



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **The work of the Asylum Service in 2017**

During 2017, the Asylum Service registered 58,661 asylum applications, of which 26,668 were submitted on the five Aegean islands where Reception and Identification Centers (“hotspots”) are located. In total, 40,127 applications were submitted by men, 18,535 applications were submitted by women, and 2,275 were submitted by unaccompanied minors.

The main countries of origin of asylum seekers were Syria (16,396 applications), Pakistan (8,923), Iraq (7,924) and Afghanistan (7,567). 10,364 applicants were awarded international protection status (asylum or subsidiary protection), while 34,646 applications were rejected either as ineligible (12,149) or as inadmissible (22,497). Of the applications rejected on the grounds of inadmissibility, in 12,323 cases the reason was relocation in another EU Member-State, in 8,330 cases the reason was acceptance by another Member-State pursuant to the Dublin III Regulation (primarily for reasons of family reunification), and in 919 cases the reason was the application of the concept of safe third country. In 6,989 cases, the asylum procedure was discontinued, primarily owing to the tacit withdrawal of the asylum claim by the applicant. Consequently, the overall recognition rate for the whole year stands at 46% percent.

In particular, with reference to the asylum procedure conducted in the framework of the EU-Turkey Common Statement, the following can be noted: During 2017, the procedure on the islands, where hotspots are located, was completed in 25,814 cases. Of these cases, 5,437 resulted in a rejection of the asylum claim, and 20,377 resulted in the lifting of the geographical restriction and in the transfer of the applicants to the mainland.

During 2017, the relocation program, which mostly concerned Syrian nationals, was completed. In total, 21,726 asylum seekers (6,982 men, 4,925 women and 9,819 children) were relocated to other EU Member-States in a safe and organized fashion.

In parallel, in 2017, 9,784 take-charge applications were sent to other EU Member-States so that they could assume the responsibility of examining the relevant asylum claims, while 7,225 of these applications were accepted by the Member-States. The main reason for these applications was family reunification (4,334). At the same time, Greece was asked to assume the responsibility of examining the asylum claims submitted in other EU Member-States in approximately 2,000 cases. Greece accepted 68 such incoming requests, while one individual was eventually transferred to Greece.

Concerning the duration of the asylum procedure at the first instance, this lasts on average for two months for cases of applicants who are in custody and of applicants for whom there is a geographical restriction (islands of the eastern Aegean). For all other cases, the average duration is six months.

At the end of 2016, the Asylum Service operated from 17 locations throughout the country (from five in 2013), while at the end of 2017 it operated from 22 locations. The opening of an asylum

office in the city of Ioannina is expected in the coming weeks. The Asylum Service does not pay rent for any of its premises as it has managed to obtain the requisite office spaces *gratis* from Greek public authorities but also from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and, in one case, from a civil society organization.

Concerning the staffing of the Asylum Service at the end of 2017, the pertinent numbers are as follows: 650 employees, of whom more than a hundred are deployed on the eastern Aegean islands. They are assisted by 176 staff deployed by EASO, by 20 police officers and by 20 staff deployed by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). Moreover, the Asylum Service is assisted in its work by hundreds of interpreters of the NGO METAdrasi (with which the Asylum Service has signed a service contract) as well as tens of interpreters employed by EASO.

Concerning European funding, the Asylum Service has implemented various programs, mostly funded from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Commission (national program and emergency measures), but also from the European Economic Area (EEA Grants). The Asylum Service has received and used funds to the value of € 27,928,917.02. It has also committed through contracts 84.72 % of the funds it received (€ 35,840,837.35) by the end of 2017. This figure does not include the Relocation Program since Greece is funded to the tune of € 500 for every individual successfully relocated to another Member-State. In 2018, the Asylum Service is planning to implement additional programs to the value of € 11,250,527.92.

It is recalled that, in 2017, a rough total of 700,000 asylum applications were submitted throughout the EU, which is approximately half the number of 2016. In contrast, in Greece, the number of asylum applications rose by 15%. This means that almost 8,5% of asylum applications in the EU were submitted in Greece which means, in turn, that Greece was called upon to shoulder a burden five times larger than the one that theoretically corresponds to the country. In any case, since the end of last year, Greece is in first place among the EU Member-States when it comes to the proportion of asylum seekers to the inhabitants of the country. This disproportionate burden results in the unavoidable delays which can be observed in all stages of the asylum procedure.

The Asylum Service has grown rapidly in size since starting its operations with fewer than 200 employees. This growth is planned to continue in 2018. 218 will be newly-appointed civil servants. In 2017, the Asylum Service, in cooperation with Harokopio University in Athens, designed an application (the Asylum Service Application) free of charge for mobile phones. The project was funded by the National Program of AMIF 2014-2020. The purpose of the application is the provision of reliable, authoritative and timely information for all those who intend to apply for asylum in Greece and for all those who have already done so. The application is available in Greek, English, French, Arabic, Farsi/Dari, Urdu, Amharic and Tigrinya.

Finally, in an event that will take place on 26 January in the office of the European Parliament in Athens, the Asylum Service will showcase an illustrated information booklet intended for the use of unaccompanied minors. The booklet, the publication of which was funded by AMIF (national program), aims at providing information to unaccompanied minors seeking international protection in a child-friendly manner. The booklet was published in six languages.

For 2018, the challenges facing the Asylum Service could be described as follows: The number of asylum applications, which remains disproportionately high for Greece; maintaining the quality of the asylum procedure at the first instance, which does not allow for further burdening of the case workers and which, if not maintained, will result in long appeal procedures (both administrative and judicial), and, finally, the continuing rapid growth of the Asylum Service, in a manner however which is sustainable, possibly structuring the Asylum Service in such a way as to allow it to function more effectively.