

LISTENING

Ahead of the February European Council the Commission assesses progress on EU migration priority actions. Important building blocks have been put in place and some progress has been achieved. But much more needs to be done urgently.

The most severe refugee crisis since the Second World War, with over 60 million refugees or internally displaced people across the globe, requires a radical strengthening of the EU migration system and a coordinated European response.

Over the last six months, the European Commission has worked for a swift, coordinated European response, tabling a series of proposals designed to equip Member States with the tools necessary to better manage the large number of arrivals.

The Commission today assesses progress and points out the need to step-up the implementation of the agreed European response, striking the balance between responsibility and solidarity.

The progress reports tabled today cover the situation in Italy and Greece, the Western Balkan Route and the EU-Turkey Action Plan. Important building blocks have been put in place. They point out some positive developments, for example the fact that the proportion of migrants fingerprinted has risen in Greece from 8% in September 2015 to 78% in January 2016, and in Italy from 36% to 87% over the same period. But still a lot of work remains to be done in regards to hotspots, returns and relocation. The Commission welcomes Italy's and Greece's commitments to make this happen shortly and reminds of the financial and operational support it is providing to both countries. Altogether the Commission has mobilised €10.1 billion from the EU budget in 2015-2016 in response to the refugee crisis.

The Commission reminds Member States of their commitments taken at the Western Balkans Leaders' Meeting in October 2015, including on reception capacities, and renews its call to end the 'wave-through' approach to those who indicate an interest in applying for asylum elsewhere.

In its assessment of the progress on the EU-Turkey Action Plan the Commission acknowledges the measures already taken by Turkey, for example in terms of access to the labour market and new visa rules for Syrian refugees. However, it also says that Turkey needs to make significant progress in preventing irregular departures of migrants and refugees from its territory to the EU, that the country should improve the implementation of its bilateral Readmission Agreement with Greece, and that it should be ready to implement the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement for third country nationals from 1 June

2016. The Commission emphasises that EU assistance should be delivered as soon as possible through the recently established Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

The Commission has also adopted a Recommendation addressed to Greece on the urgent measures to be taken in view of the possible resumption of some transfers under the Dublin Regulation.

Due to the emergency situation that Austria is currently facing, the Commission has proposed a one-year temporary suspension of the relocation of 30% of applicants allocated to Austria.

The College of Commissioners has discussed draft recommendations for Greece under Article 19b of the Schengen Borders Code. After a Schengen Evaluation Report concluded that there are shortcomings in Greece's external border management, the Council is now considering recommendations to remedy these serious deficiencies. The Commission stands ready to take appropriate implementing measures once the Council has decided on this. The stabilisation of the Schengen system through the use of its safeguard mechanisms is essential in order to ensure the subsequent lifting of all internal border controls.

Finally the Commission has decided to issue reasoned opinions against Member states in 9 infringement cases concerning their non-transposition of the Common European Asylum System. The Member States concerned are: Germany Estonia, Slovenia, Greece, France, Italy and Latvia. Previously, on 23 September 2015, the Commission had already adopted 40 decisions on potential or actual infringements of EU asylum legislation, in addition to 34 already pending cases. On 10 December 2015, the Commission had issued 8 infringement decisions.