



HON. MINISTER CARMELO ABELA

What is your view on the Common European Asylum System and its reform?

The recent migration crisis has shown us in no uncertain way that our Common European Asylum System (CEAS) needs reform. The current framework does not cater for times of extraordinary migratory pressure and does not ensure a fair sharing of responsibility among all Member States in such cases. Instead, it places a disproportionate responsibility on frontline Member States. Furthermore, as things stand, asylum seekers do not receive the same treatment in all countries, thus encouraging secondary movements.

Last year, the European Commission put forward two packages comprising a total of seven legislative proposals aimed at reforming the CEAS including through further harmonisation of asylum procedures and standards. The Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU has made continuous progress on these proposals a top priority, within the broader context of the need for a holistic approach to addressing the challenges of migration at an EU level. In the last Home Affairs session of the JHA Council on 27 March, the Council took note of ongoing work on

the reform of the CEAS on the basis of a progress report from the Presidency.

As EUMS leading the EU Presidency, we are determined to continue working intensively on all these proposals, including negotiations with the European

Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) where applicable. This will include striving to achieve progress on the recast of the Dublin Regulation, particularly through a fair and sustainable implementation of the concept of solidarity as enshrined in the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU.



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Relocation as a New Migration Channel

Since 2015, the unprecedented number of refugees arriving on European territory from across the Mediterranean and through the Western Balkans placed European politicians and Eurocrats at a juncture when the need to distribute the burden more equally between member states became so imminent that it started impinging on the future of the European project. In view of the pressing demand for burden-sharing the European Council set up a quota-based relocation mechanism to allow the movement of 160,000 asylum seekers who landed in Italy and Greece to other member states. The European Commission remarked that if the member states will hesitate to fulfil their commitments due to the voluntary basis of this mechanism, the Commission will push for a mandatory system. This Commission's statement came forward amidst the counter-discourse on relocation emanating from the Visegrad countries

of Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic and beyond in the Eastern border of the EU.

This emphasis on the relocation programme is being stressed because relocation is both a regular channel for migration and a durable solution for some of the most vulnerable asylum seekers. Focusing on legal pathways is extremely important to the European migration policy especially in view of the fact that the crisis will persist unless the root causes of migration is successfully addressed, such as war, climate change and poverty.

Against this background, Malta, as a new country of relocation, also had to take its fair share of asylum seekers from Italy and Greece. As of mid-March 2017, Malta had relocated 111 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy out of the 188 asylum seekers to be relocated by Malta. The remaining 77



asylum seekers will be relocated by the end of September 2017 always in collaboration of IOM Italy and IOM Greece who take care of pre-departure preparation such as medical checks and cultural orientation.



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Integration, Migration and Expulsion Working Party

An integrated approach to migration includes both an efficient and fair system of asylum protection to persons who qualify as refugees and beneficiaries of international protection as well as an effective return management strategy addressing the return of migrants, who are not eligible for protection, to their country of origin. The latter objective of effective return policy is underpinned by the work carried out by the EU Working Party on Integration, Migration and Expulsion which deals with issues related to entry to, exit from and integration in the EU.

During the current Maltese Presidency, the Expulsion Formation of the

Integration, Migration and Expulsion Working Party is playing an important role in complementing the active work conducted by the Commission in the field of return and readmission. The Commission has issued a Communication and a Recommendation on return on 2nd March 2017, with the objective of providing its views on how to enhance the effectiveness of the EU return policy in this area. Bearing this in mind, the Expulsion formation of the IME Working Party will dedicate adequate time to discuss these documents with particular focus on the Recommendation. Some of the recommendations, for instance, are the additional EUR 200 million to Member States' via their Asylum,

Migration and Integration Fund national programmes for return related actions; the obligation of Member States to provide the requested return data in the Integrated Return Management Application on a monthly basis; to work to swiftly conclude negotiations of the Readmission Agreements with Nigeria, Tunisia and Jordan while striving to engage with Morocco and Algeria. Work is also being undertaken in light of the Malta Declaration and the European Commission's communication on Partnership Frameworks issued in June last year, which both list as one of their short-term objectives the increase of the rate of returns to countries of origin and transit.

The CARE Project

In 2015 the European Commission issued a call for actions to support Member States under particular migratory pressure to respond to health-related challenges and the health needs of refugees and migrant groups. The Ministry for Health appointed the Migrant Health Liaison Office within the Primary Health Care Department to respond to the call and implement the project entitled “CARE: Common Approach for Refugees and other Migrants’ Health” in Malta. The project was led by the National Institute for Health, Migration and Poverty, Italy in partnership with other MS: Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia.

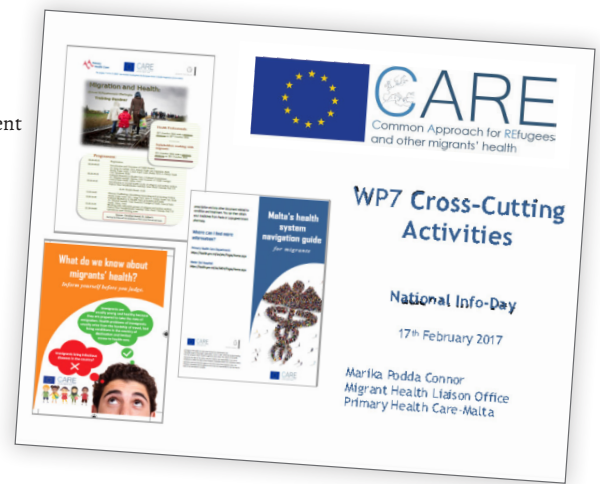


A set of eight work packages were drawn up by all the partners of the project which closed on the 31st March 2017. Malta was involved in five (5) of the eight (8) work packages: WP1 Coordination, WP2 Dissemination and Planning, WP3 Evaluation, WP5 Communicable diseases and Health Threats and WP7 Cross-Cutting Activities.

As part of WP7 a training seminar for health professionals and stakeholders working with migrants was organised over 4 days in the end of October 2016. Two (2) foreign speakers from the Christ Church University in Kent, UK and The School of Public Health in Athens were invited to participate in the training. The training focused on Cultural Competence, Human Trafficking and Psychological Issues of migrants. A total of one hundred and two (102) participants attended the training which generated in-depth discussions on several issues related to migration and health. The analysis of the evaluation forms of the training seminar

indicated a need for further training on different issues of migration which will bring together health professionals and stakeholders working with migrants and the availability of more cultural mediators in clinical settings. A report which provides the basis of the methodology and the recommendations that emerged from the training seminar was drawn up by the Migrant Health Liaison Office. Posters and leaflets for migrants and the general public were developed by the project partners and disseminated during an Info Day in February 2017.

Upon completion of the project, more appropriate health care deliveries, increased control of infectious disease risk in the early phase of migrant’s care and better taking care of migrants’ health over the European territory was obtained.



The Asylum Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020 in Malta

With the aim of alleviating the burden of unprecedented migration flows on Malta, the Maltese government and the European Commission negotiated a seven year financial programme namely the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014 - 2020 (AMIF). The document lays out an investment of over €17 million earmarked for various initiatives linked to Asylum and Migration.

The AMIF will improve the capacity of the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees through the financing of equipment for document verification and interpreters. Public entities such as the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security are benefiting from financial help in order to provide adequate reception, good quality medical care, and enhance the skills of officers working with migrants.

Moreover, the national programme also provides a financial framework for investments towards the integration of third-country nationals living in Malta mainly through the setting up of an Integration Hub by the Ministry for Social Dialogue and Consumer Rights.

An important aspect of the AMIF is also to support civil society organisations who work at grass-roots level in the areas of integration, since these entities are in direct contact with the main target groups.

The success of the AMIF is undoubtedly based on the contribution of the different Ministries and NGOs highlighting measures to address Malta’s objectives in this regard. Calls for project proposals, in particular those dedicated to Civil Society are expected to be launched in the coming months

and the Responsible Authority (RA) for AMIF is offering all the needed support to prospective beneficiaries who wish to benefit from AMIF funding. The RA can be reached via fpd.meaim@gov.mt



The JHA Council at Mid-Term Malta EU Presidency

For Malta, as the EUMS presently heading the EU Council Presidency, the last JHA Council Meeting held on 27th March 2017, and the one which will be held in June at the end of the Malta EU Presidency have been and will be the most important as they highlighted the taking over from the previous EU Czech Presidency, the submission of the report of the state-of-play of ongoing issues and a final handing-over to the next EU MS heading the EU Presidency, that is Estonia.

The JHA Council Meeting has been focusing on various salient issues, especially within the irregular migration sphere. A focal point has been the ongoing reform of the Common European Asylum System & Resettlement, the changes to the Dublin, the volatile issue of reception conditions, the qualification of a Third Country National as beneficiary of International Protection for a uniform status for refugees or persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and the proposal for regulation of the EU Parliament and EU Council to establish a common procedure for International Protection repealing the previous directive (EU)2013/32.

Further proposals for regulation of the EU Parliament and EU Council encompass the EURODAC where apart

from the comparison of fingerprints for effective application as per regulation (EU) No.604/2013 this is being enhanced with requests for the comparison with EURODAC data by EUMS law enforcement authorities and EUROPOL, for law enforcement purposes. Another proposal focused on the repealing of EU Regulation 439/2010, while the resettlement framework highlighted the proposal for ETIAS (European Travel Information Authorization System). Another proposal for a regulation from the European Parliament and the EU Council regarded the establishing of an EES (Entry/Exit System), the importance of which will be, the refusal of entry data of TCNs crossing the external borders of member states of the EU, determining conditions for access to the EES, for law enforcement purposes, automatically amending previous existing regulations.

As regards the non-legislative activities, the focus is on the migration policy implementation, on enhancing the effectiveness of a return policy, the issue of the European Border and Coast Guard and its implementation, information given by Austrian delegation about the February conference 'Managing migration challenges together', a follow up to the EU-Internet Forum held in December 2016 and data retention regulation.

The usual press questions prior the start of the JHA Council focused on 2 different issues, being IT and Security and Migration and Relocation.

The outcomes of the JHA Council Meeting, were explained by Hon. Min. Carmelo Abela during a press conference where he stated that, special focus was put on the implementation of the Malta Declaration. He stated that the implementation plan is about building capacity for the Libyan Coast Guard, about improving conditions for migrants in the centres and helping those who wish to return to their countries to do so, through assisted voluntary return. He further stated that further focus was put on the fighting of criminal gangs, the taking of a regional approach to avoid routes shifting and supporting regional cooperation. Hon. Min. Abela confirmed that there is still much to be done on relocation, and it is important to coordinate and assure that as much as possible is done in time, emphasizing on the need of a more effective return policy, bearing in mind that one has to act at EU level with close coordination between all.

