



Press release: The pace of the relocation process

According to data released by the Relocation Unit of the Asylum Service, the total number of places offered for asylum seekers in Greece during 2016 by other EU Member States reached 12,999. During the year France made 3,200 pledges, followed by Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal.

The average time between registering a candidate for relocation at one of the asylum offices and submitting a request by Greece to another Member State to accept that candidate is 49 days. However, the average time required once a pledge by another Member State has been received and a request is made by the Relocation Unit is only six days. This is a result of the fact that the number of pledges made by other Member States remains insufficient. While until 1 February the Asylum Service had registered a total of 24,233 relocation candidates, the pledges received amounted to only 15,164.

In addition, the average time for receiving a response to an outgoing request is 29 days, well beyond the ten-day period provided for in the guidelines adopted by the European Commission and the Member States. In fact, the average response time by Member States to the relocation requests made by Greece is growing. In January 2017 only five per cent of all requests received a response within ten days, while the average response time for 79 per cent of all requests was between 21 and 40 days.

Meanwhile, the average time required between the moment an acceptance is received and the asylum seeker is actually transferred is 58 days, as Member States require more time to prepare for receiving the asylum seekers. These delays result in slower decongestion of reception facilities in mainland Greece, widespread frustration among asylum seekers, and overall loss of credibility of the relocation programme.

From the beginning of the relocation programme and until 20 January 2017 a total of 523 unaccompanied minors had been registered to participate in the relocation programme. 350 had been accepted for relocation until the same date, of whom 119 by Finland. However, many Member States do not accept certain categories of unaccompanied children. The most serious cases concern girls under 18 years old, who are married, and sometimes even have children of their own. Many Member States refuse to accept these girls along with their families on the ground that the marriage is illegal (which is the case in all Member States), not taking into account either that this is not sufficient grounds for refusing relocation, under the relevant decisions of the European Council, or that relocation is definitely in the best interests of the persons concerned

The implementation of the relocation programme receives significant support from EASO, IOM and UNHCR. UNHCR is responsible for the housing of relocation candidates, as well as their transport to their interviews and other procedural steps. EASO is the partner organization providing interpretation and translation for the procedure, supporting with registration as well as knowhow on the Dublin Regulation and document verification. Finally, IOM is responsible for all processes related to the transfer of those asylum seekers accepted by Member States for relocation, such as medical checkups, cultural orientation, the organization of travel, and reception upon arrival at the Member State of relocation.

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