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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL**

Eighth report on relocation and resettlement

1 Introduction

The Eighth Report on Relocation and Resettlement provides an updated state of play since the last report of 9 November¹ and assesses the actions undertaken by all relevant stakeholders from 8 November 2016 until 6 December (the reporting period) to deliver on the commitments under the relocation and resettlement schemes.

In light of the continuous urgent need to provide support to both Greece and Italy, the European Council, at its last meeting on 20 and 21 October 2016,² reiterated its call to further intensify efforts to accelerate relocation, in particular for unaccompanied minors, and existing resettlement schemes.

Since 6 November 2016, 1,883 people have arrived in Greece.³ The total number of migrants present in Greece increased compared to the previous reporting period and as of 6 December is around 62,000 migrants, with around 16,200 on the islands and around 45,800 persons on mainland Greece.⁴ In Italy, 9,395 people⁵ have arrived since 6 November, representing a higher trend than in 2015 (18% increase compared to 2015). Arrivals of Eritreans, the main nationality eligible for relocation in Italy, also remained high (Eritrea is the second highest nationality among arrivals to Italy with more than 888 arrivals in the reporting period, representing 11.6% of arrivals).

During the reporting period, 1,237 additional persons have been relocated, bringing the total number of persons relocated so far to 8,162 (6,212 from Greece and 1,950 from Italy). As anticipated in the 7th Report, November saw an increase in the number of transfers with 1,406 persons relocated – the highest number in a single month so far. The number of relocations from Italy (401) almost doubled the persons relocated in October and it is the highest to date from Italy, while the number of people relocated from Greece seems for the moment to have stabilised at around 1,000 per month. These figures represent a continuous positive trend. As the obstacles hampering relocation are gradually being lifted, now it is the time for all Member States to build on the progress achieved so far and further intensify their efforts to continue increasing the monthly relocation pledges and transfers, and ensure all persons eligible for relocation in Italy and Greece are transferred by September 2017. This would require steadier efforts from all Member States through an increased number of regular pledges and transfers per month to ensure that as of December 2016 at least 2,000 people are relocated every month from Greece and at least 1,000 people from Italy and a continuation in the progressive increase in monthly pledges and relocation transfers.

¹ COM(2016) 720 final.

² European Council Conclusions of 20 October 2016 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/10/21-european-council-conclusions/>.

³ The number of detections of illegal border-crossings between border crossing points reported by Greece from Turkey through sea and land borders from 7 November until 4 December as recorded in Joint Operations Reporting Applications.

⁴ Source: Greek authorities.

⁵ Source: Italian Ministry of the Interior covering from 7 November until 4 December.

As regards resettlement, implementation of the July 2015 Conclusions⁶ to resettle 22,504 people continues to be strong with 13,887 people resettled so far, which is more than half of the agreed number. Since the previous report a record monthly number of 2,035 people have been resettled mainly from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Part of the resettlement under this European scheme serves also to implement the 1:1 mechanism set out in the EU-Turkey Statement. Since the starting date of 4 April,⁷ 2,761 persons have been resettled from Turkey to the EU and Norway within that mechanism, including 544 since the previous report.

2 Relocation

2.1 Main highlights during the reporting period

The Commission has continued working very closely with the Italian and Greek authorities as well as Member States, EU agencies, and other partners on the ground to find solutions to obstacles encountered mostly at operational level. This should lead to more regularity and higher pace of relocation transfers to achieve monthly averages that would allow all persons eligible for relocation to be transferred by September 2017.

In **Greece**, the registration capacity of the Asylum Service for applicants from nationalities eligible for relocation stands at 175 per day or about 3,500 per month. By the end of January 2017, 87% of the pre-registered applicants of nationalities eligible for relocation should be fully registered. The registration exercise is to be concluded by the end of April 2017. Afterwards, it is likely that the number of people entering the relocation scheme slows down. On this basis, and based on the current relocation rate (stabilised at 1,000 people transferred per month) the Commission considers that to ensure a smooth relocation process and avoid an unsustainable accumulation of cases, the pace of relocation needs to be strengthened. As of December 2016 Member States should be relocating at least 2,000 people per month. This number should be progressively increased to achieve at least 3,000 relocation transfers per month as of April 2017. By this date, the majority of applicants for relocation will have been registered and will be ready to be relocated; therefore such a further acceleration will be required to avoid lengthy waiting periods for applicants and risks of secondary movements, and help respect as much as possible the time limits of the relocation procedure foreseen in the Council Decisions.

Eight Member States and two Associated Countries pledged around 1,560 places in November and more than 1,000 relocation transfers were implemented by 13 Member States and two Associated Countries. Achieving the targets is therefore possible provided all Member States pledge and transfer on a stable monthly basis (following the example of those Member States that are already doing so).

In **Italy**, the relocation rate in November was the highest ever since the start of the process. This shows that efforts by the Commission, the Italian authorities, Member States and Associated Countries, EU agencies and other partners on the ground are bearing fruits. December is expected to lead to a further increase in the number of relocation transfers (more

⁶ Conclusions of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on resettling through multilateral and national scheme 20,000 persons in clear need of international protection (11130/15).

⁷ SN 38/16, 18.03.2016.

than 600 relocation transfers planned). But this trend needs to be strengthened. The number of applicants for relocation continued increasing and, based on information from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, between 5,300 and 5,800 Eritreans are currently potential applicants for relocation in Italy. Given the number of registered applicants waiting to be relocated (in some case for almost six months), the trend in migratory flows and the share of Eritreans (about 12% of the migratory flow and in average 1,800 per month), the Commission considers that to achieve a sustainable relocation pace, Member States should be relocating by December 2016 at least 1,000 applicants per month and progressively increase this number to reach at least 1,500 relocation transfers per month by April 2017.

To achieve this goal, on the one hand Italy will need to increase the staff processing applications in the Dublin Unit, and on the other hand, more Member States should participate in relocation from Italy, while their contribution in terms of pledges and relocation transfers per month should be steadier so that all Member States pledge and relocate on a regular monthly basis (in November 2016, two Member States and two Associated Countries pledged more than 850 places and four Member State and one Associated Country relocated about 400 people). The arrangements with Europol to facilitate exceptional additional security interviews were discussed at the Liaison Officers' meeting in Rome on 25 November 2016 and became operational on 1 December 2016. This specific workflow has also been incorporated into the relocation protocol for Italy which will subsequently be shared with Member States and Associated Countries. This positive development in terms of eliminating remaining bottlenecks in the procedure should pave the way for more Member States to become active in Italy and for meeting the monthly targets.

The number of **unaccompanied minors**⁸ arriving in Italy continued to increase (24,595 arrivals since the beginning of January up to 2 December 2016 including 3,714 Eritreans, 200 Syrians, 384 Iraqis and 13 Yemenis)⁹, with mostly minors travelling on their own. In Greece, the National Centre for Social Solidarity reports that as of 17 November, 2,300 unaccompanied minors were estimated to be present in Greece. As already reported, the mass pre-registration exercise in Greece identified 1,225 unaccompanied minors,¹⁰ of which 48% (about 588) belong to one of the nationalities eligible for relocation (36% Syrians and 12% Iraqis).¹¹ In this sense, out of the 501 unaccompanied minors eligible for relocation that have been fully registered in Greece, 377 are "separated children" and only 124 are minors completely on their own in Greece, which is the category with more difficulties for relocation. Furthermore, 326 of the 501 unaccompanied minors are 16 or 17 years old.

⁸ Article 2(l) of the Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU) defines "unaccompanied minor" as a minor (under 18 years old) who arrives on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied "by an adult responsible for him or her whether by law or by the practice of the Member State concerned" [emphasis added]. As a consequence of the differences in law and practice among Member States, the definition of unaccompanied minors varies from Member State to Member State which makes that separated children, including minors married to adults, be considered unaccompanied in some Member States while not in others. These also creates inconsistencies in the reporting of total number of unaccompanied minors relocated since some Member States only consider as such those on their own and exclude from the reporting separated children relocated.

⁹ Only nationalities potentially eligible for relocation mentioned.

¹⁰ http://asylo.gov.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Preregistration-data_template_5_EN_EXTERNAL.pdf.

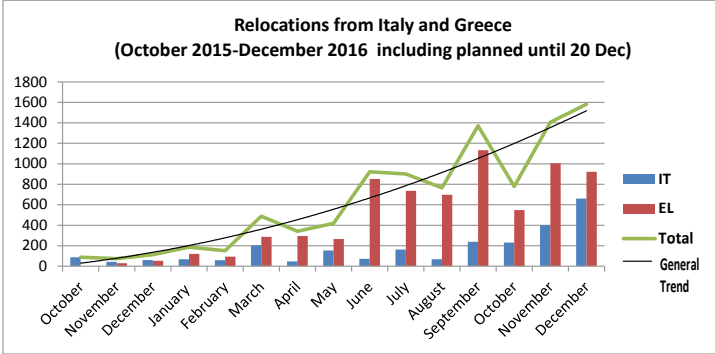
¹¹ The biggest group of unaccompanied minors in Greece are Afghanis, who are not eligible for relocation. However, the Greek government is in contact with several Member States to negotiate a possible voluntary transfer of these minors with a different status, other than as applicants for international protection.

The total number of relocated minors in this reporting period was 24 bringing the total number of unaccompanied minors relocated to 172 (71 minors travelling on their own and 101 separated minors).¹² This number covers mostly relocation transfers from Greece since in Italy no unaccompanied minors travelling on their own have been relocated and only one separated child was relocated to the Netherlands in November 2016.

During the reporting period, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) developed a new vulnerability form to better map Member States' capacities to relocate the various categories of unaccompanied minors. In addition, a specific session of the Liaison Officers' meeting in Greece held on 11 November 2016 was dedicated to better understand the obstacles for relocating unaccompanied minors from Greece and to find solutions. This meeting followed the discussions held during the 7th Forum on Resettlement and Relocation in October 2016 on unaccompanied minors. The meeting concluded on the need to increase transparency and communication between Greece and the Member States of relocation regarding the type of unaccompanied minors to be relocated, the result of the best interest of the child assessment, and the legal limitations in the Member State of relocation to accept specific categories of unaccompanied minors. Italy is also making additional efforts to facilitate the relocation of unaccompanied minors; however, a specific procedure to make the relocation of unaccompanied minors travelling on their own possible still needs to be developed.

The Commission will continue working closely with the Greek Asylum Service, the Italian authorities, Member States' Liaison Officers, the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees (UNHCR), EASO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to develop practical arrangements that will facilitate and speed up the relocation of unaccompanied minors.

2.2 Actions by the Member States of relocation



From 8 November until 6 December, 1,237 additional persons were relocated, 836 from Greece¹³ and 401 from Italy.¹⁴ Germany, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland are relocating on a monthly basis from both Italy and Greece. It seems that Switzerland and Norway also intend to carry out monthly transfers from both

countries. In addition, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania continued with monthly transfers from Greece. Other Member States participate more irregularly, transferring

¹² To note that the Greek authorities and IOM do not use the same definition of unaccompanied minors; as a consequence figures reported by the Greek authorities and IOM differ. According to IOM data, the total number of minors relocated during the reporting period is 23. The figures herein are those as per the Greek authorities.

¹³ 212 to Germany, 167 to France, 38 to Lithuania, 32 to Luxembourg, 10 to Malta, 138 to the Netherlands, 20 to Norway, 14 to Portugal, 156 to Romania, 6 to Slovakia, 41 to Slovenia and 2 to Finland. To be noted that 2 people reported as relocated to Romania were Dublin transfers.

¹⁴ 187 to Germany, 51 to France, 45 to the Netherlands, 60 to Norway, 37 to Finland and 21 to Switzerland.

people every two or three months. The first relocations from Greece to Norway took place in the reporting period. The arrangements involving Europol as security checks facilitator in Italy (by providing additional, exceptional security checks including, if substantiated, an interview) are expected to encourage additional Member States to actively engage in relocation from Italy.¹⁵ At least 827 additional relocation transfers are planned until 20 December from Greece¹⁶ and 617 from Italy.¹⁷ France is the country that has relocated the largest number of applicants (2,373) so far, followed by the Netherlands (1,098) and Finland (901). Member States with smaller allocations (such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, or Finland) are on track to meet their obligations.¹⁸

Actions to address the limited number of pledges: in the reporting period, only eight Member States (Germany, Estonia, France, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovakia)¹⁹ and Switzerland and Norway²⁰ submitted 2,186 formal pledges (885 formal pledges submitted for Italy and 1,301 for Greece). The total number of formal pledges by Member States of relocation amounts to 18,515 (5,839 to Italy and 12,676 to Greece).

Faster progress, more steadiness and active involvement of all Member States is needed to ensure all Member States pledge on a monthly basis a sufficient number of places both for Italy and Greece in accordance with the targets mentioned in section 2.1 and following the example of those Member States and Associated Countries already doing so. Germany, France, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland are pledging on a monthly basis for both Italy and Greece. In addition, Estonia and Latvia are pledging on a monthly basis for Greece and Finland, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia every two months. However, some Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Luxembourg) have not pledged for more than three months now.

Austria²¹ and Hungary continue being the only two countries that have not submitted any pledge nor relocated at all. Since April, Poland has not taken forward the implementation of

¹⁵ One of the reasons for the lower number of Member States active in Italy is Italy's strict policy of not allowing Member States of relocation to carry out additional, exceptional security interviews in Italy. For example, Estonia and Ireland pledged once, but since they were not allowed to carry out security interviews, they have not pledged again for the moment. In addition, the Czech Republic submitted two pledges to Italy. Since the Czech Republic rejected the 10 applications sent by Italy, Italy did not send any new requests when the Czech Republic pledged again. Similarly, Lithuania rejected the first relocation requests sent by Italy; although Lithuania has been pledging almost every month, Italy has not sent any relocation requests. The new arrangements with Europol should help addressing some of these shortcomings.

¹⁶ 236 to Germany, 323 to France, 131 to Ireland, 20 to Latvia, 67 to the Netherlands, 31 to Portugal and 19 to Romania.

¹⁷ 251 to Germany, 20 to Luxembourg, 151 to Norway and 195 to Switzerland.

¹⁸ Malta and Finland are on track to meet their obligations both for Italy and Greece, whereas Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia for Greece.

¹⁹ Germany 500 for Italy and 500 for Greece, Estonia 20 for Greece, France 400 for Greece, Ireland 81 for Greece, Latvia 10 for Greece, the Netherlands 50 for Italy and 100 for Greece, Portugal 100 for Greece, and Slovakia 10 for Greece.

²⁰ Norway 135 for Italy and 80 for Greece and Switzerland 200 for Italy (to note that Norway pledged 70 places in the previous reporting period that had not been taken into account).

²¹ In accordance with Council Decision 2016/408 of 10 March 2016, Austria benefits from a temporary suspension of the relocation of up to 30% of applicants allocated to Austria under Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601. As a consequence, the relocation to Austria of 1 065 applicants shall be suspended until 11 March 2017. However, the obligations under Decision 2015/1601 continue to apply to Austria in respect of the relocation of the remaining allocation, so pledges and relocations are still required.

its pledges and has not pledged nor relocated any applicant.²² In addition, the Czech Republic has not relocated any applicant since August.

Actions to speed up the response time to relocation requests: During the reporting period Member States have increased the number of additional, exceptional security interviews lengthening the response time beyond the 10 working days target set in the relocation protocols. As referred to in previous reports, security interviews should be carried out only in duly justified cases and within the 10 working days target. Member States will need to improve their processing capacity to accelerate the response time.

It should be noted that despite the increase in security interviews, the acceptance rate of relocation requests is very high (around 93%), although there are still instances where the acceptance rate could be significantly increased. In fact, some of the rejections are still based on grounds not foreseen by the Council Decisions, such as nationality (even if the person belongs to one of the nationalities eligible for relocation).

The reasoning of rejections must also improve to meet the requirements of the Council Decisions. Sharing information is crucial for the security of the European Union. Therefore, Member States should not reject certain applications merely referring to security issues in general terms. It is of paramount importance to address this matter in a comprehensive manner both between Italy/Greece and the Member State of relocation and at the EU level. To address the concerns raised by several Member States regarding sharing security-related information, Europol has offered a dedicated secured communication channel for Member States to safely provide reasons for rejections of relocation requests. This channel is operational as of 1 December 2016. In Greece, the Hellenic Police has put in place a national security correspondence for communicating the grounds for rejections. The Commission stresses once more the possibility of exchanging fingerprints via police cooperation channels for security verification at national level, particularly in cases where applicants lacked ID or travel documents.

Actions to address challenges related to the relocation of vulnerable applicants, including unaccompanied minors: The pace of relocation of unaccompanied minors has slowed down in the reporting period. This is due to the additional guarantees that are required for the transfer of unaccompanied minors which lead to a procedure that tend to last more than the two months foreseen in the Council Decisions. By 5 December, 24 unaccompanied minors (16 unaccompanied minors travelling by themselves and 8 "separated children") have been relocated from Greece (to Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Finland) bringing the total number of unaccompanied minors relocated to 172. Most unaccompanied minors have been relocated from Greece, since only one separated child has been relocated from Italy to the Netherlands, while no unaccompanied minor travelling on their own has been relocated from Italy.

Actions to accelerate the transfer of applicants: while the overall ratio between acceptances and transfers is very high (around 97%), in the last months, as more Member States actively participate in the scheme, the time delay between the acceptance by the

²² In early April, Poland suspended the processing of 73 relocation requests that the Greek Asylum Service sent to Poland on the basis of a pledge that Poland submitted on 16 December 2015 thus *de facto* freezing the relocation procedure three and a half months after the submission of the pledge. The same applies to requests from Italy.

Member State of relocation and the actual transfer has increased. While in some cases these delays are due to additional checks carried out by Member States after acceptances, other delays are due to operational and logistical problems. Countries with bigger allocations, such as Germany or France, prefer to send acceptances for large groups of applicants (400 or 500) and prefer large single transfers in charter flights, while Member States with small or medium-size allocations prefer smaller transfers scattered throughout the month. In addition, some Member States request flights on very specific week days and at specific hours. These differences and requirements have an impact, particularly in Greece, in the last phases of the relocation procedure, from notification by the Greek authorities to organising health checks by IOM and cultural and pre-departure orientation. They also complicate the logistics to organise transfers. More flexibility from the Member States of relocation would therefore be desirable, from sending acceptances in smaller groups to the organisation of flights.

In addition, IOM had to postpone some transfers as it seemed that some Member States did not have the capacity to swiftly accommodate accepted relocation applicants. Member States will need to ensure their reception capacity is capable of accommodating relocated applicants.

Actions to reinforce EASO's capacity to support Italy and Greece: On 8 November the EASO Management Board amended the rules on reimbursement of costs for experts and interpreters/translators participating in EASO operational support activities (EASO Management Board Decision 16). The amendments aim at facilitating further the deployment process of Member State experts. A more efficient flat rate system grouping categories of specific costs has been introduced for EASO operational support activities, enabling the deployment of individual experts not directly employed with the national administrations in the Member States but with relevant professional experience.

For Greece, EASO launched on 11 November 2016 the 8th call for experts under its Hotspot Operating Plan to Greece. The total need of experts to support the relocation scheme has remained at 28. However, more diversified profiles were included in the call, such as exclusion experts, Dublin experts and senior registration officers/case workers, to operate the escalation desk within the registration procedure, next to experts on fraudulent documents. Some Member States have spontaneously taken up the commitment to cover certain posts over the longer term and to look automatically for a replacement when the deployment of one of their experts comes to an end, which the Commission and EASO very much welcome. The total number of experts deployed in Greece as of 5 December is 23 asylum experts and 26 interpreters. In line with the current planning there will be a shortage of 10 experts for the week of 19 December, which will go up to a shortage of 17 experts for the week of 26 December.

For Italy, EASO has called for an overall number of 74 experts (out of which 26 experts urgently need to be deployed to cover the period until end of 2016). As of 5 December 2016, 50 asylum experts and 42 cultural mediators were deployed in Italy. Despite this recent positive rise in the number of deployed experts, it is still insufficient to cope with the high number of arrivals of persons eligible for relocation and the significant volume of persons awaiting registration in Italy, and falls short of the number of experts needed under the contingency planning. As of 5 December EASO has received 15 new nominations from Member States to the call for experts of 11 November 2016.

Main recommendations to the Member States of relocation

- As of December 2016, all Member States should:
 - pledge and relocate on a monthly basis both for Italy and Greece to reach at least 2,000 relocation transfers per month from Greece and at least 1,000 relocation transfers per month from Italy;
 - where needed, increase their processing capacity of relocation requests and accelerate the response time to relocation requests to meet the 10 working days target set in the relocation protocols as well as increase their reception capacities to accommodate the relocation applicants, including unaccompanied minors, in accordance with their allocation;
 - send acceptances in groups of a maximum of 50 people, show flexibility regarding organisation of flights, avoid delays in transfers of relocation applicants that have been accepted by Member States and increase involvement of Liaison Officers in cultural orientation activities and information provision;
 - ensure proper justification of rejections and share information regarding reasons for rejections via the secured channel offered by Europol or the national security correspondence offered by the Hellenic Police;
 - nominate experts in response to EASO's various calls, ensuring longer deployments and more senior and specialised profiles.
- As of February 2017, all Member States should increase their monthly relocation pledges and relocation transfers for Italy and Greece proportionally to their allocation to reach at least 3,000 relocation transfers per month from Greece and at least 1,500 relocation transfers per month from Italy by April 2017.

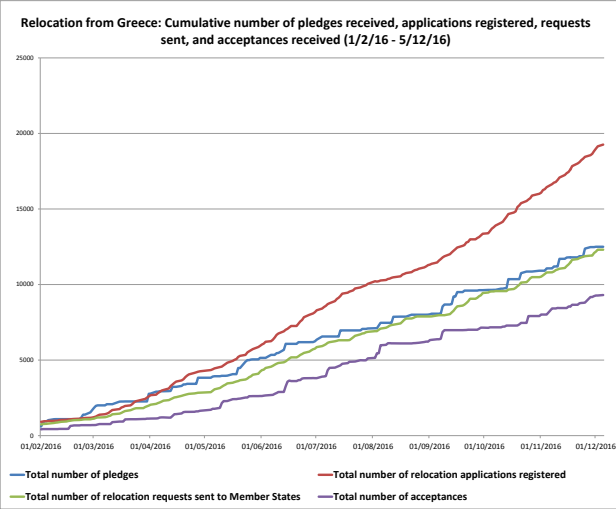
2.3 Actions by Greece and Italy, including highlights from the roadmaps

- *Greece*

Actions to accelerate the registration and processing of migrants and the registration capacity of the Greek Asylum Service: following the mass pre-registration exercise, on which the Commission has reported earlier, the Greek Asylum Service has scheduled the appointments for full lodging of asylum applications. By the end of January 2017, 87% of the pre-registered applicants will have been fully registered and the total caseload will be registered by April 2017. By 5 December 19,260 people had been fully registered. People that missed the pre-registration exercise can still access the asylum procedure by making an appointment via the Skype system.

The capacity of the Greek Asylum Service for registration of applicants from nationalities eligible for relocation is at 175 per day. In total the Relocation Unit in Athens currently employs 75 persons which meets satisfactorily the needs for the relocation process. The Thessaloniki and Alexandroupoli regional offices also deal with relocation cases. EASO supports the registration process both through experts, who carry out the registration jointly with staff of the Greek Asylum Service, and through experts in an escalation desk. The EASO teams for joint registration consist of 8 experts in Thessaloniki and 3 experts in

Alexandroupoli, and the EASO team for the escalation desk consists of 4 experts in Athens, by 5 December.



The gap between the number of relocation requests submitted by Greece and the acceptances by Member States has slightly decreased during the reporting period (between 4 November and 5 December Greece submitted about 1,508 requests while 1,296 replies were received). However, more significant is the gap between the number of registrations by the Greek Asylum Service and the total number of pledges (during the same period Greece registered 2,815 relocation applications, while the number of additional pledges was 1,431). In total by 5 December Greece had

registered 19,260 applications while the total number of pledges was 12,676). Ensuring higher and steadier pledges and accelerating the relocation procedure (particularly the response time) becomes a priority to avoid an unsustainable accumulation of cases.

Actions to improve the reception capacity in Greece: As of 5 December, the total reception capacity in Greece stands at 71,539 places²³ in temporary facilities and permanent reception places at the mainland, both for irregular migrants and persons in possible need of international protection who have expressed their will to apply for asylum or have already lodged their asylum applications. According to the information given by the Greek authorities, the total planned capacity of the 40 permanent sites in the mainland is estimated to be around 33,186 places.

Out of the 20,000 places committed for applicants eligible for relocation under the rental scheme by the UNHCR,²⁴ as of 5 December, the target has been met and even exceeded with 20,145 places available, including 6,344 places in hotels/entire buildings, 11,711 places in apartments, 484 places in host families, and 646 places in dedicated facilities for unaccompanied minors. The next challenge for UNHCR is to increase the occupancy rate of

²³ This figure includes the places provided under the UNHCR rental scheme capacity and the organised reception places provided by the Greek authorities in mainland Greece and at the hotspots. http://www.media.gov.gr/images/prosfygiko/REFUGEE_FLOWS-27-10-2016.pdf [http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/documents.php?page=1&view=grid&Country\[\]=83](http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/documents.php?page=1&view=grid&Country[]=83) These temporary emergency and permanent facilities are established on the Aegean islands in the hotspots as well as on the mainland. As of 17 November 2016, and based on the information available to the Commission, 1,191 places were available in shelters for unaccompanied minors irrespective of whether they are asylum seekers or not. An additional 130 places suitable for unaccompanied minors will be established by the end of 2016.

²⁴ The Delegation Agreement reached with UNHCR for the 20,000 places rental scheme in January 2016 primarily benefits asylum seekers eligible for relocation. The Delegation Agreement was revised in July 2016 in order to make it clearer in the text that the accommodation scheme includes also the possibility to establish places in relocation sites managed by UNHCR, and that the target group of the accommodation scheme includes not only relocation candidates but also other asylum seekers. UNHCR agreed to make 6,000 places from the rental scheme available to relocation centres to accommodate all fully registered relocation applicants.

its rental scheme which is presently of around 60-70%. UNHCR is already looking into ways of doing so.

In addition, as regards the relocation centres, as of 5 December, only one of the three relocation centres committed by the Greek authorities (Lagadikia) has been established with 960 places available. Due to the deteriorating weather conditions in northern Greece and the fact that the site has not been fully winterised yet, it currently accommodates only less than half of its official capacity. The occupancy rate in the site is expected to reach its official capacity by the end of the year. For the remaining two, the Greek authorities have not yet designated suitable sites. Discussions are still ongoing between the UNHCR and the Greek authorities regarding the provision of more sites for the construction of dedicated relocation centres, notably a relocation centre in the Attica region with a capacity for 3,000 people. As mentioned in previous reports, the Commission urges Greece to designate these sites as soon as possible to avoid bottlenecks in the implementation of the last stages of the relocation workflow following the mass pre-registration exercise and to allow cost-efficiency in the relocation process.

- *Italy*

Actions to increase the number of hotspots and to make them fully operational: On 24 November 2016, the number of migrants disembarked in Italy since 1 January 2016 exceeded the total number of arrivals in the record year of 2014 (170,100 migrants disembarked, an all-time high). This results in a constant strain on the four operational hotspots (Pozzallo, Lampedusa, Trapani and Taranto) whose capacity of 1,600 places is not sufficient. Two thirds of disembarkations now take place in fully-fledged hotspots and in six further ports of disembarkation applying the hotspot Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)²⁵. Italy should accelerate the opening of already announced additional hotspots and the upgrade of other ports of disembarkations. The six additional ports of disembarkation where hotspot SOPs are applied could become fully-fledged hotspots after some works, notably to ensure adequate reception structures. Moreover, the Italian authorities expressed their intention to apply the hotspot SOPs to most southern Italian disembarkations shortly. A circular has been drafted to this end to instruct all Prefectures and *Questure* on the ground. As mentioned in the previous report, given the increasing rate of unaccompanied minors disembarking in Italy, dedicated areas as well as particular assistance should be provided in all hotspots and transfers to first or second line reception facilities completed in the shortest possible timeframe, and migrants should be processed as quickly as possible and within a maximum of 72 hours.

Actions to improve coordination: The last meeting of the group monitoring the implementation of the hotspot SOPs was held on 14 November 2016. A decision on a possible annex on minors to the SOPs was postponed, as the Ministry of the Interior clarifies whether the legal situation allows for a transfer of (unaccompanied) minors in the hotspots. In any case, amendments to the SOPs will only be decided when applicability of the current SOPs have been formally extended to all ports of disembarkation in southern Italy. In order to better trace possible weaknesses and strengths in the hotspots and disembarkation sites, the group's monitoring activities will be stepped up. To that end, a form suggested by the Commission team in Italy, which has already been used by IOM and UNCHR during their activities, will serve as a starting point. No decision has been taken on further SOPs related training

²⁵ http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/hotspots_sops_-_english_version.pdf.

activities, including on a specific training involving the Fundamental Rights Agency. The group is supposed to meet twice before the end of the year.

On relocation, the local Liaison Officers' meeting organised on 25 November 2016 re-launched the process of regular multilateral coordination meetings in Italy and discussed the arrangements agreed between the Italian authorities and Europol on the additional, exceptional security checks. These are also reflected in the relocation protocol for Italy to be circulated to EU Member States, Associated Countries and other partners, so as to clarify the process and make it fully transparent for all stakeholders.

Actions to improve processing capacities in Italy: Italy should improve its capacity to process asylum applications in general, by permitting to identify more swiftly those claims that are well founded and to reject those that are not. Speeding up the overall reform of its asylum framework would contribute to a general improvement of the processing of asylum claims in Italy.

As regard relocation more specifically, as previously reported, and in line with the recent increase of pledges made available by Member States and Associated Countries, the capacity of the Italian authorities, including of the Dublin Unit to register and process applications, will need to increase in order to accelerate the registration of persons belonging to the nationalities eligible for relocation and fill the new pledges. This should also contribute to reducing the risks of absconding, as relocation applications will be processed more speedily. In this framework, the teams registering applications need to be strengthened and EASO presence in the new registration Hubs needs to be ensured. The activities of EASO roving teams for registration contribute to swift registration of applicants accommodated outside of registration Hubs, thereby increasing the number of applicants for relocation (by 5 December 2016, the roving teams have covered 24 different locations all over Italy).

Actions to speed up the response time to relocation requests: following the agreement on the additional, exceptional security checks formalised by the Italian Ministry of the Interior and Europol, with the support of the Commission, the arrangements are operational since 1 December 2016 to Member States of relocation that can request such checks to Europol, under the condition that they are duly justified and in line with Europol's mandate.

Actions to address challenges related to the relocation of vulnerable applicants and unaccompanied minors: No unaccompanied minors travelling on their own have been relocated yet from Italy (only one separated child was relocated to the Netherlands). To start the relocation of unaccompanied minors remains a priority, as about 4,300 unaccompanied minors potentially eligible for relocation (mostly from Eritrea) have disembarked in Italy since the beginning of 2016. In view of some Member States' availability to receive applications for the relocation of unaccompanied minors, the Commission is working with the Italian authorities to clarify the procedures, particularly concerning the role of guardians and judicial authorities in Italy, and to enable the relocation of unaccompanied minors. In order to accelerate and streamline these procedures, the Italian authorities will also establish a dedicated relocation Hub for unaccompanied minors. Following these clarifications the Commission expects relocations to start taking place rapidly.

Actions to limit secondary movements: As part of actions taken by the Italian authorities to limit secondary movements, the Italian police continue regularly transferring migrants, who moved irregularly from the South to the North of the country, back to the reception facilities

in Southern Italy. As indicated above, EASO has intensified the activities of the roving team that performs registration for relocation in various areas where candidates for relocation are accommodated (based on needs indicated by the Italian authorities) outside of registration Hubs. The presence and movements of irregular migrants on the Italian territory should be closely monitored, and irregular secondary movements prevented.

Main recommendations to Italy and Greece

- By December 2016, Italy to finalise the procedures to allow the relocation of unaccompanied minors and further increase the hotspots capacity;
- By January 2017:
 - Greece to designate an adequate relocation site in the Attica region with capacity for 3,000 people;
 - Italy to increase the staff in the Dublin Unit to be able to register 1,000 relocation applications per month, to implement the first relocation of unaccompanied minors and to establish the relocation Hub for unaccompanied minors.
- By April 2017, Italy to increase the staff in the Dublin Unit to be able to register 1,500 relocation applications per month.

2.4 Actions by the Commission and EU agencies

- ***European Commission***

The main activities carried out by the Commission have been highlighted throughout the report, including follow-up discussions in Greece and Italy at the regular Liaison Officers' meetings organised by the Commission. The Commission has continued supporting Italy and Greece on the ground on a day to day basis, helping with the coordination among various stakeholders and assisting the Greek and Italian authorities to identify bottlenecks, find solutions to challenges in close cooperation with all stakeholders and develop specific procedures. As part of this support, the Commission facilitated the conclusion of the arrangements between Italy and Europol described above for additional, exceptional, security checks, one of the main bottlenecks slowing down relocations from Italy. In addition, the Commission is now gathering good practices to improve information provision during the relocation procedure, including the pre-departure information and cultural orientation, with a view to better manage expectations and thus prevent secondary movements or absconding from the procedure and to further build applicants' trust towards the relocation scheme. This issue should be discussed further in specific sessions of the upcoming Liaison Officers' meeting in Greece (December 2016) and Italy (January 2017).

As part of its monitoring of the implementation of the Council Decisions on relocation, the Commission raised and will continue to raise concerns with those Member States that are falling behind in implementing the Council Decisions. The Commission recently sent letters to Member States reminding them of their obligations under the Council Decisions on relocation. Should tangible progress not be reached in the coming months, the Commission will not hesitate to make use of its powers under the Treaties.

Funding for relocation made available for Italy and Greece through their respective Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) National Programmes, notably the EUR 500 lump-sum allocated for every person effectively relocated, can be used also for those persons relocated to the Associated Countries, if such relocations are made pursuant to Council Decision 2015/1523 or pursuant to Council Decision 2015/1601.

As the current Delegation Agreement ends on 31 December 2016, the Commission started discussions with UNHCR for the extension of the scheme in 2017, on the basis of an updated assessment of Greece's reception needs.

- ***European Asylum Support Office***

Actions to speed up the relocation process and increase the registration capacity in Greece and Italy: Experts are deployed in a number of functions.

In **Greece**, 11 experts currently support the registration process directly through joint processing in Thessaloniki and Alexandroupoli. Further EASO has deployed 3 experts for information provision in Athens and 2 in Thessaloniki. EASO also manages the escalation desk in support of the registration procedure with 4 experts in Athens and another 2 experts in support of the Dublin Unit. As mentioned above, following the pre-registration EASO has diversified its support for the relocation procedure and included more experts on exclusion indicators, Dublin Regulation, family unit and document fraud as well as senior registration officers. On 21 November 2016 EASO held a kick-off meeting in Athens with the Greek Asylum Service and the Hellenic Police for the implementation of the matching tool. A first usable interface of the matching tool is expected to be ready by the beginning of February 2017.

In **Italy**, EASO is currently deploying 50 out of the 74 requested experts from Member States and Associated Countries: 13 experts in the hotspots, 10 experts in two mobile teams (based in Rome and Catania), 10 experts in registration Hubs, 6 experts in the registration roving team, and 11 experts in the Dublin Unit in Rome. EASO is also deploying up to 48 cultural mediators (for Arabic, Tigrinya and Kurdish) to support the relocation process (as of 5 December, 42 cultural mediators are deployed on the ground). In the reporting period EASO has intensified the activities of the roving team that performs registration for relocation in various locations where candidates for relocation are accommodated (based on needs indicated by the Italian authorities) outside of registration Hubs.²⁶ The roving team also supports the local *Questura* by building the capacity of Police officers in performing registrations themselves.

EASO is also working to ensure appropriate and efficient working conditions in the hotspots for its teams. 5 Mobile offices (containers) in some of the hotspots and Hubs were installed (1 in Trapani hotspot, 2 in Villa Sikaniana and Bari Hubs, respectively) and another 1 to be placed in the Augusta harbour where numerous disembarkations happen. Technical equipment (computers) was also made available to the Italian authorities to support relocation-related work (5 working stations were made available in each registration Hub and in the *Questura* in

²⁶ To-date, the team has covered the following locations: Bologna, Cagliari, Chieti, Cosenza, Florence, Foggia, Genova, Grosseto, Latina, Milan, Modena, Naples, Parma, Pisa, Potenza, Salerno, Teramo, Torino, Treviso, Venice, Verona and Vicenza.

Rome, further 20 to be placed in the Dublin Unit once internal security clearance is obtained to link them to the existing system).

In line with the European Council Conclusions of 20 October 2016, EASO has elaborated an action plan to fully operationalise the Asylum Intervention Pool and to facilitate the nomination of experts by Member States *inter alia* by offering a pilot induction training programme for junior experts to be deployed in Greece and enabling the deployment of experts who are not permanently staff of the administration of the participating States.

Main recommendations to EU Agencies and implementing partners

- EASO should continue its work on operationalising the Asylum Intervention Pool and should continue working closely with the Commission on improving information provision (including the production of specific videos for targeted Member States by January 2017 at the latest); by February 2017, EASO should ensure that the first usable interface of the matching tool is ready.
- By January 2017, UNHCR should continue working to progressively achieve a close to 100% occupancy rate;
- By February 2017, IOM should increase its capacity to match the target of relocating 1,500 people per month from Italy and 3,000 people per month from Greece

3 Resettlement

Based on the information received from the participating States more than half of 22,504 resettlements agreed under the Conclusions of 20 July 2015 have been completed at the half way stage of the implementation of the resettlement scheme. By 5 December 2016, 13,887 people have been resettled to 21 resettling States (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). **Sweden, the United Kingdom and Finland** as well as Associated Countries **Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland** have already fulfilled their pledges.

A majority of States participating in the scheme indicated that their resettlement efforts were primarily, but not exclusively, directed at Syrians staying in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. This includes efforts from Member States to resettle Syrians from Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March.

The number of resettlements from Turkey continues to increase as Member States assess the files referred to them by Turkey via UNHCR. Member States are also preparing further resettlement operations as well as missions to Turkey to interview resettlement candidates. The Turkish authorities are working on the next lists of referrals of 3,000 persons due to be submitted in December.

Since 4 April 2016, 2,761²⁷ Syrians have been resettled from Turkey under the resettlement part of the 1:1 scheme of the EU-Turkey Statement. In addition, 340 persons have been approved and are now waiting to be resettled. Altogether, 544 people were resettled under this mechanism since the last report, which is a similar pace of resettlements compared to previous

²⁷ This number includes resettlements under the 1:1 mechanism to the EU and Norway.

months (506 in October, 431 in September and 418 in August) and the remaining number of all pledges is 10,889.

Resettlements under 1:1 scheme have so far taken place to Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

As previously reported, Council Decision (EU) 2016/1754²⁸ amending the second Council Decision on relocation has been adopted. The amendment allows Member States to meet their respective obligations under the 54,000 allocation by using either relocation or legal admission of Syrian nationals present in Turkey. The amendment requires modification to the AMIF National Programmes. As an immediate follow-up to the adoption of the Council Decision (EU) 2016/1754, and as part of the exercise to amend AMIF National Programmes the Commission has received first indications from Member States on the number of Syrians present in Turkey to whom the Member States plan to grant legal admission under this Decision. Based on those indications, Member States plan to legally admit from Turkey around 33,000 Syrians.

The Commission's proposal for a regulation establishing a Union Resettlement Framework²⁹ adopted on 13 July 2016 is currently being examined by the co-legislators.

4 Way forward

The Heads of State or Government have repeatedly recognised the urgent need to address Europe's migratory situation and have called for further action to accelerate the implementation of the relocation scheme, as an essential expression of solidarity towards frontline Member States. In October, the European Council reiterated once more the need for Member States to further intensify efforts to accelerate relocation.

The Commission has been constantly working with the Italian and Greek authorities, Member States and EASO, Frontex and Europol as well as with UNHCR and IOM to support and improve the relocation procedure on the ground. The arrangements with Europol are now in place. EASO, Frontex, Europol, UNHCR and IOM are all increasing their support to Italy and Greece to accelerate and make more efficient the relocation procedure. Italy and Greece have continued increasing their capacities. Some Member States have shown to be truly committed to relocation and significantly contributed to the positive trends observed in the last months in terms of pledges and relocations actually performed.

As a result of this joint effort much progress has been made. Relocations from Italy are showing a positive trend (after being stalled for months) and relocations from Greece have stabilised at 1,000 transfers per month. Based on the available information regarding the number of persons eligible for relocation in Italy and Greece, it should be feasible to transfer all eligible applicants by September 2017. To achieve this goal and ensure a smooth and sustainable relocation process, the Commission considers that **as of December 2016 there should be at least 2,000 relocation transfers implemented per month from Greece and at least 1,000 relocation transfers per month from Italy, and that as of April 2017 the**

²⁸ OJ L 268, 1.10.2016, p. 82–84.

²⁹ COM(2016) 468 final.

number of relocation transfers should reach at least 3,000 per month from Greece and at least 1,500 from Italy.

Achieving these targets is possible if all Member States pledge and relocate on a monthly basis as soon as possible in line with the abovementioned targets. A number of Member States and Associated Countries are leading the way. Now the other Member States should follow since only through our common efforts it will be possible to alleviate the pressure on Italy and Greece. It would also require Member States to continue regularly nominating experts to respond to EASO's various calls on a regular basis ensuring longer deployments and more senior and specialised profiles.

In addition, achieving these targets would also require that Italy progressively increases its capacity to register relocation applicants to reach about 1,000 relocations applicants registered per month by January 2017 and 1,500 by April 2017. In addition, given the high number of unaccompanied minors in Italy, Italy should establish the dedicated relocation Hub for unaccompanied minors and implement the first relocation of this category of vulnerable applicants by January 2017. On its part, Greece should establish the designated relocation site in the Attica region with capacity for 3,000 people by January 2017, which will allow to further accelerate the last phases of the relocation procedure and will facilitate achieving the monthly relocation targets.

The repeated calls made by the Heads of State or Government must be matched with determined action by the competent national services. Member States of relocation should build further on what has been done so far by responding fully to these calls and on the Commission's recommendations thereby delivering on their legal obligations and applying solidarity in practice.

The Commission will continue to closely monitor the situation and, if needed, adjust these targets. The Commission will also continue reporting regularly on the implementation of the two Council Decisions on relocation and will present its Ninth Report in February 2017. The Commission reserves the right to take action against those Member States not complying with their obligations.

In parallel, Member States should continue delivering on their resettlement commitments, including as part of the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement.³⁰

³⁰ Fourth Report on the Progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, COM(2016) 792 final.