



Viewpoint

9th report on relocation and resettlement: Mystification and selective use of data in effort to present a dysfunctional approach as “sustainable”

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On 8 February 2017, the Commission produced its [ninth report on relocation and resettlement](#), covering a two-month period from 8 December 2016 to 7 February 2017. It basically offers an update on the figures and developments from the previous report, noting the resettlement of 13,968 people overall under the scheme and 3,813 relocations in the reporting period, viewed as maintaining “the overall positive trend” with December recording the record figure to date (1,926) and bringing the total to 11,966, up from 8,162. Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos noted “progress” on both schemes although the challenge requires that “more needs to be done, and faster”, calling on member states to show “political will, commitment and perseverance”. As for the 8th [previous report](#), isolating these two aspects enables the portrayal of a situation which is improving while turning attention away from its systemic effects in the frontline states and this approach’s limits in terms of rationality and sustainability.

Much ado about nothing

Among other issues, these limits result from the low commitments by member states, in numerical terms, for resettling and relocating people which, even if they were achieved (and they are not, as result of foot-dragging and a lack of political will), would not substantially alter the situation. Taking in 13,986 people registered as refugees from countries in the region of origin [Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon] since June 2015, out of a total commitment of 22,504 does mean achieving the resettlement of “more than half of the agreed number”, a fact the Commission’s report stresses. The millions of refugees present in the three countries suggests the impact of these measures will not make much of a difference, particularly as some of them are carried out within the framework of the 1:1 scheme laid out in the EU/Turkey Statement which envisages resettlements from Turkey in exchange for deportations from the Greek island hotspots. As with the previous report, the potential impact of the relocations enacted is revealed to be inconsequential by comparing them with the numbers of people who are arriving. In the eight report, the respective figures were 1,406 relocations in a month when 11,278 people arrived; in this one, there were 3,813 relocations in two months (as of 5 December) when there were 19,487 arrivals to Greece (3,873) and Italy (15,614). This is a major problem in the official narrative, as it only considers people whose nationalities make them potential relocation candidates, while assuming that all the others will be tracked down, detained and deported, in application of the Commission’s damaging plans to “restore credibility to the EU’s returns policy”. The impact of what the two countries will have to do for this to happen are not spelled out, although

strong evidence as to its destructive effects is emerging, particularly from the Italian government's activities in this context (see below).

This is why the painstaking detail contained in these documents is remarkable, at the same time as it shows signs of mystification and selective (or self-serving) use of data. In fact, for the second successive report, official figures are provided on the overall number of migrants in Greece on 7 February, "stable" at 62,600 (15,000 on the islands, 47,600 on the mainland), while the detail included for Italy is "15,614 people have arrived since 5 December 2016" 3.6% of whom are Eritreans, the main nationality of potential relocation candidates. There are two simple reasons for this: the first one is that an archipelago of reception, detention, hotspot and processing centres have been set up using a myriad acronyms which reflect the formal definition of their status, which makes obtaining reliable figures harder; the second and most significant one is that it would foreground the system's underlying irrationality. This is glaringly obvious from the numbers of people present in the Italian reception centre and facilities network (see below).

The eighth report set a target of 3,000 relocations per month, defying reason to argue that it would lead to the system's sustainability. The fact that the target has not been met although the monthly figures increased in December 2016 (1,926) before decreasing again in January 2017 (1,682), lead the Commission's report to argue that "the results are mixed", while highlighting "a positive trend overall" although it falls "short of the targets set by the Commission". It singles out Hungary, Austria and Poland for not relocating "anyone", Slovakia for only relocating people "on a very limited basis" and the Czech Republic for not pledging any places for relocations since May 2016 and for not relocating anyone since August 2016. Six countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Finland) are acknowledged as being "on track to meet[ing] their obligations", while Switzerland and Norway are on track to "complete their relocation commitments by March 2017". This situation for the eight countries singled out for their contribution to the scheme amounts to the relocation of 2,774 people, 1,544 from Greece and 1,230 from Italy. **The point is that the very limited targets for relocations are not being met, and it would make very little difference to the situation in Greece and Italy if they were met.**

A number of elements, some of which are included in the report justify this observation.

1) 28,129 minors arrived in Italy in 2016, 25,772 of whom were unaccompanied, and 4,431 were from nationalities eligible for relocation (3,806 from Eritrea, 218 from Syria, 394 from Iraq and 13 from Yemen) – at the time of the report, **only one separated child had been relocated**, to the Netherlands. Of the 2,200 unaccompanied minors estimated to be present in Greece on 27 January 2017, of whom 1,225 were identified during pre-registration activities, and 588 of whom belong to nationalities for which relocations are applicable (Syrian and Iraqi), 248 have been relocated, 74 of them during the reporting period.

2) At the end of December 2016, the overall presences in temporary reception centres (CAS), the SPRAR network and first reception centres were respectively 137,218, 23,822 and 14,694, providing a grand total of 175,734. This figure excludes large numbers of so-called "irregular migrants", non-asylum applicants, people who are sleeping rough all around Italy or working illegally and suffering abuses, particularly in the fields of southern Italy. This is only a tiny fraction of the people who have arrived in Italy, but the Commission feels that it is reasonable to disregard them as they will be dealt with by taking action in the field of returns. Suggesting that relocating 1,000 people from Italy to other EU member states every month (a goal which has never been achieved to date) would make a difference, is at best disingenuous. These figures are not included in the part of the report which focuses on the achievements of the relocation process and the actions required to improve it, yet the figure of 181,346 arrivals in 2016 is used to justify plans for a large expansion in the network of hotspots in the region of arrival. There are currently four fully-fledged hotspots in Pozzallo, Lampedusa, Trapani and Taranto with a capacity of 1,600 places, but standard operative procedures designed for use in hotspots are being applied in six further ports, and the interior minister designated 15 ports in which this should be the case in December 2016.

3) Probably the most significant issue when it comes to uncovering the deceitful nature of the hotspot approach and relocations as undermining Greece and Italy's ability to deal with mixed flows of people arriving at their borders, rather than assisting them as the Commission claims, is their relationship to the Dublin transfers system. Transfers to Greece have been suspended since 2011, yet the Commission is eager to resume them and a Recommendation on 8 December 2016 [1] tentatively suggested that they should be resumed on 15 March 2017, in a clear example of bad faith which confirms that relocations were not an attempt to share the burden or offer solidarity. To confirm this, in the years 2015 and 2016, a comparison of the figures on relocations from and Dublin transfers to Italy shows that there were 5,049 Dublin transfers and 3,936 relocations. To spell it out, more people have been returned to Italy than have been relocated from Italy.

4) Moreover, the figures on arrivals, both in the reporting period for the eighth and for the ninth reports on relocations and resettlement, clearly show the system's unsustainability: there were 1,406 relocations in a month when 11,278 people arrived (8th report) and 3,813 relocations in two months when 19,487 people arrived (9th report). This is particularly true in view of the institutional efforts to ensure that all the people who arrive are either trapped in Italy and Greece or perpetually attached to them in application of the Dublin III Regulation system. Providing "assistance" to the two countries would require scrapping this system to share the burden, a change the two countries have been periodically proposing since its inception. Instead, the focus is on helping them perfect the system which places them in an untenable situation, regardless of the enormous efforts (periodically praised and even described as "Herculean" by Commissioner Avramopoulos) they are making in expanding their network of reception facilities.

Immigration policy is being used by the Commission as a wrecking ball to dismantle the rule of law while promoting institutional discrimination and violence

The obvious absence of the hundreds of thousands of what the Commission terms "irregular" migrants who are in fact men, women and children who are systematically denied any rights and made to live in destitution because they should not be in Europe, will be remedied by "restoring the credibility of the EU's returns policy". Italy has adopted some steps in this direction. They include the new interior minister, Marco Minniti, announcing an expansion of its network of detention centres, which had been scaled down due to its ineffectiveness, costs and the human rights violations it entailed.

The police chief, Gabrielli, issued instructions to "give maximum impulse to the activity to track down third country nationals in an irregular situation" [2] in December 2016 which herald a season of large-scale ethnic profiling by police forces across the country. Most tellingly, direct instructions to police headquarters across the country were issued on 26 January 2017 to target Nigerians for whom 95 places had been made available in detention centres, as interviews with the Nigerian consulate and a charter flight for late February 2017 had already been scheduled [3].

Sources

Dublin figures:

<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy/asylum-procedure/procedures/Dublin>

Figures for people in reception centres and facilities:

<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy/overview-main-changes-previous-report-update>

¹ [Commission Recommendation: 8.12.16](#) (pdf)

² <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2017/jan/italy-cies-circular.pdf>

³ <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2017/feb/italy-nigeria.htm>

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