed pool of candidates.

EUAA confirmed that the registration and interview of candidates present in **IT** is taken place so far only in Bari, but EUAA is available to support IT also in other locations.

The work of EUAA is also continuing in **MT** on the pool of candidates.

EUAA is also available to support Member States in getting familiar with its platform used to share the lists of candidates.

IOM confirmed to be ready to support the exercise on the basis of three ongoing contribution agreements on relocation transfers respectively from Greece, Italy and Malta while a new regional umbrella agreement currently negotiated will also include internal transfers, including from Lampedusa to Italy mainland; the ongoing EL agreement is being reviewed to include the support to CY (health assessment mission foreseen in October); discussions are also ongoing with MT. No update on ES.

3. TOUR DE TABLE ON THE CONCEPT PAPER AND ANY OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORKFLOW

COM welcome the good news received by some Member States on the efforts put to accelerate the exercise, notably through larger interview missions and possible additional relocation hubs, and invited comments on the Concept Paper presented by COM on 15th September at the Solidarity Platform Pact meeting, through which Member States were invited to suggest ways to accelerate the process.

In this framework, **DE** enquired about the possibility to share NIST files through the EUAA sharepoint platform instead of Dublinet, and to make sure that candidates arriving to the additional interviews are well aware and agree with being relocated to DE. However, this solution would not appear feasible, also in line of what outlined in the workflow.

Moreover, DE underlined the importance of ensuring that appropriate and sufficient locations for the additional interviews are made available.

4. WAY FORWARD/OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

- COM will update the VSM monitoring table on a weekly basis, based on input by EUAA, IOM and MS. Member States are requested to keep COM informed on all developments in terms of available pledges, proposed lists of candidates, acceptances, interview missions and transfers with a view to
- The workflow on the relocation of UAM candidates will be shared with partners and Member States shortly for comments.
- COM will share again through the Solidarity Platform the contact list of DG HOME officials based in the respective MED5 countries, who act as contact points to facilitate the process and who need to be copied to all relevant communications related to operational activities. Participation of Member States and the other partners should include representatives in charge of carrying out the exercise at operational level. Member States are invited to share with DG HOME any updates on their operational contacts.
- The Solidarity Mechanism functional mailbox also remains in place for official communications (i.e. MSs communicating availability of pledges).
- Next meeting planned for 13th October (tbc). The frequency will be adjusted in the light of needs.