



Managing the Refugee Crisis: Commission reports on implementation of EU-Turkey Statement

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The Commission has today reported on the implementation of the [EU-Turkey Agreement](#) and finds that good progress has been made to operationalise the Statement. Continued efforts and commitments are needed to consolidate this position and carry out sustained return and resettlement operations, given that this aspect of implementation still largely lies ahead. On 18 March 2016, EU Heads of State or Government and Turkey agreed to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU and replace it instead with legal channels of resettlement of refugees to the European Union. This new approach has started to deliver results, with a sharp decrease seen in the number of people irregularly crossing the Aegean from Turkey into Greece. Today's report also constitutes the fourth report on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan of 29 November 2015.

European Commission First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"The first result of our cooperation with Turkey is that the message is starting to get through that turning to smugglers is the wrong choice to make. In the past three weeks we have seen a sharp decrease in irregular arrivals, which now needs to go hand-in-hand with opening up the legal channel of resettlement to those in need of protection. Although we have seen good progress in the initial stages of implementation, the Commission will remain engaged to ensure full and timely delivery of all elements of the EU-Turkey Statement, including projects for refugees from Syria in Turkey, the visa liberalisation process and compliance with EU and international laws."*

Today's Report concludes that there has been good progress since 18 March, with joint efforts by the Greek and Turkish authorities, the Commission, Member States and EU agencies making headway in operationalising the Statement:

- The return of irregular migrants to Turkey started on 4 April. So far, 325 irregular migrants arriving to Greece via Turkey after 20 March have been returned to Turkey under the Statement. We welcome that a number of legal changes have been undertaken by both Greece and Turkey to ensure full respect of EU and international law. Frontex has deployed 318 escort officers and 21 readmission experts to the Greek islands to support the return operations. In addition, a total of 25 Turkish liaison officers have been deployed in the Greek hotspots and 5 Greek liaison officers to arrival points in Turkey.
- The first resettlements from Turkey following the Statement took place on 4-5 April. So far, 103 Syrian refugees have been resettled to the EU under the 1:1 scheme. Standard Operating Procedures for resettlement have been developed in close cooperation between the Commission, Member States, EASO, UNHCR and Turkey, and now need to be finalised.
- Greece has set up accelerated procedures for the processing of all stages of asylum applications on the islands, from the initial interviews to the appeals. Greece has already deployed case officers and police officers to the islands, in line with the requirements of the Asylum Procedures Directive. EASO has deployed 60 asylum officers and 67 interpreters to the Greek islands to support the processing of asylum applications.
- The Commission will present its third visa liberalisation progress report for Turkey on 4 May and, if Turkey takes the necessary measures to fulfil the remaining benchmarks, the report will be accompanied by a legislative proposal for transferring Turkey to the visa-free list.
- Programming and project preparation under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey have been accelerated. In addition to €1 billion from the EU budget, 16 EU Member States have now sent in their contribution certificates, covering €1.61 billion out of the €2 billion pledged for 2016-2017. The first contracts under the Facility, worth €77 million, were signed on 4 March and the first payments were made on 18 March. The good progress in the initial phase of implementation now needs to be stepped up in the next phases. The Commission will remain fully engaged in implementing all elements of the Statement. Member States need to step up their efforts in

supporting Greece, particularly given the need to pay particular attention to children and vulnerable groups; more pledges and acceptances are needed in terms of resettlement, relocation and support to the EU agencies. Those Member States that have not sent in their contribution certificates under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey should quickly do so. Equally, further efforts are required by Turkey to make sure that those who need international protection receive the kind of support they most require including through the Facility. Turkey also needs to take the necessary measures to fulfil the remaining benchmarks of the visa liberalisation roadmap by the end of April, with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens at the latest by the end of June 2016. The Commission will present its second report on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in early June 2016.

Background

In line with the EU-Turkey Statement, from 20 March 2016, all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Turkey to the Greek islands and whose applications for asylum have been declared inadmissible should be returned to Turkey. This temporary and extraordinary step is designed to end human suffering by showing clearly that there is no benefit in following the route offered by the smugglers.

Under the Statement, the EU will resettle a Syrian from Turkey to the EU for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands. Priority is given to migrants who have not previously entered or tried to enter the EU irregularly, within the framework of the existing commitments.

The implementation of the agreement requires huge operational efforts from all involved, and most of all from Greece. Greece and Turkey are the two governments in charge of implementing the agreement. It is their authorities who have to do the legal and operational work and ensure that EU and international law is respected at all stages of the process. The Commission has been working closely with the Greek and Turkish authorities to ensure the necessary improvements in terms of practical and logistical arrangements and human resources to ensure the smooth implementation of returns and is assisting Greece with advice, expertise and support from the EU budget. President Juncker immediately appointed an EU Coordinator and reinforced the existing Commission team already on the ground in Greece. The EU Coordinator is responsible for the coordination of the support provided to the Greek authorities by the Commission, the EU agencies, and the other EU Member States and the coordination of Member States action for the implementation of the resettlement programme from Turkey.

For more information

[Communication: First Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement Annex](#)

[MEMO: Implementing the EU-Turkey Agreement – Questions and Answers](#)

[FACTSHEET: Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#)

[FACTSHEET: Managing the refugee crisis: EU financial support to Greece](#)

[Operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement](#): Member States pledges and deployments for Frontex and EASO operations - returns and resettlements

[EU-Turkey Statement](#) of 18 March

[EU-Turkey Action Plan of 15 October](#), activated on 29 November

[Appointment of the EU Coordinator](#)

[European Agenda on Migration](#)

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