

International protection: provisional measures for the benefit of Italy and Greece

2015/0125(NLE) - 16/03/2016

The Commission presents its first report on relocation and resettlement in accordance with Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 and [Council Decision \(EU\) 2015/1601](#) (Relocation Decisions), adopted in September 2015, which established a temporary and exceptional relocation mechanism for 160,000 applicants in clear need of international protection from Greece and Italy. This was a response to the arrival of around 880,000 persons arrived in the European Union through Greece and Italy.

In addition, following the [Commission Recommendation of 8 June 2015](#) on a European resettlement scheme, 27 Member States together with Dublin Associated States agreed on 20 July 2015 to resettle 22,504 displaced persons from outside the EU who are in clear need of international protection within two years. The report also responds to the Commission commitment under the [Roadmap "Back to Schengen"](#) to report on a monthly basis on the implementation of relocation and resettlement.

The Communication summarises the **challenges identified and lessons learned** in these first months of implementation of the relocation and resettlement schemes and proposes recommendations and actions in the short term to improve the implementation rate.

It makes the following points:

Relocation:

- the **rate of implementation has been slow** over the last five months but there are signs of a positive trend: by 15 March 2016, 937 people had been relocated (368 from Italy and 569 from Greece). The pace of relocation has significantly increased in the first weeks of March, but is still insufficient to meet the objectives of the Relocation Decisions;
- as of 15 March, the total number of indications of readiness to relocate swiftly applicants for international protection ("**formal pledges**") by Member States of relocation amounts to 3,723 which represent **2.33% of the 160,000 relocation transfers to be implemented**. On the positive side, most Member States have appointed liaison officers, who play a key role in the procedure;
- there has been a **rapid increase in the number of applicants**, from around 20 persons per day to 300 persons per day in Greece). Partially, this is a consequence of the restrictions imposed at the Greece/former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia border but also of the additional efforts to disseminate information, including the deployment of European Asylum Support Office (EASO) mobile teams outside the hotspots to maximise outreach. Nevertheless, the risks of absconding once the person is notified of the Member State of relocation remain;
- there has been an **increased number of nationalities eligible for relocation** but also increased unpredictability regarding new nationalities potentially covered by the Relocation Decisions. The nationalities eligible for relocation are currently Burundi, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Costa Rica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines;
- relocation of **vulnerable applicants** for international protection, including unaccompanied minors is proving challenging;
- some Member States have expressed **long or restrictive lists of preferences** for the profile of the applicants to be relocated, and some have used the **non-respect of preferences as a ground for rejecting a relocation request**, which is not allowed under the Council Decisions;
- the relocation procedure in general **exceeds the two-month time limit** set out in the two Council Decisions on relocation;

- the main reason for delays in responding to relocation requests is **additional security checks, including systematic security interviews and requests for fingerprints;**
- there are **unjustified rejections of relocation requests** and a lack of pre-departure information by the Member State of relocation;
- despite the fact that Member States offered 201 experts to the general call from EASO for 374 experts, **the response is inadequate** for specific calls and actual deployments.

Main recommendation to Greece and Italy:

- **increase the capacity of the Greek Asylum Service**, with the support of EASO, to register applicants to be relocated, matching the significant increase in the number of eligible migrants interested in joining the scheme;
- **complete the full operation of all hotspots;**
- **step-up efforts to carry out systematic security checks** and to improve the quality of information provided in the relocation requests sent to Member States, and appoint a security correspondent;
- **improve coordination capacity** by finalising and implementing as soon as possible Standard Operating Procedures and Protocols for relocation;
- **increase the reception capacity of Greece** by making available the 50,000 places committed under the roadmap as soon as possible;
- finalise as soon as possible the procedures to facilitate the relocation of **unaccompanied minors**.

Main recommendations to the Member States of relocation:

- increase significantly the number and frequency of pledges;
- **reply to relocation requests from Italy and Greece within one week upon receipt;**
- accelerate the carrying out of **additional security checks** with the objective of performing them **within one week** and with a focus on duly justified cases;
- provide pre-departure information packages including qualitative and attractive information to applicants following EASO's guidance note;
- respond as a matter of urgency to EASO calls for experts to support Italy and in Greece.

The report also addresses **recommendations to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO)**.

The Commission has calculated that in order to meet the number of commitments already allocated (106,000) under the two Council Decisions on relocation averaged over the remaining 18.5 months, **a monthly relocation rate of 5,679 should be achieved as a minimum**. This would imply an average of **around 187 transfers per day and a relocation procedure of maximum two weeks**. The experience of the recent relocation transfers to Portugal from Greece proves that the relocation procedure can also be implemented within one week. Based on this calculation, the Commission considers that **at least 6,000 relocations should be completed by the time of its second report** on relocation and resettlement on 16 April, and that, stepping up the rate, at least 20,000 relocations should be completed by the third report on 16 May, in view of the emergency humanitarian situation on the ground.

Resettlement: based on the information received from the participating States 4,555 people were resettled until 15 March 2016 to Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland under the scheme. A majority of States participating in the scheme indicated that their resettlement efforts are primarily, but not exclusively, directed at Syrians staying in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

The report makes the following points:

- there are **substantial divergences** among the Member States as regards their respective resettlement programmes and practices, such as the selection criteria, length of procedures, pre-departure orientation programmes, integration tools, the status granted to persons admitted, residence permits as well as the number of places available for resettlement;
- the **duration of the procedure** can last from several weeks to up to two years between the submission of the case by the UNHCR until arrival in a host country;
- **lack of reception capacities and finding adequate accommodation** was frequently mentioned as a particular challenge, especially in cases of resettling larger families, or when dealing with especially vulnerable cases. Exit clearances by the third countries, were also cited as problematic in some cases;
- 10 Member States are expected to resettle for the first time, although none of them has started implementing the programme yet. **Challenges which those Member States face** include building capacity for establishing a national resettlement mechanism, a lack of experience in conducting missions and selecting candidates, providing optimal conditions for integration of resettled refugees, and winning public support for resettlement among the general public.

The Commission makes several recommendations regarding overcoming these challenges, including: (i) sharing knowledge and experience and working with partners; (ii) improved monitoring of the scheme; (iii) implementing the Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme with Turkey; (iv) bringing forward an EU wide resettlement proposal to frame the EU's policy on resettlement.

In order to underline the importance attached to solidarity with affected third countries in the region and the role of legal pathways for migration, **Member States need to deliver on the remaining 17,949 resettlement places.** Over the remaining period, Member States would need to resettle on **average 855 people in need of protection on a monthly basis.** In line with its commitment under the Roadmap "Back to Schengen", the Commission will report on a monthly basis on the progress made in implementing the relocation and resettlement commitments.