



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Deputy Director-General
Head of the Task Force Migration Management

Brussels
HOME.TF/UD

Dear Representatives,

On behalf of Commissioner Johansson, it is my pleasure to send you the details about the progress of EU support to migration management in Greece.

As the Head of the Task Force Migration Management, I hold weekly meetings with the Greek authorities and I go on monthly missions to assess the situation on the ground. During my last visit to Greece in September 2021, I had again the opportunity as every visit to have open and fruitful discussions with many organisations, committed and active on the ground.

The European Commission supports the Greek national authorities to manage migration in line with EU law and values, and is fully committed to the objective of providing adequate accommodation to persons in need of shelter.

Overall, the Commission has supported Greece with more than EUR 3,3 billion since 2015, in order to set up its migration and border management systems. This includes support through International Organisations for accommodation, protection and integration programmes for asylum applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. At the same time, the Commission has been working together with the Greek authorities in order to develop their national capacity and transition to an effective and centrally-run migration management system that caters for the protection and dignity of migrants and refugees as well as to support the seamless integration on beneficiaries of international protection into the Greek society.

In this respect, the Greek authorities increasingly take over the reception system for applicants for international protection. Emergency support programmes until hereto managed by International Organisation as UNHCR and IOM are taken over by the Greek authorities and adapted into a sustainable government approach. In parallel, given the decreasing number of applicants for international protection, the reception system was rationalised and certain emergency programmes have ended, such as Filoxenia emergency accommodation in hotels.

In particular, on the interruption of **cash assistance to self-accommodated migrants** it is important to underline that the Greek authorities are responsible to implement their policy in respect of the EU acquis. Safeguards have been introduced in the EU acquis,

ensuring that Member States are under an obligation to provide applicants of international protection with the necessary reception conditions which guarantee an adequate standard of living for applicants, when their application is processed, which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health, as stipulated under the respective Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU). In applying this Directive, Member States should seek to ensure full compliance with the principles of the best interests of the child and of family unity, in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Rights respectively.

In line with the relevant EU provisions on the **rights of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection**, the Greek authorities need to focus on managing a fluid transition by setting up sustainable integration programmes for beneficiaries of international protection and timely access to all the rights beneficiaries are entitled to upon protection being granted, such as social benefits on a par with own nationals, and access to accommodation. With regard to **integration**, the Commission has provided comments to the integration strategy that the Greek authorities are developing in line with the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. The Action Plan encourages Member States to implement specific actions in four thematic areas crucial for successful integration: housing, education, health and employment. In particular, access to adequate and affordable housing is a key determinant for successful integration.

On top of the successful implementation of the **HELIOS programme** which is covering all the four areas and has been funded through Emergency Assistance under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum is planning to include the project under the European Social Fund (ESF+), strengthening its core components and enhancing integration prospects in Greek society.

As concerns the **conditions in the Reception and Identification Centres on the Aegean islands**, I do not share your assessment that the reality of the situation for migrants on Lesbos and the other islands has not improved. A list of works and improvements undertaken in the recent months can be found in Annex to this letter. Commissioner Johansson has also received personal assurances by Minister Mitarachi that no persons will spend the coming winter in inadequate conditions. At the same time, the population has been significantly reduced thanks to the transfers to the mainland and the ongoing relocation exercise, coordinated and financially supported by the Commission. In particular, at mid-October 2021, there were approximately 3 100 residents in the temporary Mavrovouni facility. The Commission continues to work with the Greek authorities to further improve the situation.

The new **Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos** is a key priority of the Commission's Task Force on Migration Management. While the tender process for the facilities on Lesbos and Chios is now at its final stages, the new Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centre on Samos has opened on 18 September 2021, and the centres on Kos and Leros will follow still in 2021. Together with the successful reduction of the numbers of persons on the islands and the quicker asylum procedures, the new centres will ensure adequate living conditions for arriving migrants and enable efficient migration management.

As regards the **fencing around the four open accommodation centres**, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is implementing a project under the AMIF that covers,

amongst other actions, the construction and operational needs of reception centres on the Greek mainland. In view of increasing security and safety of residents and staff, it includes the construction or maintenance of fences in certain sites¹, as requested by the Greek authorities. The choice of materials to be used (concrete walls, metallic fences, or other materials) is not prescribed by EU reception standards. The Commission and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) were consulted on the technical specifications prior to the construction of the fences. We underlined that the fencing must take due account of a number of parameters, including safety, security, fire protection, access to sufficient natural light and non-blockage of sight. Amongst others, this ensures that the fencing is placed at an adequate distance from any accommodation units. A mixed solution is implemented that alternates concrete with chain-link fencing, which increases vision into and out of the centres.

With regard to the **NGO registration law**, the Commission has repeatedly acknowledged the key role that civil society plays in upholding the common values and fundamental rights upon which the EU is founded, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights. At the same time, regulating activities of private entities, including NGOs, with a view to ensure full transparency is reasonable, while any restrictions imposed, including regarding registration as a precondition for activities in Greece, need to be necessary, justified and proportionate. In this regard, I welcomed the online information event that the Ministry undertook for the NGOs applying for the Registry in June. We continue to express the importance of an open dialogue with NGOs to the Greek authorities, and have asked them to consider holding such meetings more regularly.

We also note the list of obligations for the Greek government set out in the various instruments of international human rights law vis-à-vis housing provision for refugees and asylum seekers. For beneficiaries of international protection, EU law prescribes no obligation to provide housing per se; Greece is required by Directive 2011/95/EU to ensure that beneficiaries of international protection have access to accommodation under equivalent conditions as other third-country nationals legally resident in Greece. For unaccompanied minor beneficiaries, Greece has an obligation to accommodate them in centres specialised in accommodation for minors or in other accommodation suitable for minors. For minors, Greece has an obligation to ensure full compliance with the principles of the best interests of the child and of family unity and to ensure a standard of living adequate to their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, which implies, among others, accommodation in centres suitable for minors and access to education and to leisure activities appropriate to their age within those premises.

Supporting the Greek authorities' efforts to ensure access to **education** is one of the priorities of the Task Force. Under the Memorandum of Understanding to establish the new centre on Lesbos, all parties recognise that children should attend public school or, be schooled within the reception centres for mandatory education. The Commission funds several activities to support education for children in migration and their families on the Greek islands and mainland, including among others, non-formal education, transportation to schools, interpretation services in schools and access to formal education. In parallel, the Government of Greece and UNICEF have launched a new three-year education programme, All Children in Education (ACE), to ensure that all school-age refugee and migrant children in Greece have access to quality, inclusive learning. Through Non-Formal Education activities and other actions, ACE aims at ensuring a pathway to formal education for every school-age refugee and migrant child.

¹ Diavata, Ritsona, Malakasa and Nea Kavala

This programme will cover three school years, starting from September 2021, and aims to not only increase access to public schools but also provide the necessary retention support once children are enrolled – ultimately improving future outcomes and integration into Greek society.

To assist Member States' response to the pandemic, the Commission adopted Guidance in April 2020 on how to ensure continuity and effectiveness of asylum procedures while implementing the EU rules on asylum, return procedures and on resettlement, including access to health services and measures taken for persons in reception facilities to ensure that the integrity and dignity of the persons are respected. It contained examples of how such rules can be applied in the context of the pandemic and drew on the practices that Member States put in place in order to ensure that systems and procedures are adapted to this reality and to the extent possible, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and international obligations. In the Guidance, it is recommended that access to health care is ensured and all measures aimed at preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19 be in a proportionate and non-discriminatory manner for all migrants. Particular attention should be paid to the situation and needs of vulnerable people.

Finally, I thank you for the information provided in your letter. We welcome detailed information on operations and practical obstacles experienced by actors in the field, both in writing and during my visits on the ground.

Yours faithfully,

[e-signed]
Beate GMINDER

Enclosure: Overview of works implemented in the temporary facility on Lesbos

Annex – Works implemented in the temporary facility on Lesbos

- The works to establish a proper water grid, sewage system and electricity grid as well as flood prevention and gravelling are almost finalised, the 152 hot showers and 400 toilets which depend on water trucking and desludging have been replaced by fixed toilet and shower containers. Once the works are finalised (planned end of October) the system will be connected to the local water and sewage grids. Until that time the current system will stay in place to avoid any gaps in availability and access to the facilities.
- 200 accommodation containers have been deployed and are gradually inhabited by the residents, replacing the family tents. 118 Refugee Housing Units have also been set up and residents have moved in after they were connected to electricity.
- Spaces have been adapted to host non-formal education activities for children and adults, two playing grounds have been set up and two modern sport fields have been functioning since February 2021. In addition, since the lifting of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, education and learning activities are available for children and adults in the Unicef-run learning centre and the SOS villages in Mytilini, and in the ‘Tapuat’ learning centre. All children have access to learning and non-formal education.
- Enrolment in formal education is ongoing for primary and secondary levels, the Ministry of Education expects a record number of 150 children in formal education programmes for the ongoing school year, including about 50 children enrolled in kindergarten, which has started to operate in the Mavrovouni centre.
- The provision of health care and medical service on a 24/7 basis is ensured by the Greek national health service (EODY) and a number of dedicated non-profit organisations. The Covid-19 vaccination campaign for residents has started in June and is ongoing (1204 residents were vaccinated in the centre so far; in addition, a number of asylum seekers have received vaccination outside the centre).
- There is active participation of international organisations and NGOs in the site management and 24/7 presence of Greek police (both female and male staff) to ensure the security of the site.
- The Commission has granted €5 million to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum in order to finance the necessary works in the temporary centre for the comprehensive upgrade of installations and infrastructure.
- Furthermore, €8 million have been contracted with UNICEF and IOM for the provision of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Services for Refugees & Migrants in the temporary facility on Lesbos.