



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Task Force Migration Management

Mission to Greece

22-26 February 2021

(Lesvos – Athens)

Operational Conclusions

Financial Plan (Meeting with Minister Mitarachi, Deputy Minister Voultepsi and leadership of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum)

- Based on the preliminary calculation of the **allocations** to Greece for the 2021-2027 programming period taking into account the distribution key agreed in the legal basis of the Home Funds, the amounts will be lower than initially expected, in particular for BMVI.
- Commission informed Minister Mitarachi that in the new programming period 2021-2027 the initial allocation to Greece under its national programmes [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] In addition, Greece will benefit of a mid-term top-up of 10% of its national envelop of each Fund and top-ups for strategic priorities will be provided as in the current funding period. However, Emergency Assistance funding will be reduced, unless a new crisis situation would emerge that would allow HOME to access the EU emergency reserve.
- Minister Mitarachi expressed **strong discomfort** with this lower level as it would not allow to continue fully financing the current reception system [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- The Task Force invited the ministry to embark on a **strategic planning exercise** and proceed with a concrete prioritisation exercise based on review and analysis of future needs and respect of standards set by the EU acquis. Moreover, complementary funding on migration related areas, in particular as regards integration, needs to be programmed with support of other Funds such as European Social Fund+, European Regional Development Funds and Recovery and Resilience Facility.

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- It was agreed to work together to further develop **the financial plan for 2021-2027** based on three scenarios suggested by the Minister.
- The financial cash flow gap for 2021 needs to be further addressed. It was agreed to go through every ongoing project to identify savings to prolong them. However, COM underlined again that no more EMAS was available as of July 2021 due to legal base and work programmes not yet in force. Like in other MS, government needs to frontload EU financing that is already eligible as of 1.1.2021.

Next Steps:

- *Work with Greek AMIF Responsible Authority to finalise the financial plan 2021 and continue preparation of the programming period 2021-2027.*

Synergies between EU funds in Greece (Meeting with Mr Skalkos, Secretary General of Ministry of Development, and leadership of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum)

- A joint meeting was held with the Ministry of Development, in charge of Structural Funds in Greece, and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. The synergies with Structural Funds, as well as the Recovery and Resilience Fund, is recognized by all parts as necessary in order to cover the funding gaps to support migration management in Greece.
- Although a dedicated Operational Programme for Migration and Asylum is not envisaged, the Ministry of Development agrees to earmark specific projects, mainly for long term integration of refugees, for their cofinancing by ESF+. The funding of ESF+ for social inclusion, will be 30% of the EUR 5.5 billion ESF+ envelope. Most of this funding is allocated to the 13 Regional Operational Programmes.
- The Ministry of Development is open to receive proposals for projects from the Ministry of Migration for their further cofinancing mainly by ESF+. The Ministry of Migration from its part should prepare the requested list after checking, and solving when needed, any eligibility issues and present this list together and agreed with the Ministry for Social Affairs. A working group should be established at the Ministry of Migration to prepare the list of projects together with the Ministry for Social Affairs.
- There is a political priority from both ministries to finance Social Housing projects. The Task Force was asked to flag the need to REGIO and EMPL, to ascertain possible eligibility of Social Housing projects. The note of DG EMPL addressed to MoMA and Ministry of Development on 9/7/2020 Ares(2020)3633695 should be used as a basis for further discussion.
- The Ministry of Development has already asked from Management Organisation Unit to initiate the necessary actions for maturation of the projects of the wishlists provided by the two municipalities of Lesvos. Close monitoring will be done of the progress made.
- The Ministry of Development acknowledges that restitution / renovation of buildings and lands which have been deteriorated during the migration crisis are eligible for funding by ERDF. Again, the Ministry of Migration can include this kind of projects in the project list is would prepare.

Next Steps:

- *Discuss with DG REGIO and DG EMPL the possibility to finance social housing under ESF+ and ERDF.*
- *MOMA to prepare strategic list of projects for social inclusion OP*
- *MOD of Min of DEV to follow-up on maturation of “wishlist”*

Returns (Meeting with Frontex and Hellenic Border Police)

- Frontex insisted on establishing a **permanent mechanism** that will ensure a smooth information flow to Frontex from the issuing of the 2nd instance negative decision for the launch of the return operation.¹
- The Task Force asked about the **500 Third Country Nationals from the mainland pre-removal detention centres (PROKEKAs) that Greece asked to return** to various third countries. Hellenic Police explained that only 100 of them have exhausted all legal appeals and could be immediately returned. The organisation of the flight takes approx. 3 weeks, for setting up the flight and finding Member State escorts. It was agreed to take stock in 2 months' time of the progress in returning the 100 persons ready to be returned. In addition, around 100 people are detained in the PROKEKA of Kos but Hellenic Police have received no reply to its request for readmission to Turkey under the EU-TK statement.
- It seems that neither the Greek Asylum Service nor the Hellenic Police have a **legal aid** programme for people in detention.
- We acknowledged the **increased security in the Reception Centres of the islands**, and underlined that more needs to be done for the mainland camps.
- For **new centres' designs**, Hellenic Police and Frontex seem to have been involved for the detention part, but not clearly on the rest (registration/screening areas).
- It was clarified that the Greek Ombudsman is the national monitoring mechanism both for readmissions to Turkey and returns to countries of origin. The main issue is currently Covid-19 testing, done only for returnees and if the destination country asks for it. Escorts and monitoring staff are not necessarily tested. Commission promised the Ombudsman to follow-up.

Next Steps:

- *Liaise regularly with the Hellenic Police and Frontex to ensure the timely launch of a return operation for the 100 Third Country Nationals currently detained in pre-removal detention centres of the mainland;*
- *Inquire with Frontex about the possibility to provide Covid-19 testing for escorts and monitoring observers of returns operations.*

¹ - In terms of operational support, Frontex explained that it can

- o help with the organisation of return flights from Greece, both commercial and charter flights, as already happens for Georgia or Pakistan;
- o provide administrative and organisation support for the return operation itself;
- o EU liaison officers (EULOS) for returns in different countries, incl. Afghanistan, can facilitate contacts with the countries of origin for the preparation of the return operation and documents;
- o Help with identification missions.
- o In the new mandate of Frontex, they can also assist with voluntary returns and repatriation flights on a voluntary basis, complementing IOM AVRR program.

- *Involve Frontex and Hellenic Police in further workshop on reception centre on Lesbos*

AVRR (meeting with Gianluca Rocco, Head of IOM Greece mission)

- IOM is preparing a **non-cost revision of the current Grant** with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum through an Addendum to provide an **increased return allowance** of EUR 1 000 for migrants from the mainland while offering an allowance of EUR 500 for applicants from the islands. The proposed addendum does not entail an increase of budget. The Commission will be in contact with the ministry in order to provide its feedback before the signing of the addendum.

Education (Meeting with Ms Gika, Secretary General Ministry of Education, and Mr Logothetis, Secretary General Reception Ministry of Migration and Asylum)

- Ministry of Education (MoEDU) managed to **increase the number of Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (DYEP)** from 94 in the 2017-2018 school year to 169 in the 2020-2021. The enrolment of migrant children in reception classes had increased in 2019 by 63%; however it decreased again in 2020 due to the pandemic. Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs) who are responsible for facilitating the enrolment of children in schools have an important role.
- **Main challenges** are linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions of movement imposed on specific sites and throughout the whole country, as well as the closure of schools. Lack of transportation on the side of the prefectures and reluctance of migrant parents to send their children and especially girls to schools also prevent children from participating in education. The local communities often oppose the enrolment and attendance of migrant children in Greek schools, fearing that the different hygiene standards in the sites and accommodation facilities would endanger their children's health, particularly during the pandemic. Finally, the abrupt transfer of children between sites and accommodation facilities, makes school attendance very problematic.
- COM underlined the need for **cooperation between MoEDU and MoMA** and urged them to communicate on a regular basis in order to prevent issues. It also stressed the importance of non-formal education activities in all sites and accommodation facilities.
- MoEDU briefly discussed the **UNICEF Refugee Education Plan 2021-2023** and informed that they have reviewed the plan and endorse it. Official approval is still pending but will be given as soon as possible.

Next Steps:

- *Follow-up on access to formal and non-formal education to identify remaining obstacles and means to overcome them*
- *Work with MOMA to avoid abrupt changes of kids that are going to school*
- *See if UNICEF plan can get funding outside HOME Funds*

Integration (Meeting with Deputy Minister Voultepsi)

- Most of the actions of the **Integration Strategy** presented by Deputy Minister Voultepsi can be in principle funded by the EU budget.

- Due to **budgetary constraints under the new Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund**, there is a need to mobilise other resources, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility and in particular the European Social Fund+. All these actions should go through the AMIF Managing Authority in the Ministry.
- DG HOME will send **comments on the new Strategy in writing within 2 weeks** and to this end it will consult also DG EMPL.
- COM also suggested to explore the possibility to use available resources under AMIF programmes of other Member States, willing to support integration measures in Greece. The Commission will explore this option.
- Effective integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Greece is very important also for other Member States, in particular those affected by **secondary movements**. It is a highly political issue and Greece is in communication with Germany, the Netherlands and Austria in this respect.
- Ms Voultepsi will meet the Mayor of Athens Mr. Bakoyiannis next week to talk about the project of Elaionas, a pilot to **pre-integration actions**.
- Coordination for integration is required at various levels (inter-ministerial, with NGOs and with refugee communities)
- As regards Helios, the project should be transferred to the ESF+, however some delays might occur and it may not be ready by June 2021. due to late adoption of ESF+ legal basis and respective operational programme of Greece. DG HOME will further discuss with DG EMPL to explore possibilities to support rental subsidies.

Next Steps:

- *Explore the possibility to use available resources under AMIF programmes of other Member States, willing to support integration measures in Greece.*
- *Discuss with DG EMPL the timeline for the transfer of Helios project under ESF+, including coverage of rental subsidies.*
- *Submit a Task Force note to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum with our comments on the new National Plan on Integration*

Pushback allegations (Meeting with the Greek Ombudsman, Mr Pottakis)

- The Greek Ombudsman confirmed that they have an investigation ongoing since June 2017 based on several complaints. They will release an interim report next week on the land border after pre-information of the relevant Minister. As they have a quasi-disciplinary role towards the police, he could only share some general findings with us at this stage. He however alluded that some complainants would have told that border police involved in pushbacks was not speaking Greek. Commission to check timing of FRONTEX deployment at land border.
- The complaints and the Hellenic Police responses all follow the same pattern, often to their very details. All complaints from NGOs and International Organisations fail to provide information on the persons concerned and the specificities of the cases, thus making them difficult to substantiate.

Next Steps:

- *Upon reception of the interim report, check FRONTEX deployments at the land borders*

ESTIA (Meeting with Ms Girard, UNHCR and Mr Logothetis, Secretary General Reception Ministry of Migration and Asylum)

- **Exits:** UNHCR informed of around 850 beneficiaries of international protection accommodated in untransitionable apartments under ESTIA 2020, including the vulnerable cases and stressed that a solution needs to be found before end of March. UNHCR presented a concept note with proposed options that are assessed by DG HOME. IOM has been consulted to potentially involve Helios. The Ministry of Migration stressed that to take over the most vulnerable persons under ESTIA 2021, an amendment of the eligibility criteria is needed. The ministry will try to identify if there are any savings under the ESTIA 2020 budget that could allow for some time extension.
- **ASB (Arbeiter Samariter Bund) has expressed its interest to take over the apartments of Solidarity Now** in Thessaloniki. The Ministry needs to discuss with them if and under which terms this could be done in a way to help out with the problem described in the concept note.
- **Cash:** It was agreed to discuss the transition and financing of the management of Cash allowances to asylum seekers in the next Task Force mission to Greece (week of 22 March). The Greek Authorities will prepare a concrete proposal on estimated needs by then, including estimates on the evolution of number of people in the reception system. A one month extension of the current project running until 30 June within the current budget might be possible depending on the savings. Continuation of the scheme is expected to be supported under the new AMIF national programme of Greece.
- **VAT exemption:** As part of the exercise to identify ways to prolong ongoing grants, UNHCR mentioned that there are many delays from the Ministry in authorising the reimbursement of VAT. The Ministry is reluctant to sign off VAT exceptions for UNHCR, unless a third party (e.g the Reception Service or ESTIA implementing partner) verifies the delivery of the goods or services. Moreover according to the Joint Ministerial Decision there has to be a clear link between the transactions and migration activities, in order for the Ministry to approve the exemption from VAT. UNHCR will seek to provide the necessary documentation.

Next Steps:

- *Assess UNHCR concept note on ESTIA and identify preferred option(s)*
- *Urgent follow-up with MOMA*

Lesvos (Meetings with International Organisations; NGO partners on the ground; local teams of EU Agencies; Mayor of West Lesvos)

- We visited the temporary camp in Mavrovouni and co-chaired with SG Logothetis the weekly coordination meeting with RIC, UNHCR, Unicef and other actors concerning the ongoing works. Unfortunately the technical service was only represented online, and could still not ensure the presence of a permanent staff on the island. A further meeting concerning the wash facilities and exact planning of tents

redeployment and movements of residents will be held on Friday (Unicef / Greek Technical Department).

- The Task Force together with the Ministry also held a meeting with NGOs active in the camp. SG Logothetis explained the situation concerning the NGO registration requirements and warned that temporary solutions will soon be finished. The evacuation plan is ready and will be communicated, a proposal for regular security meetings to involve all actors was accepted (first already scheduled for 1 March).
- The Task Force together with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum held a joint information meeting with the Frontex, Europol and EASO Lesvos teams.
- We also visited the mayor of West Lesvos and discussed concrete measures of support. To be followed up with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.
- The Ombudsman expressed concerns about the living conditions on the islands, and in particular Mavrovouni, Samos and Chios. He welcome the efforts of the Commission to improve the situation on the ground.

Next Steps:

- *Continue to push for a permanent representative of the Technical Department on Lesvos*
- *Find an urgent solution to the gravelling of the Blue Zone*
- *Confirm solution found for watertrucking with UNICEF*
- *MOMA to organise meeting with NGOs to explain the provisions for registration*
- *Further workshop with Technical department on layout Plati with EASO and Frontex*

Meeting with Gianluca Rocco, Head of IOM Greece mission

Samos

- On Samos, IOM will shortly **hand over** the part of the centre in Zervou site to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, following a meeting of a bilateral committee (IOM – Ministry) to discuss the technicalities of the handover. There might be some savings under the Samos grant, which then can be used for the procurement of 70% of the missing containers. IOM has taken away all the internal barbed wire.

Site Management Services

- Savings can possibly be identified by rationalising the provision of services and allow for extension beyond June 2021. **The role of EASO** in the centres is important and Commission proposed a meeting between Taskforce, EASO and IOM on this matter.
- Replies for the expansion of the centres are still pending from the Secretary General, Mr. Logothetis to IOM. The Commission requested the Greek Reception Service to reassess the list of the interventions needed and the possible closure of some centres in the mainland.

Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs)

- **PEDIA hotels** hosting unaccompanied minors were successfully closed on 22 February 2021. The continuation of the shelters for UAMs in the mainland needs to

be ensured. As regards requested emergency financial support, the Commission informed that questions on the project's Emergency Assistance application have been sent back to the Ministry. It is urgent to conclude the EMAS process

- On **Merimna project that provides safe zones for unaccompanied minors** on the island RICs, IOM is planning to submit a no cost extension of the project until the end of September 2021. The uncertainty on the timing of the conclusion of the works in the MPRICs, is a major factor on the continuation of the project. The Commission noted that the MPRICs in Samos, Kos and Leros should be ready in the course of the year, so partially the project should be then taken over by the Greek authorities.

Philoxenia I

- No building has been identified to replace the Aharnon building, and IOM requested the Commission to raise the point at a higher level. Commission raised it with the Minister but a follow-up in writing will have to be prepared.

Relocation

- On Wednesday 24 Feb, we attended the departure of the **second direct flight** from Lesvos with 122 relocation beneficiaries to Germany. **Further acceleration** of the exercise is needed.
- It was noted that unused places should be signalled much earlier than 2 days before, so that they might be reassigned to other beneficiaries.

Next Steps:

- *Explore the possibility of EASO providing additional support for the management of mainland accommodation sites once SMS has been phased out in June 2021*
- *Follow-up in writing regarding Philoxenia and Aharnon building*
- *Get clarity from MOMA on camp strategy mainland*

Cooperation with Member States (Meeting with Austrian and Dutch Ambassadors)

- Member States address similar questions and issues with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum individually, however do not systematically involve or even inform the Task Force.
- Some Member States would appreciate to have regular briefing sessions from the Task Force. Commission will set it up after every mission in Athens.
- EU Ambassadors meeting Minister Mitarachi in the week of 1 March – Commission asked to be invited too. Member States should share with the Task Force any type of bilateral support they (plan to) provide to Greece in order to optimise the coordination and avoid overlaps.
- The issue of secondary movements and the possible means to address it, is of great concern for several Member States.