

Main conclusions from the mission of the Head of the Task Force, DDG HOME Beate Gminder to Athens, Lesvos and Samos on 19-21 January 2021

Main meetings of the mission:

- Minister of Migration and Asylum, Mr Mitarakis
- Deputy Minister for Integration and UAMs Ms Voultepsi
- Secretary General for Asylum Policy, Mr Georgiadis
- Secretary General for Reception, Mr Logothetis
- Permanent Secretary for Admin, Finance and Informatics, Ms [REDACTED]
- Special Secretary for UAMs, Ms Agapidaki
- Director General of the Managing Authority Ms [REDACTED]
- Governor of Northern Aegean, Mr Moutzouris
- Mayor of Mytilene, Mr Kytelis
- Mayor of Samos, Mr Strantzios
- IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and NGOs on both islands

Ministry of Migration Priorities for 2021 repeated at various meetings:

1. [REDACTED]
2. [REDACTED]
3. [REDACTED]
4. [REDACTED]
5. [REDACTED]

LESVOS / Mavrovouni

- According to the contractor, **works** are ongoing following the master plan and the studies for the sewage and wastewater network as well as for the water network have been finalised. UNICEF /IOM will start the tendering procedure. However, and despite the efforts, delays result from bad weather, complexity of the works and variety of actors involved. The finalisation of the works, planned by end of February is in jeopardy.
- DDG Gminder urged accelerate work and to put in place sufficient provision of **electrical power** so that heaters, which have been organised by UNHCR and have been available since the beginning of the year, can be distributed to residents. Mr Logothetis agreed to focus on this challenge and suggested a small pilot to test if the electricity from the current system would support this.
- A **coordination meeting** will take place the week after the mission to look at the technical requirements and the steps. The participants will be Red Cross, UNHCR, UNICEF, RIS/RIC and EC representative. At the request of DDG Gminder meetings in such format will from now on take place regularly to accompany and coordinate all ongoing building works.

- On the **lead issue**, the expert study has been concluded. After this mission, on 23 January, MoMA published a press release summarising the results of the study. Out of 12 samples taken, only one was found giving values above the threshold (blue zone, F, zone without tents but close to an administrative tent of IOM). The contractor confirmed that the levelling works foresee that 10cm of fine gravel will be added to upper layer of the soil to ensure drainage of water. This will also result in an additional protection against any traces of lead, which would be moving down in to the soil.
- **Local authorities:** DDG Gminder informed both the Mayor and the Governor of the region of North Aegean that the EU understands the need to enhance the economic, social and cultural development of the island following negative consequences of the refugee crisis, exacerbated by economic and health crisis due to the pandemic. COM fully agrees to deliver on the priorities as set by the local and regional authorities, in close cooperation with the central and European authorities. She informed that from the initial list of projects that had been presented by the municipality there were three projects that in cooperation with DG REGIO would be responding to the framework and could be brought to maturity in a short time span, [REDACTED]. Both, the Governor and the Mayor welcomed this information. However the Governor stressed that these development should not be seen as a compensation for the consent of Lesbos to the new MPRIC.
- The COM delegation visited the **Kara Tepe site**, which hosts currently about 1050 migrants and asylum seekers with vulnerabilities. COM took note of the needs expressed by UNHCR for a further extension of Kara Tepe camp (currently questioned by the Mayor) that needs to be included in the application on Protection Activities together with some general actions regarding Mavrovouni camp.
- The COM delegation visited as well the **landfill site ('XYTA')** which is adjacent to the area where the new MPRIC could be built. The landfill is connected to a biological purification station. The site Director informed about the plans to extend and include recycling in the site. The plant appears to be well managed, providing reasonable assurance that it does not constitute a threat for the new MPRIC

SAMOS

- **Local Authorities:** The mayor of Samos focused on the needs at local level in the aftermath of the migration crisis, COVID-19, the earthquake on the island, and the lack of tourists on the island. He asked to provide support in particular for cleaning and rehabilitating the area of the current RIC after its evacuation. COM will examine this request and revert back to the authorities.
- **Current RIC:** There are 3384 people hosted in the RIC (official capacity 670) and 19 of them are UAM's living in the safe area. Despite the limited resources and the challenging environment, the RIC director is managing the camp efficiently. The living conditions for the majority of the residents are below standards (vast informal area outside the RIC). Lack of space and food quality remain an issue along with lack of medicines. Particularly for the food, the new framework contract that is being prepared should improve the quality because the cooking would take place on the island (while now it is often frozen and reheated). There are people with second instance negative decisions that cannot leave the island due to the suspension of returns.
- **IOM RIC:** The RIC constructed by IOM is almost completed. The pending issues are: i) pending delivery of 72 containers plus 27 extra that were used to host locals affected by the recent earthquake. The containers will be provided by IOM that has already launched the procedure, ii)

wastewater disposal and iii) water supply. The COM proposed to revisit the extensive use of barbed wire all around the camp which makes it look and feel like a prison.

- **New MPRIC :** Works are ongoing and advancing.
- **NGOs:** NGOs expressed their concerns over the various deficiencies noted during the asylum procedure (lack of legal aid, delays in the procedure etc), the alleged push backs and the new registration system NGOs which is considered as non-transparent, cumbersome and costly for small NGOs. Further on they complain about the need to continue to provide NFIs since in-kind NFIs available in Athens cannot be stored on the island and are thus non accessible.

UAMs

- **Multi-Annual Plan for UAM:** Special Secretary for UAM (SSUAM) submitted a first draft of a Multi-Annual Plan for UAM, including a plan for integration and with indicators to ensure a sustainable policy in this area. DDG Gminder thanked SSUAM for this strategic document, which will be submitted to DG HOME's experts for input.
- **Envisaged transfer of guardianship:** SSUAM confirmed that MoMA will take over responsibility for guardianship from the MoLSA in the coming weeks. SSUAM has sent a draft legal amendment with the modalities of such transfer to the MoLSA for comments before submitting it to Parliament.
- **Guardians for the relocation scheme:** Discussions are ongoing with EKKA, IOM and UNCHR on how to ensure the uninterrupted provision of guardians under the relocation scheme. According to IOM an extension is needed but their current budget cannot sustain it. On the other hand, COM has no additional funding to allocate on this activity. SSUAM suggested that the current scheme continues to operate until the end of February (it ended officially on 31/12/20). Following that, the guardians can operate under the EKKA/Metadrasi contract (funded under National Programme).
- **UAM relocation scheme:** SSUAM reported that relocation of UAM has been rather slow due to the delays of certain MS (583 transfers until now). In particular Portugal and France have been slow to fulfil their large pledges (500 pledges each). DG HOME will reflect on ways to improve situation, possibly at senior official level.
- **Funding for UAM shelters:** DDG Gminder confirmed that available EMAS funding is currently very limited and urged SSUAM to explore any possible alternative funding. SSUAM explained that EUR 19 million will not suffice to fund the shelters also due to the slower than expected relocation of UAMs. BG urged SSUAM to explore the possibility that MS contribute with funding for UAM shelters to compensate for their lack of relocation efforts under the EU scheme.
- IOM stressed to COM the need to proceed quickly with the assessment of the Emergency Assistance Applications for the shelters of UAMs in the mainland, highlighting the risk that many NGOs, in the absence of funding support, might withdraw their applications.
- The COM highlighted the need that the Special Secretary for UAMs should proceed with the submission of the revised application as soon as possible which then will allow the Commission services to continue with the assessment of the request.

Integration

- Strengthening integration policies and digitalising the legal migration process in 2021 is another priority set by the Greek authorities. Ms Voultepsi, the new Deputy Minister for Integration and UAMs, noted the work on a **holistic approach over the integration policy** and underlined the need for proper funding. The State needs to invest in programmes that ensure faster integration

in order to reduce secondary movements. The authorities are aware of the political sensitivity of the issue and are in contact with Germany, as the main end destinations for secondary movements. MoMA expects the evaluation of an Integration project under the Recovery Fund that will contribute largely to the integration policy. ESF and Recovery Fund will be the main funding sources for the integration.

- SSUAM explained the strategy to implement projects that will have a **refugee-to-refugee approach** to create job opportunities for skilled recognised refugees. She noted the importance to focus on children and women and enhance their pre-integration, even during their stay at the reception system.
- **Exits of recognised refugees:** BG also referred to the challenge of removing 20.000 refugees from the reception system. Currently half of the population in the sites are recognised refugees.
- **Helios:** The preparation of the transition to ESF+ is advancing. There is a strong will on behalf of the ministry to take over in time and this was clear from the new Deputy Minister for Integration too. Both COM and IOM were reluctant to include under Helios the suggested pilot that could bring recognised refugees in Greece as workers to Germany.

ESTIA

- **Cash:** UNHCR remains dedicated to the transition, but the Ministry does not seem ready to take over. This can still be achieved provided that the Ministry would collaborate with a partner that uses the same financial service provider with UNHCR allowing this way to use the same cards (i.e CRS). The solution for the bank accounts is still on the table however serious obstacles should be overcome in order for this solution to be feasible.
- In view also of the budgetary constraints, the Greek authorities are exploring the possibility to reduce cash assistance to the absolute minimum. COM cautioned against that – humanitarian policy favours cash towards in kind benefits.
- **Accommodation:** Overall, there are no significant challenges regarding the transition from UNHCR to MOMA. For the non-compliant cases it is made clear to the partners that they should make any effort needed as after March it will be their liability. UNHCR is supporting by funding the out of court settlement of these cases.

SMS

- **SMS project:** SMS 2020 will cover at least the first 3 months of 2021. SMS 2021 is planned to end in June 2021 however the Greek authorities have not provided any clear plan regarding the management of the sites and the provision of the necessary services.
- **Expansion of camps:** MOMA has requested the expansion of at least 5 camps however the specifications to be provided by the technical department is delayed therefore IOM cannot complete the expansions. COM stands ready to support IOM if needed.
- **Procurement of containers:** The IOM tender for the containers is currently being evaluated. None of the competing vendors can undertake the provision of the full quantity of containers hence IOM will split the project among 2-3 vendors.
- **Wash:** RIS has requested IOM to take over WASH for Klidi and Nea Malakasa with chemical toilets and showers. IOM proposed to consider the possibility to provide WASH containers, which can offer more dignified conditions at a lower cost.
- **NFIs for winterisation:** Following RIS request, EC informed IOM that they can transport NFIs and other materials currently kept in their warehouse in order to cover the emergency winter needs.

FILOXENIA I

- There have been difficulties in identifying a building to replace **Aharon**. Discussions on a possible use of a building in the region of Ioannina is being explored. COM underlined that a further extension of the grant agreement is not possible. The grant agreement ends in June 2021.

FILOXENIA II

- Following the closure of Filoxenia, IOM mentioned that there are still a few asylum seekers in the scheme who are though expected to exit the hotels in the upcoming days. The project will be extended only for covering the accommodation needs for the Beneficiaries of International Protection. IOM highlighted that a small extension might be needed after February.

Funding

- **Funding gap for until the MFF:** A key priority for Greece in 2021 is to deal with the funding gap due to the transition period from the current programming period of 2014-2020 to the new one. Greek authorities are fully aware of the situation. DDG Gminder explained that a long term planning is needed from now on in order to avoid potential problems of cash flow in the future. She also explained the changes related to the new programming period (for instance the financing of emergencies will be exceptional and not a usual practice as EMAS in the past). This was detailed in meetings with the Responsible Authority and with Minister. The RA is now responsible for coordinating all EMAS of the Ministry.
- **Project Management Office:** The Minister emphasised the importance of the Project Management Office that is foreseen in the MoU with the Commission in order to enable substantial development in the areas that are mostly affected by migration. A coordinated effort between DG HOME and DG REGIO with the Ministry of Economy and Development is needed in order to facilitate the plan of providing support to the regions under pressure through the PMO.

Administration

- The recent **appointment of the Permanent Secretary** in November 2020 is expected to streamline the use of resources across the services of the ministry and provide quality assurance.
- **A new Head of the Managing Authority** was appointed in January 2021 following the resignation of the previous Head last year.
- **MoMA under the same roof:** Up until recently, the different services of MoMA were located in six different buildings in Athens. In January 2021, all the services moved under the same building (Keranis) which has improved tremendously the communication across services, the harmonisation of practices, pooling of resources, synergies and economies of scale.
- In 2021 MoMA will further strengthen its capacity by recruiting 509 new officials

4th Meeting of Migration Management Steering Committee

- In the context of the mission the 4th Meeting of Migration Management Steering Committee was held. The minutes of the Steering Committee will be issued soon.