



**ON BEING  
MOVED**

REFUGEE PERCEPTIONS OF  
BEING RELOCATED TO MALTA

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The analysis and recommendations are the work of JRS Malta, aditus foundation and Integra Foundation and, unless otherwise stated, the views expressed in the publication are their own.

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## NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

For the purposes of this report, the term 'refugee' is used to include asylum-seekers as well as beneficiaries of all forms of international protection regulated by European Union (EU) and Maltese law.

Where required to only refer to one category of persons (either asylum-seekers, persons recognised as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection), the context or use of specific terms shall clearly indicate this intention.

## INTRODUCTORY WORDS

Our approach to responsibility-sharing within the European Union is firmly grounded in the value of human dignity. This means that any procedure, model or methodology adopted by Member States to distribute their asylum responsibilities in a fairer manner must be refugee-centric and not limited to protecting only Member States' interests, or the European Union's broader interests. This means that refugees' needs should be taken into account at all stages of the process, and their active involvement and participation ensured.

*Katrine Camilleri, Jesuit Refugee Service Malta Director.*

We are convinced that establishing a process based on true inclusivity of its beneficiaries will not only be more humane and in conformity with the European Union's human rights obligations, but it will also foster trust amongst all stakeholders, thereby guaranteeing more efficiency and effectiveness.

*Neil Falzon, aditus foundation Director.*

Refugees are not just a statistic. Each individual is unique, with particular and multifaceted needs and experiences. Relocating to a new country marks another stage in a long and arduous journey marked by uncertainty and insecurity. A person-centred approach, grounded in tailor-made support, will go a long way in providing beneficiaries with security, and some semblance of stability so that they may reclaim their future.

*Maria Pisani, Integra Foundation Director*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A REPORT ON THE RELOCATION EXERCISE:  
WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO AND WHY **6**

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY **7**

RELOCATING ASYLUM-SEEKERS **12**

RELOCATING TO MALTA: KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS **23**

TRUST **29**

DIGNITY **37**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS **53**

## A REPORT ON THE RELOCATION EXERCISE: WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO AND WHY

In our work, we are constantly seeking to engage actively with refugees to better understand their stories to document their experiences. We do this in order for us to provide more effective and relevant services, and to formulate advocacy recommendations that are truly evidence-based and responsive to actual needs and rights<sup>1</sup>.

Malta's 2017 participation in the European Union relocation scheme presented us with one of the first experiments at intra-EU relocation. Through this scheme, a number of asylum-seekers were relocated to Malta from Italy or Greece, as an expression of solidarity with these two Member States and an attempt to bolster efforts at solidarity in the field of asylum. We knew that the relocated asylum-seekers would be persons who, having spent a number of months or years living in difficult conditions, were offered the opportunity to travel to Malta as part of a regulated and structured process. We noted that, although they would be channelled through Malta's 'regular' reception and asylum systems, they would nonetheless be experiencing these systems from a perspective different to that experienced by asylum-seekers reaching Malta through other means. Also, from an institutional perspective, this would be Malta's first-time participation in a scheme as a receiving, and not sending, Member State.

The EU relocation exercise attempted to address the unequal distribution of asylum seekers among EU countries, which in many ways is a consequence of EU and national laws and policies regulating asylum and migration. States' exclusive focus on the protection of national interests has led to a drive to contain refugees at the EU's external borders or its periphery, and to a lack of willingness to truly protect refugees and respect their fundamental human rights. This being said, it is also true that in the past couple of years there have been some positive steps forward, such as an increase in integration initiatives at local level in various EU countries and some efforts to increase legal pathways for protection. However, unfortunately, these initiatives are often fragmented and, in our view, fall short of a concrete expression of genuine solidarity towards refugees and a commitment to offer them meaningful and effective protection as a Union. Possibly more worrying, we are seeing a resistance to assume responsibility for the care and well-being of asylum seekers, which has led to the lowering of protection standards, particularly in those areas where Member States have struggled to cope with large arrivals of refugees (see for example Squire et al, 2017).

Whilst we appreciate that the relocation exercise was an attempt to instil a measure of solidarity in the Common European Asylum System, we feel that a review of its operations and impact needs to be undertaken so as to ensure that future similar exercise are truly expressive of this solidarity and respect for the fundamental rights of refugees. This report seeks to contribute to this potential assessment by gathering and presenting a sample of the beneficiaries' views, as with the above-mentioned Dari? report. We believe that the beneficiaries' perspective of the impact of the relocation programme on their lives is a fundamental component of a comprehensive assessment of this programme and hope that this report, in conjunction and juxtaposition with the analyses of other entities and stakeholders involved in the relocation process, can serve to inform a national and EU-wide discussion on responsibility-sharing, with a view to ensuring a discussion and result that are rights-based, humane and effective.

<sup>1</sup> See for example our research into the integration potential and challenges of refugees: aditus foundation, Integra Foundation and JRS Malta, *Dari? Refugee Voices on Making Malta Home*, December 2016, available at <http://aditus.org.mt/Publications/dari.pdf>.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Aims

The aim of this research project was to investigate the beneficiaries' first-hand experiences of the relocation scheme from the initial choice to participate up to the process of settling in Malta, so as to evaluate the programme's overall impact on the personal lives of beneficiaries, as perceived by the research participants.

We strongly believe that a comprehensive evaluation of implementation of the EU relocation scheme is not possible without considering this lived experience. We therefore wanted to bring to the fore the beneficiaries' views and opinions of how the scheme they voluntarily participated in worked out for them.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The research adopts a qualitative methodology that attempts to give voice to the research participants. Rather than attempting to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the process, or to convey an 'objective reality', the emphasis is on gaining some insights and understanding of how the participants perceived and made sense of their own experience, and to make their world 'visible' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews as the data collection tool were considered best suited to achieve the research aims. An interview schedule covering various topics – experience of life in Italy/Greece, information received about relocation programme and factors influencing choice to participate, life in the IRC and open centres, experience of the asylum process and degree of integration in Malta – was designed with the objective of eliciting a global picture of the relocation experience. The semi-structured interviews provided space for the research participants to elaborate on topics and issues considered important to them, and for the researchers to follow and build on participants' indications of what was most pertinent to their experiences.

Interviews were conducted at open centres or participant organisations' offices, according to what best suited participants' life demands. To ensure the validity of the data collected, where participants were not fluent in English, interpreters were provided in the participant's first language. Consent and data protection forms were explained and signed at the beginning of each interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, if consent to record was given, or otherwise recorded manually. In line with data protection principles, access to the data collected was restricted to research personnel and was stored in password protected locations.

Data was analysed by identifying patterns within answers across interviews so as to extract themes that capture the essence of the participants' experiences of being relocated to Malta. In outlining the themes to the reader, primacy was given to participant direct quotes so as to make their voices visible within the interpretation of the data collected.

## Meeting with EASO Executive Director

As part of our research, representatives of aditus foundation, Integra Foundation and JRS Malta also met with EASO's Executive Director in April 2017. The aim of the meeting was to discuss logistical aspects of the relocation scheme, particularly those relating to provision of information.

As a follow-up to the meeting, EASO was asked to provide the Malta Fact Sheet used by EASO in the relocation process, in order to better understand the details shared with applicants within the scheme. EASO's response is provided below:

*“Please note that info on the countries of relocation is provided by the countries themselves, and in some cases, with the support of IOM. EASO together with the Commission is supporting Member States to develop pre-departure information.*

*Currently some Member States have such information packages/leaflets used by Liaison officers on the ground in Italy and Greece. However, such information varies in scope and detail and in many cases contains general information on the Member State of relocation, its asylum procedure and other aspects relating to stay in the country.*

*EASO is tasked to provide information aimed at explaining and promoting the relocation programme and countering the narrative disseminated by smugglers and human traffickers.*

*In this regard, EASO leaflets – which were made available to asylum-seekers, asylum and reception officials and EASO staff on the ground, in different languages so as to reach out to asylum-seekers from eligible nationalities – are publicly available on EASO website (see EN version here) <https://www.easo.europa.eu/operational-support/hotspot-relocation>.*

*We would kindly suggest you to contact the Maltese Relocation contact point at Maltese Ministry of Home Affairs, Mr Julian Micallef ( [julian.r.micallef@gov.mt](mailto:julian.r.micallef@gov.mt)) about the specific leaflet on Malta.”*

## Research Sample

All potential participants were identified from refugees visiting or benefitting from the services offered by the three partner NGOs, JRS Malta, aditus foundation and Integra Foundation. This meant that all had existing experiences and relationships as service-users with one or more of the collaborating organizations. All potential candidates were listed in a database and contacted directly, usually by phone, by a representative of one of the organizations or an interpreter where required.

Of the 110 individuals who were relocated to Malta in 2016, 16 individuals were interviewed. These 16 participants hailed from the three nationalities that were relocated to Malta: Syrian, Eritrean and Iraqi. The two sending Member States – Italy and Greece – were both represented in terms of composition of the sample. Further details of the research sample are provided below.

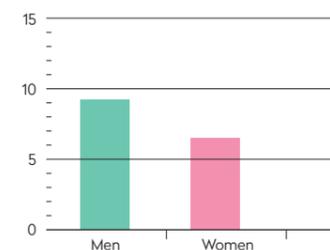


Table 1: Gender

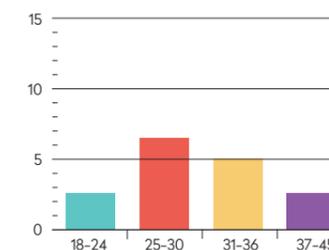


Table 2: Age

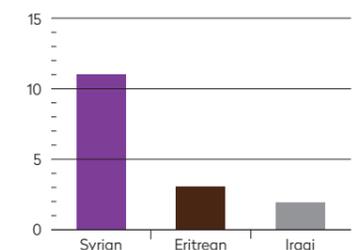


Table 3: Nationality

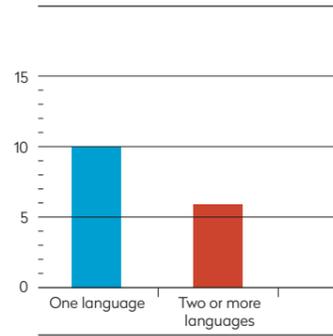


Table 4: Number of Languages Spoken

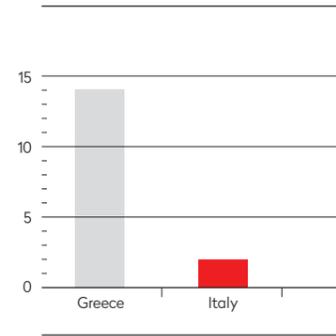


Table 5: Relocated from

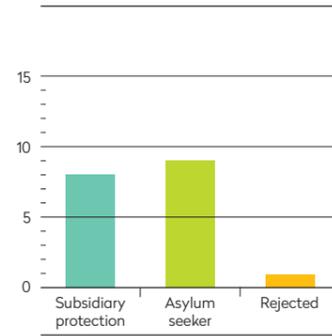


Table 6: Legal status

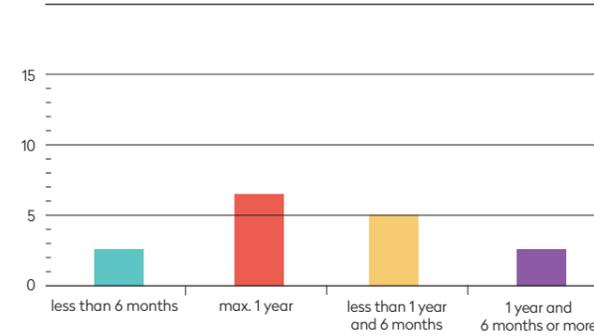


Table 10: Duration of Stay in Greece/Italy

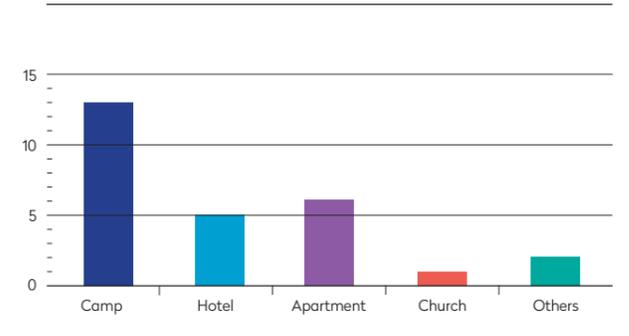


Table 11: Type of Accommodation in Greece/Italy

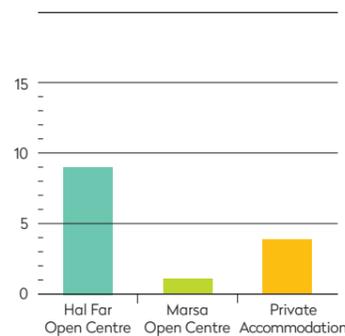


Table 7: Living arrangements

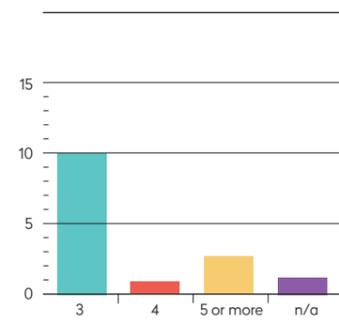


Table 8: Number of Movements from Country of Origin to Malta

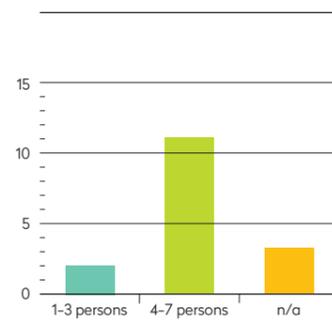


Table 9: Persons per Household

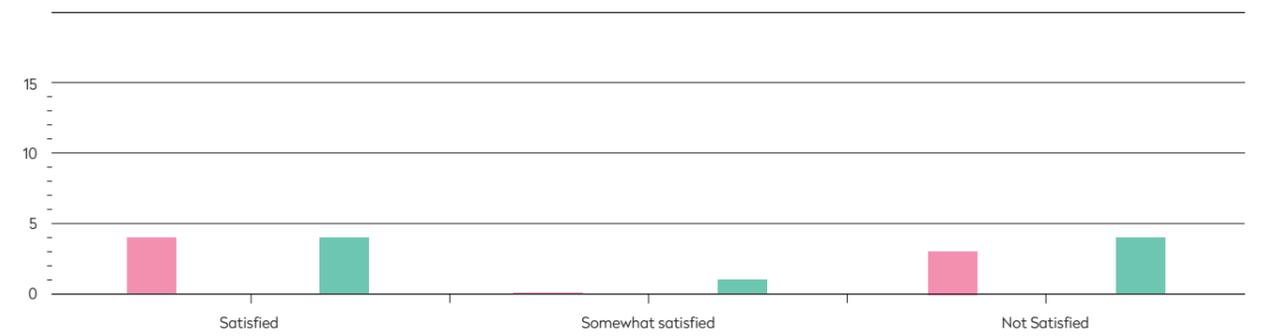


Table 12: Level of Satisfaction with Life in Greece/Italy

Women  
Men

# RELOCATING ASYLUM-SEEKERS

## The European Union's relocation scheme

Relocation is the transfer of asylum-seekers who are in clear need of international protection from one EU Member State to another Member State, where their asylum application will be examined.

In September 2015, the Council of the European Union adopted two EU Decisions<sup>2</sup> establishing a temporary emergency relocation scheme through which Member States committed to relocate 160,000 people from Italy and Greece, Member States experiencing high migratory pressure, by September 2017. According to the Decisions, asylum-seekers eligible for the EU Relocation scheme are those coming from countries for which the quarterly EU-wide average recognition rate is more than 75 percent. This means that the majority of beneficiaries have always been persons from Syria, with Eritreans and Iraqis as the second and third largest groups.

Applicants cannot choose which country to be relocated to, but criteria such as language skills, family, cultural and social ties are taken into account in order to decide which Member State beneficiaries (of the scheme) should be relocated to. Furthermore, the European Asylum-Support Office (EASO) confirms that:

*“Yes, vulnerable persons are given priority in the relocation process and the best interest of the child will be a primary consideration for the authorities.*

*Vulnerable persons include in particular: minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illness, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as victims of female genital mutilation.”<sup>3</sup>*

The relocation is implemented by Italian and Greek authorities under the coordination of the European Commission, with operational and procedural support of the EASO and with additional support from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for pre-departure, transfer and logistical activities. Each Member State appointed Liaison Officers to facilitate the process, including Malta.

The EU relocation scheme ended on 26 September 2017, but asylum-seekers who arrived in Greece or Italy and were fingerprinted by this date can still register for relocation under the scheme, if eligible. Persons from the following countries of origin are eligible as of 1 July 2017: Eritrea, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bhutan, Qatar, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The relocation Decisions state that for each asylum-seeker relocated from Greece or Italy, the receiving Member State is granted the sum of €6,000. As of 31 December 2017, 33,154 persons have benefitted from relocation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece; and Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece.

<sup>3</sup> EASO, Questions and Answers on Relocation, available at <https://www.easo.europa.eu/operational-support/hotspot-relocation/relocation/questions-and-answers-relocation>.

<sup>4</sup> Information retrieved from <http://eea.iom.int/index.php/what-we-do/eu-relocation>.

In May 2016, the European Commission proposed a reform of the Dublin Regulation, which is to include a permanent relocation mechanism. This is still being negotiated and, if adopted, its 'fairness mechanism' would automatically be triggered when a Member State is handling a disproportionate number of asylum applications. This assessment would be based on various factors, including the Member State's size and wealth, and all further applications for asylum in that Member State would be redistributed across the EU.

## Roles and Responsibilities

The relocation scheme was implemented through the activities of several actors, in all cases with the governments of Italy and Greece and the governments of the receiving Member States. In order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the roles played by these various institutions in the relocation to Malta, queries were sent to UNHCR, IOM, EASO and the Malta Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security.

The replies are provided below.

### Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security (MHAS)

Together with the replies provided below, MHAS shared a document included with this report as Appendix I – Q&A Relocation Information (2016). We were also informed that information was provided to IOM for the cultural orientation session the Organisation conducted in Greece.

#### 1. What information did Malta receive in relation to each of the individuals to be relocated to here? (E.g. biodata, health status, vulnerability assessments, etc.)

Information from the Member States included general details on the individual, family relations, languages spoken and medical issues noted at the time of the registration (the level of detail varied, even between the two Member States, however it gave an indication of the situation at the time when it was gathered). A more detailed medical assessment was made available, particularly from Greece where IOM was conducting additional medical checks prior to departure. This would be shared with the health authorities once the persons arrive, with the use of CDs and such in envelopes that were handed over to our health authorities.

#### 2. What criteria did Malta use in order to select with individuals to accept/reject for the relocation exercise?

No particular criteria was communicated from our end. As requested by the European Commission and EASO we supplied regular updates on our capacity levels so as to make sure that we could accommodate the cases that were to be transferred, particularly for those for whom we have specific accommodation centres. The only issue on which Malta would refuse was based on security considerations.

#### 3. How far in advance of an individual's arrival to Malta was the Government informed of travel details?

This was not always the same. The relocation exercise spanned a considerable period of time, however as a practice I would discuss the date of arrival with counterparts in the respective Member States as well as local stakeholders to ensure that the transfer could be successfully conducted.

#### 4. What is the degree of relevance of information and documentation sent to Government in relation to specific individuals, particularly in relation to specific needs and to the asylum procedure?

The information on health was often descriptive, however also limited. One could also note that the transferring Member States were working differently and them being under pressure, one could appreciate certain aspects. I mention a few cases:

- a case referred to us was indicated to have limited mobility needs. Further detailed information as to the actual nature of the difficulties could not be made available until the fit-to-travel test, which is very close to the actual departure date. Preparations had at any rate started being done both in relation to arrival and accommodation to prepare for a person who might be restricted to a wheelchair. On arrival, however, we noticed the mobility issues were not as severe, in fact the person did not require a wheelchair at all.
- a note filed by an organisation based in one of the Member States indicated that a case had a particular disorder, and making a strong case for the person to be treated for it. Preparations were made with the relevant local institution to care for the person following arrival, as fortunately we had a centre specifically catering for such cases – which is not always the situation due to our limited capacity. However, on further inspection of some results that were shared with the medical authorities we were getting an indication that the underlying health situation was something different to the original assessment. In the end, we never heard again about the case.

With regard to the asylum procedure, the information shared was not intended for such a process. As per the relevant Council Decisions and the regular updates, the most important element in this respect was that the persons referred were of an eligible nationality. The persons relocated were asylum-seekers, and it was always clear to all parties that the asylum procedure would then be conducted in the accepting country.

## EASO

EASO's founding regulation (Regulation (EU) no. 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010) gives the Office the mandate to support Member States, which are faced with specific and disproportionate pressures on their asylum and reception systems, with activities related to relocation of international protection applicants within the European Union.

In particular, EASO *“shall promote, facilitate and coordinate exchanges of information and other activities related to relocation within the Union” and “should support the development of solidarity within the Union to promote a better relocation of beneficiaries of international protection between Member States, while ensuring that asylum and reception systems are not abused”.*

The 2015 crisis situation in the Mediterranean prompted the EU Institutions to call for concrete measures of solidarity towards the frontline Member States, including an emergency relocation mechanism. In this context, EASO has been tasked to support the implementation of the EU Emergency Relocation scheme and was asked to deploy Asylum Support Teams in Italy and Greece to support all the key stages of relocation, including information provision, registration and fingerprinting.

Following the adoption of the two above-mentioned Council Decisions, establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, an emergency relocation scheme to assist Italy and Greece was set up <sup>5</sup>. EASO has played a crucial role in the implementation of the emergency Relocation scheme, in Italy and Greece.

Overall, EASO's role included:

- Deploying and coordinating Special Support Teams and Asylum Support Teams, composed of Member States experts, to Italy and Greece;
- Facilitating direct cooperation and exchange of information between National Contact Points (NCPs) of the Member States of Relocation and Italy and Greece;
- Monitoring of the overall relocation process;
- Developing tools in support of specific steps in the relocation procedure and particularly in the information provision and the vulnerability assessment;
- Implementing a Relocation communication package, targeted at potential relocation applicants, including information leaflets and other information tools in non-EU languages, mobile app, videos to explain and promote relocation.

In order to perform the above activities, EASO has scaled up its operational presence, by deploying EASO statutory and interim staff, experts from EU Member States and interpreters/cultural mediators in Italy and Greece. EASO has also contributed to the opening and proper running of the hotspots by providing the necessary logistic, infrastructural and IT support and technical equipment.

EASO supported Greece in the context of the hotspots and relocation, by performing: identification of potential applicants for international protection and active information provision about the international protection system in Greece and the relocation procedure in general; in addition, advice on nationality assessment and possible exclusion issues to caseworkers registering relocation candidates; detection of possible document fraud.

More specifically, concerning the implementation of the Relocation programme in Greece, EASO has supported the national authorities on the Greek mainland with the provision of information to potential relocation candidates, the referral to the Greek Asylum Service and registration of applications for international protection. To enhance the programme's effectiveness, two dedicated hotlines have been established (thousands of calls received), an Escalation Desk for quality review and hands-on advice has been opened in Athens and Thessaloniki <sup>6</sup> and a relocation matching tool has been developed.

EASO became increasingly mobile through the introduction of mobile teams able to provide information on asylum procedures in more than 30 reception sites throughout mainland Greece.

<sup>5</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece, and Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece.

<sup>6</sup> After the EU-Turkey Statement was agreed, on 18 March 2016, relocation from Greece was taking place only from the Greek mainland while, EASO teams in the Greek hotspots (Lesvos, Samos, Leros, Chios and Kos) were working on the operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, supporting the Greek Asylum Service with regard to the Greek eligibility and admissibility procedures.

Overall, with various means, EASO supported Greece in pre-registering over 27,000 applicants and in transferring around 22,000 applicants from Greece to other Member States and EU+ Countries.

EASO provided operational support to Italy in the context of relocation in the following three main areas: provision of relevant information to potential applicants for relocation of eligible nationalities; handling registrations of applicants for international protection, in view of the relocation procedure, in regional hubs; handling outgoing Dublin 'take charge' requests for relocation cases.

More specifically, EASO experts have been providing information in the hotspots (Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Taranto, Trapani and Messina); information provision by mobile teams; registration in registration hubs (outside hotspot areas); registration by roving team; Dublin support in Dublin Unit.

Due to multiple points of disembarkation, EASO presence was scattered all over the Italian Peninsula and its deployment of experts to specific locations was organised in a flexible manner and in order to better cover the needs communicated by the Italian authorities (for example, the roving registration team, deployed for short periods to different locations to register eligible applicants and build the capacity of local stakeholders, has covered to date 45 locations).

Overall, EASO supported Italy in relocating more than 12,700 applicants from Greece to other Member States and EU+ Countries.

## UNHCR

**UNHCR's involvement and role in the relocation process from Greece may be summarised as follows:**

- UNHCR's support of the pre-registration exercise of asylum-seekers (including relocation candidates) in the summer of 2016;
- UNHCR's support of the full registration of the persons who were pre-registered (including relocation candidates) by providing transportation from the various sites to the respective asylum offices where asylum-seekers had their full registration appointments;
- UNHCR provided transportation to relocation candidates who needed to present themselves to the Asylum Service to be notified of their relocation decision;
- Implementation of an accommodation scheme, which in 2016 focused on relocation candidates. In 2017 UNHCR's accommodation scheme focused on vulnerable Persons of Concern<sup>7</sup>. Thus, relocation candidates were provided with accommodation after they had been notified of their relocation decision – unless they would have been referred to UNHCR's accommodation scheme as vulnerable cases – if they lived outside Attica, in order for the next steps of the relocation process (IOM health checks, interviews with the embassies, pre-departure counselling, transfer) to be facilitated;
- UNHCR field teams were providing general information on the relocation process (e.g. covering issues such as 'what is relocation?', eligibility criteria, procedure to be followed, etc.) to asylum-seekers.

<sup>7</sup> 'Persons of Concern' is the term used by UNHCR to refer to the persons falling within its mandate. In this case, it refers to asylum-seekers and refugees.

UNHCR did not provide any country specific information.

For the relocation from Italy, UNHCR's involvement and role may be summarised as follows:

- Provision of information on access to the relocation scheme at disembarkation and at the Hotspot facilities. This information was mainly on how to access the procedure, e.g. timeframe, documents required and steps to apply to the scheme. ;
- Provision of training on relocation to personnel at Immigration Offices, Prefectures and reception centres;
- Identification and follow-up of individual cases to ensure access to the scheme;
- Coordination meetings with various actors including EASO, the European Commission, IOM, the Dublin Unit as well as other governmental officials;
- Finalisation of a video on the relocation scheme to be distributed at reception centres across Italy.

**In Malta, UNHCR's activities included:**

- Visits to all the groups of relocated individuals coming from Greece and Italy as soon as they arrived (after a few days) at the Initial Reception Centre. During these visits, UNHCR provided information on the situation in Malta, access to rights, the asylum process, and answered questions posed by the asylum-seekers. These sessions were always held with interpreters;
- On the basis of the asylum-seekers' feedback, where they expressed that they had received inaccurate information (in Greece and Italy), UNHCR raised these concerns with IOM, since IOM was part of the info-provision team;
- Follow-up visits according to UNHCR's weekly visits to open centres;
- Appropriate referrals to AWAS and other stakeholders, as appropriate;
- Since the start of the relocation process, UNHCR continued its advocacy against the detention of the asylum-seekers at IRC, with the positive outcome in September 2017 whereby the IRC did not remain a closed centre.

## IOM

IOM provided the following information regarding their activities in the relocation scheme. It highlighted that on the website of IOM's Regional Office for the EEA, EU and NATO, information may be found on the overall EU Relocation Programme, explaining the procedure and IOM's role<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, IOM referred to the information sheet that is updated on a monthly basis, providing statistics and a more detailed explanation of the activities IOM engaged in during pre-departure activities<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://eea.iom.int/index.php/what-we-do/eu-relocation>.

<sup>9</sup> IOM provided the April 2018 Info Sheet for easy reference and accessibility, at [http://eea.iom.int/images/Download/Relocation\\_Info\\_Sheet\\_April\\_2018.pdf](http://eea.iom.int/images/Download/Relocation_Info_Sheet_April_2018.pdf).

Specifically in the case of Malta, IOM assisted with the relocation of 67 asylum-seekers from Italy and 101 asylum seekers from Greece, to a total of 168 persons, including one unaccompanied migrant child (UMC). Prior to departure, the sending IOM Missions carried out pre-departure health assessments and pre-departure orientation sessions, together with movement management assistance. Upon arrival IOM provided arrival assistance at the disembarkation airport in Malta. IOM provided dedicated support for UMCs, including escort services, as was the case with the one UMC relocated to Malta. IOM underlined that these pre-departure activities are crucial for the set-up of a well-coordinated scheme whereby beneficiaries as well as Member State representatives are well-informed.

IOM considers linking the pre-departure and post-arrival phases as key for sustainable integration of the beneficiaries of relocation. In fact, IOM has the capacity to provide assistance in the post-arrival stage, including through integration assistance, upon the request by a Member State. While IOM's assistance with integration measures was not requested in Malta, we recommend that in future relocation initiatives, post-arrival integration measures are considered, as part of a wider scope which includes end-to-end continuity of care.

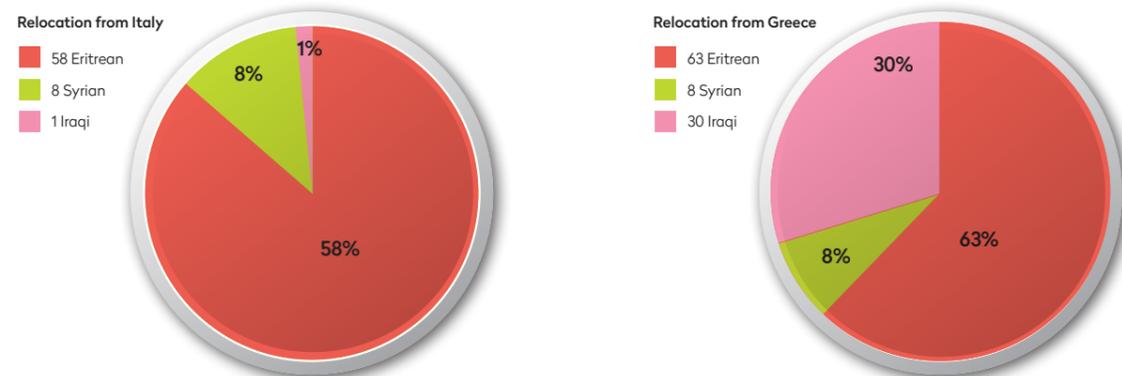
IOM also referred to its general recommendations on EU Relocation, as seen in the comments by IOM's Director General William Lacy Swing <sup>10</sup>.

## Relocation to Malta, 2015 – 2017

According to Malta's legal commitment as foreseen in the Council Decisions, 131 <sup>11</sup> applicants for international protection were supposed to be relocated from Italy and Greece over two years <sup>12</sup>. The Third Country Nationals Unit within the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security (MHAS) was appointed as Liaison Office for the relocation.

As of 31 December 2017, 168 asylum-seekers were relocated to Malta: 67 from Italy and 101 from Greece <sup>13</sup>.

Breakdown per country of origin<sup>14</sup>



<sup>10</sup> These are available at <https://www.iom.int/news/un-migration-director-general-calls-continuity-full-participation-eu-relocation-programme>.

<sup>11</sup> Information retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302\\_tenth\\_report\\_on\\_relocation\\_and\\_resettlement\\_annex\\_3\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302_tenth_report_on_relocation_and_resettlement_annex_3_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> However, this number does not include the allocations under the Council Decision to relocate 54,000 applicants.

<sup>13</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20171114\\_annex\\_6\\_relocation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20171114_annex_6_relocation_en.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Information provided by the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security (MHAS), January 2018.

## Arrival <sup>15</sup>

The relocation procedure from the request by Italy or Greece to actual physical transfer took between a few weeks to a couple of months, often depending on different variables such as preparation by the Maltese health authorities, delays in responding by Italy and Greece.

Upon arrival, relocated persons were placed in the Initial Reception Centre (IRC) under the responsibility of the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum-Seekers (AWAS). During their stay in the Centre, they were medically screened in accordance with Malta's national reception policy <sup>16</sup>. We observed that applicants spent two to three days in the IRC awaiting medical clearance, with some applicants spending more than one week. During this time, they received information about the asylum procedure and could lodge their asylum applications. While at the IRC they also received visits from UNHCR, JRS Malta and the Malta Society of the Red Cross.

Initially, persons were not authorised to leave the IRC pending their formal 'release', with the IRC being akin to a form of detention. However, towards September 2016, a decision was taken by Government authorising asylum-seekers being processed at the IRC to leave the premises pending the medical clearance. Following their stay at the IRC, asylum-seekers were offered accommodation in one of Malta's open reception centres.

According to the authorities, no applicants with special needs were relocated to Malta, and only one relocation request was rejected <sup>17</sup>. This information somewhat contradicts our own experiences with the relocated people. During our service-provision activities we noticed a number of persons who manifested different levels of vulnerability – at times in an extremely visible and self-evident manner. Without having access to the information transmitted from Italy and Greece to Malta, it is impossible for us to determine the level of detail of this information, in particular in relation to any identification and vulnerability assessments conducted prior to departing from Italy and Greece.

It is therefore unclear whether Malta's response that "no applicants with special needs were relocated to Malta" is based on the information provided by EASO and/or the Italian or Greek authorities, or on any assessment conducted by responsible authorities upon the applicant's arrival in Malta <sup>18</sup>.

As mentioned above, EASO underlines that vulnerable persons are given priority in the relocation scheme. It is not clear how this vulnerability is identified, assessed and confirmed, which entity conducts these procedures and what is done with the information therein.

<sup>15</sup> Information provided by the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security (MHAS).

<sup>16</sup> Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, *Strategy for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers and Irregular Migrants, 2016*, available at <http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/08-01-2016/malta-new-migration-strategy-ends-automatic-detention-irregular-entrants>.

<sup>17</sup> According to Article 5(7) of the Council Decision. "Member States retain the right to refuse to relocate an applicant only where there are reasonable grounds for regarding him or her as a danger to their national security or public order or where there are serious reasons for applying the exclusion provisions set out in Articles 12 and 17 of Directive 2011/95/EU".

<sup>18</sup> It is important to underline that Malta does not, by default, conduct vulnerability assessments of all asylum-seekers. For more information on this, see the final report published by the Italian Council for Refugees in the project *Time for Needs: Listening, Healing, Protecting*, pages 73-83, September 2017, available at <http://aditus.org.mt/Publications/timeforneedsreport.pdf>.

## Asylum Procedure

Persons who were relocated to Malta went through the regular asylum procedure: following the lodging of their applications for international protection, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner (RefCom) proceeded to schedule their interviews, after which the cases were examined and final decision taken. Applicants wishing to appeal negative decisions were able to access the appeals procedure, as per national law and practice. According to the authorities, the procedures of all the relocated applicants were concluded, on average, within two months. Furthermore, since these cases were not subject to the Visa Information System (VIS), Eurodac or Dublin procedures, they were seen to immediately<sup>19</sup>.

We do not have access to the full list of decisions taken by RefCom on the asylum applications of the relocated persons, yet through our work we have encountered at least two persons whose applications were rejected. One of these applications was rejected on the ground that RefCom concluded the applicant was not Eritrean, despite the fact that the applicant was relocated to Malta primarily on the basis of Eritrean nationality. At the time of writing, the appeal before the Refugee Appeals Board was pending.

As with issues of vulnerability, we are unable to comment on the quality of asylum-related information transmitted from Greece and Italy to Malta. Whilst it is clear that a form of nationality assessment must have been conducted in Greece and Italy – even as a simple basis to assess eligibility to the relocation scheme, it is not known whether this assessment or any other information obtained by EASO or the Greek or Italian authorities was transmitted to the Maltese authorities, specifically (but not limited to) RefCom.



<sup>19</sup> Information provided by the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security (MHAS), January 2017.

## RELOCATING TO MALTA: KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The following text highlights the key themes that emerged from the interview data. The research attempts to explore the participants' experience of the relocation exercise from registration and the selection process through to life in Malta.

It must be emphasised that the relocation exercise does not mark the beginning of the participants' journeys. Rather, it occurs during a point of transition at the EU border, following what many described as a precarious and fragmented journey to reach Europe.

Four key themes (and a number of sub-themes) emerged from the thematic analysis, namely: time, trust, dignity, and securing a future. Whilst the following analysis takes each of these themes in turn, they are not to be understood as independent factors, but rather as intersecting, dynamic, and feeding in to each other within an ongoing process.

### LIVES ON HOLD: TIME

The findings of this research draw attention to the interplay of temporal and spatial factors – or time and space – and how this feeds into a sense of uncertainty and causes significant stress and anxiety. The decision to relocate, and arrival in Malta, marks another phase (and not the end) of a long, often dangerous, protracted and fragmented journey.

Fragmented, protracted journeys

From flight, the participants all described complex journeys, involving protracted periods in transit at various points in the journey, including within the EU. Whilst all of the participants (bar one) arrived in Europe by boat, they described taking different routes depending on country of origin, as well as the information they had received:

*"I went from Syria to Lebanon, then to Turkey and then to Greece. I found out that people were being sent back to Syria from Turkey, there was an agreement between the two countries, so I decided to go on to Greece." (Ahmed)*

Consistent with research findings elsewhere, the participants described fragmented journeys, crossing a number of international borders, and including periods of waiting in transit countries, sometimes to be reunited with other family members:

*"I left Damascus and went to Turkey. I waited there for the rest of the family to join me before traveling on to Greece." (Ibrahim)*

## Waiting in transit

Upon arrival to the EU the participants all describe a lengthy waiting period, stranded at the external border, either in Italy (either the mainland or Sicily) or Greece. The findings suggest that the transit time in Italy was significantly shorter (all less than a year) than in Greece, where the waiting period consistently took more than one year. During this period of waiting, the participants were housed in different forms of accommodation, ranging from tents to caravans, hotels and 'proper houses'. This period of time was generally marked by ongoing disruption and displacement:

*"First, we were in tents in Greece, then we were in a hotel for a week in Lamia, and then we were in another camp on the border with Macedonia." (Ibrahim)*

The period in transit marks a long period of waiting, with lives put on hold for an indeterminate period of time. Despite having access to basic provisions, participants described how the physical and social isolation of waiting in a camp impacted their sense of wellbeing. The following passages illustrate the limits of agency, the sense of having no control as one awaits the decisions of others, and how this fed in to a sense of disempowerment, uncertainty and unpredictability:

*"It was like a prison, I had no sense of the outside world, not even through communication. I was completely lost when I was in Greece, I had no work for a whole year. But the Greek people were friendly and the medical services were very good quality." (Ibrahim)*

*"In Italy I stayed in the camp for 5 months...in a camp, from the cafeteria to the bed, from the bed to the cafeteria. Nothing else..." (Teklu)*

## The relocation process and time

Once they had taken the decision to relocate, many of the participants also described a drawn-out process with what they experienced to be misleading time frames, and information that, in retrospect, they perceived to be distorted and sometimes deceptive:

*"I was told that I would be relocated within a year, some people applied after and left before..." (Ahmed)*

*"I waited one year and 3 months in Greece. They took my details, so I was registered for the program from the very beginning in Greece. After 8 months I was called for an interview for the relocation program. I had an accommodation in Greece. I am not telling you that I suffered a lot from the waiting in Greece, but the others they did. They suffered a lot in the camps." (Mohamed)*

## Arrival in Malta and making use of time

According to the participants, the relocation's early stages were marked with a series of obstacles. The participants' experiences appear to suggest that the receiving agencies were not sufficiently informed and/or prepared for the particular needs of the new arrivals. Outside the relocation scheme, refugees arrived in Malta with no prior notice, and their particular needs would be assessed and addressed during the reception period, which until some years ago meant detention. The relocation exercise presents an alternative narrative wherein the period of waiting prior to arrival in Malta offers the opportunity for case preparation, including assessment of vulnerability and preparation for the asylum process.

The findings suggest that a care plan was not in place prior to arrival in Malta and vulnerabilities related to specific needs were not recognised, and therefore not addressed. Such an individualised approach is necessary, because protection needs are multidimensional and specific to particular individual needs:

*"We came by aeroplane and we had with us our clearance about the health clearance, everybody has his bag, then they took us to a doctor of the airport and he said that it was something not kind... I didn't like this experience there because I have sugar and blood pressure and the doctor was... he wasn't active, quite lazy, just tell me to wait for a long time. And I told them I had a sugar problem and they didn't listen to me and they didn't see clearance... They make another check then they took us to Marsa open centre and it was like a prison. Because of my sugar... I had something like a shock and took maybe 2 or 3 minutes to rise again, from the pressure..." (Elias)*

The respondents gave mixed responses vis-à-vis the level of support available to them. Some participants indicated a high level of support from particular social workers. Overall the data suggests that in the absence of established structures and processes, the level of support the refugees received was contingent on the initiative and quality of care provided by the individuals they encountered working in the system. The findings clearly demonstrate how access to information and support saves on precious time:

*"If you ask for something that they have, they will give it to you. It was also possible to get a social worker, but he was not helpful." (Teklu)*

*"...there was a social worker there who was absolutely fantastic in getting my young daughter into school. She also helped me find my job by presenting me with details of 28 different companies." (Ibrahim)*

Another period of waiting commences during the asylum process. Whilst it would appear that the asylum process can take as little as three months, the majority of participants described a long and drawn out process, marked by a sense of liminality and insecurity, wherein their lives are, once again, quite literally put on hold:

*"It takes too long. I did interview in July (waiting 4 months) and still waiting for results." (Elias)*

*“Is a really long process, I had my second interview five months ago and I haven’t had no answer from them.” (Sami)*

*“Even here the UN visited us and they told us you are here temporary and you will apply and it will take maximum 3 months and you will get your papers and you can find a job and live free here in Malta. They told us lies. I did an interview in July and up to now I haven’t got any feedback.” (Mohamed)*

*“Long and frustrating. After the first interview it took two months to be called for second one. I was then told three months later of the decision and it took a further one or two months for my ID card to arrive. This is five to six months altogether...The interviewer at RefCom was nice and took detailed notes but he had to change the interpreter mid interview as he was making mistakes and some things I said he was not translating.” (Ibrahim)*

Long delays in the asylum process appear to contribute to vulnerability on two counts. The first is in relation to a sense of wellbeing. The asylum process is reported as a source of stress and worry, long waits mean prolonging a period of psychological strain and tension. The waiting, combined with a lack of trust in the system (see below), also appears to negatively impact the integration process:

*“I think there is a big chance that I am rejected. I would like to know at least, so I could move on. I will not be happy even when I get the ID card. After all we had to go through it would be tasteless. They don’t have a humanity.” (Mohamed)*

## **The unseen and time: family reunification**

Family members awaiting reunification are also subject to the temporal structures described above. In the following transcript, the participant describes how his wife had to ‘wait’ as her husband moved from one place to another, in the hope of finding security and a way to reunite. Whilst the participant managed to find employment and secure some kind of security for himself, waiting times and protracted procedures had a particularly adverse effect on his marital relationship. This is further impacted by the fact that, following a 7-month asylum process, he was granted subsidiary protection. Limitations on the rights of beneficiaries of this form of protection mean that he does not qualify for family reunification, a fact that was not explained to him upon applying for relocation:

*“I don’t know but the lawyer she told me it takes long time, long long long years, she told me like that. I didn’t talk to her, just I take my mobile and go... because my wife, we fight now, because she told me “what I wait you, already 7 years I wait you” ... In Italy I choose Swiss and Norway<sup>20</sup> because those country it’s fast to collect your family. But they bring me here and it’s difficult for me for now, my wife she’s still go from Eritrea to Ethiopia, but I don’t know. She told me “until what I wait?” ...If I tell her, she will stay 4 years, after 4 years does she get chance to come or not?” (Teklu)*

<sup>20</sup>Relocation is only possible to the following EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden. It is unclear how this refugee was able to indicate Switzerland and Norway as preferred destination countries.

The passages above provide some insights not only into how time is not only experienced by the participants in this study, but also how this feeds in to a disconnect between expectations, life plans and lived realities. The reader is reminded that waiting, and the sense of insecurity that comes with it, is not only experienced in Malta, or even limited to the relocation process, rather, it must be framed within the broader experience of being a forced migrant. From fleeing home, to being forced to take long, protracted, fragmented and dangerous journeys, time plays out in long, drawn out periods of waiting in transit, and in camps. The lives of family members are also put on hold, also waiting, in the hope of reunification.

Participants described how such experiences contribute to an altered experience of time in which the future remains uncertain and life, overall, is unstable. From the perspective of the participants, because of the lengthy process, the relocation experience is experienced as disempowering. Placing constraints on their own agency, and as such, feeling disempowered, the participants described how time is no longer in their hands. They sought relocation as a solution to this predicament, only to face more uncertainty and insecurity, their lives at the mercy of others; managed and controlled by bureaucratic regimes, legal procedures and broader power relationships.

The following section demonstrates how the condition of waiting, and the uncertainty this generates feeds a sense of insecurity and a distrust of the information provided by agencies involved in the relocation process.

## TRUST

The findings presented in this section suggest that participants' experiences of uncertainty and waiting influence how they experience the relocation process, and more specifically, the agencies they come in to contact with. Again, what the findings highlight is the importance of seeing the process as a whole, rather than stages in isolation – this may be of particular relevance with regard to agencies that are present at each phase of the relocation process.

### Agencies as a source of information: relationships of trust?

The participants claim that their ability to take an informed decision on relocation was compromised by the desperate conditions they were facing at the time, and, as the following analysis demonstrates, incorrect information on the level of support they would receive in the country of relocation.

Information on the relocation program was generally provided by UNCHR, EASO or IOM, facilitated by interpreters. The participants were consistent in expressing a sense of disappointment with the information they received.

In each of the passages below, reference to 'they' identifies either a specific agency, or a generic reference to all official sources, now deemed to be untrustworthy. The passage also underlines the lack of clarity – from the refugees' perspectives' – as to which agency was responsible for which relocation stage, with a resultant blurring of institutional responsibilities and activities:

*"I was told that I would be able to bring my wife as soon as I arrived in Malta. But I have subsidiary protection, and so I can't bring her here. They did not tell me this before." (Teklu)*

*"They told us that in Malta you can work, and you can relocate from Malta to other countries after some years. Also, they told us if they accept you, you can bring your family within one year." (Teklu)*

*"They lied to me. A person who came from the Malta embassy said that I would be housed in a hotel or a camp for one week and afterwards given accommodation." (Ibrahim)*

*"I was provided with information about the Maltese population, culture...the information was not true...we were told we would have the same rights as a Maltese citizen." (Maria)*

*"Really bad. They gave us countries to choose and send us to Malta. That was the first step in telling lies...they told us in one month you will have papers, accommodation, you will be able to work and study. And we believed them. They told us the second you arrive in Malta you will have papers...everything was a big lie from the beginning. When I came to Malta I knew that the relocation process is made by Mafia. In Greece they told us one thing and when we came to Malta it was totally different." (Mohamed)*

The following transcripts, excerpts from the same interview, point towards a shift in the trusting relationship formed with UNHCR prior to relocation. Preceding registration, UNHCR is recognized as a trusted source, keeping the participant informed of the politics behind the relocation program. After registration, a perceived lack of clarity with regard to the process and timeline is interpreted as being misleading, seemingly feeding into a shift in perception.

*“So the programme started when we were in Macedonia and Greece, and UNHCR they are always you know, everything that was the meeting between European leaders, they have result they were telling us. They told us the programme it's started, and because there is a lot of people, they didn't put them in one set of camp, so they distribute them to many centres in Greece. So if you say I want be near Athena, they take you to a camp near from Athena. But because me, they took me this camp...” (Elias)*

*“So the first things it was the first mistakes they did, when they started registering the people in this programme, for example, the people started registering the first people in January, say in 2015. There is people they come after registry after 4 months in 2015. So when we ask them the people who is registered first and the people who registered in the middle and the last people, they will go on queue, you know, after you know because the register after the people. Wasn't like this, you know, it was mixed, you can find the people who registered first, they go in the last queue. So there was that. So for example they give the promises of 1 year, all the people who will be relocated to another countries in Europe, it wasn't true, it wasn't exist these things.” (Elias)*

## Trusting the process and hope

The following passages point to the degree of control participants had over the relocation process. Prior to the relocation decision, participants were asked to choose eight countries as preferred destinations. Only one of the participants included Malta. For the majority of participants this lack of control over the decision contributed to their sense of disappointment and disempowerment. However, upon receiving the news, the responses were varied:

*“I cried. I didn't know the background of Malta...” (Teklu)*

*“I know Malta, I have a friend here so I didn't think anything. It was fine.” (Sara)*

*“For me it is not a problem because in all European countries you have human rights.” (Aya)*

The participants' experiences suggest that the receiving agencies were not sufficiently informed and/or not prepared for the particular needs of the new arrivals. A couple of participants described some degree of disorganisation, and also mentioned one occasion where it seemed that the Maltese authorities were not aware of their arrival. Such experiences did little to foster trust in the process, or indeed the authorities responsible for their relocation:

*“Not great. I didn't apply for Malta, and then the Maltese lost my files, the information they gave me about Malta was incorrect, and the process took a long time and was disorganized.” (Ibrahim)*

*“When we arrived at the airport there was no one waiting for us.... we asked a policeman, who did some phone calls and then someone from AWAS arrived.” (Ahmed)*

The refugees all stated that they had not been informed that they would be detained upon arrival in Malta. They described this experience within the broader context of fleeing war, re-counting the cumulative effects of ongoing human rights violations:

*“No, it was a big shock...we had to spend nine days in prison...it makes me crazy, it was enough what I was facing in my country, it was not right to do that.” (Ahmed)*

Whilst the time spent in detention in Malta is relatively short, this too is experienced as a further blow, at a time when participants had hoped relocation would mark a new beginning:

*“I am a military man. I speak from my experience. It is not easy to be in a prison for 3 days. After the airport we found ourselves in prison for seven days.” (Mohamed)*

The distress caused by being detained appears to be intensified as a result of a number of factors. These included a lack of access to relevant information that generated a sense of confusion and insecurity – this must also be understood within the broader context of the relocation exercise wherein participants expressed a lack of control over their present and future. This element is explored in the next section of the report.

Participation in the relocation scheme was an attempt to improve life conditions. Detention was experienced as another severe blow at a time when they hoped things would finally be progressing. One participant stated that his initial experience in Malta removed trust in the whole system, and without a comprehensive understanding of the process, he felt that he could not afford to differentiate between different agencies or actors. As a result, he opted not to limit self-disclosure during the asylum process:

*“The first treatment in Malta was a shock, so I thought maybe it's the same people who ask me, so I simply told them I came because of the conflict in Syria and if they give me a protection in Malta I welcome it and if not, it is fine.” (Ahmed)*

The following narratives suggest that the reasons for mistrust are embedded within and also exacerbated by the context from which the refugee has come as well as the context in which they now find themselves. The passages highlight the importance of receiving accurate information from the outset. Importantly, the information provided prior to relocation is evaluated upon arrival. When the reality in Malta does not match the information received, hope shifts to disillusionment, negatively impacting the integration process. The following extracts capture the sentiment expressed by the majority of participants:

*“They lied .... the people of EASO, when they said to me “your decision is Malta”, they said it would take Euros 1,700, you and your family... “there is no camps” they said, “all the refugees are in apartments” I didn’t know anything about Malta before, they said they speak English and their language is near to Arabic. When we came here it’s different... I was so excited on what they said because I said finally me and my family will live normal life.” (Elias)*

*“At the beginning we thought we will get to a normal place, we will have a normal life again because we lost our life, everything. And we thought, we heard before that in Europe they will take care of your boys, of the women, even the refugees, that why we say we take everything just to reach Europe, and we don’t have a plan B, we just came to here. We thought that the governments of Europe will take care of us. We thought that our boys can at least live normal life like that, we didn’t think at all that will happen to us.” (Elias)*

*“That one (EASO)... they told us, when we go from Italy to came to Malta, they told us “In Malta there is work, good work, you can work. And even here there is ... you can relocate from Malta after some years, you can relocate to other countries” They told us like that. Even they told “if they accept you for refugee, they can bring your family in one year”. They told us like that but I haven’t see anything because we get the subsidiary.” (Teklu)*

## **Insecurity, information and trust**

The following analysis considers access to information, and how this information is received, within a broader dynamic of trust and a sense of security. In this regard, the participants’ responses are not considered within a vacuum, but rather, mindful to a drawn-out migratory process marked by long periods of waiting, a legal process marked by insecurity, limited access to support networks (and alternative sources of information) within the broader community, and a general mistrust of official sources of information.

The majority of participants claimed that the information they received about Malta upon arrival was scarce and inadequate. The findings suggest a perceived lack of information feeds into a lack of trust in the process:

*“Only in the single visit of JRS and UNHCR in Marsa Open Centre. In hal far Tent village no single body or no single foundation visited us except Jehovah’s Witnesses...the thing which I can consider it as deliberate offensive behaviour for refugee to have visits only from people wanted to tell them about religion issue...where no other foundation come to check our situation or come even to ask about us. From the beginning we didn’t get no information from their side, not even when we needed help to cash the cheque, they just told us to take the bus and find it ourselves.” (Burhan)*

Within the context of the relocation process, protecting basic human rights requires accurate and accessible information on rights, the help and assistance refugees should expect and the possibilities and options available in order to plan and move on with their future. Participants emphasise the importance of receiving information, and also having the opportunity to have their questions and concerns answered – this is crucial to develop a sense of security and an understanding of the Maltese context, including an understanding of key service providers (i.e. health, social security, education and employment). The findings suggest a lack of consistency in the provision of information, it appears that some participants received more information than others, suggesting the program might benefit from a more structured approach:

*“We didn’t receive any information about Malta, just about the facilities of the Centre.” (Elias)*

*“At that time, 4 or 5 days I stay in Marsa and they came UNHCR and JRS, I think 3 groups or 2 groups, they came to us and tell us the story of this country, how is the process to another country, like that...” (Teklu)*

*“Yes, about the English centre, work places and private doctors...” (Sami)*

*“No, only through JRS. Nobody at the open centre explained what courses are available in Malta.” (Ahmed)*

*“They didn’t help us in anything, they told us about the water and electricity, nothing else.” (Elias)*

People who are forced to flee leave behind established social networks in which information resources are embedded, social processes full of knowledge of how to do things, and established patterns of accessing formal, informal and local knowledge. Entering a new host country and community can lead to uncertainty about place and identity and the activities necessary to re-establish and access resources such as information, particularly if the institutional context of the host country is unfamiliar. In the following passages, participants associated a feeling of neglect with a sense of mistrust; any trust they may have had in the agency’s claim to providing protection and/or assistance has been all but abandoned:

*“You can talk to, but if you talk him he doesn’t give you answer, because you need the courses, different courses, so we need learn course... but when we ask for that, they can’t help us, just to go to the education, but if you go to the education, you need the letter from the office, they need something from you to give them” (Teklu)*

*“About the MCAST there is one, our friend, in that place. So when we ask him, he is taking course about the electricity, he tell us about the MCAST. So we try to go to that place but they didn’t accept us” (Teklu)*

*“Sometimes they put letters with information on the walls. We asked the social worker for a course, but they did not help us. You can talk to the social worker, but if you talk to him, he does not give you an answer.” (Teklu)*

In the absence of a structured process wherein information is shared in a timely and accessible manner to depend on a given individuals' willingness to support them in navigating their new environment. This suggests that when accurate and personalised information is provided, the source of that information

*"There was a lady called Josephine <sup>21</sup> (from AWAS) who helped a lot for applying at MCAST <sup>22</sup>. But when she had to go and another woman came for us one time and did not help much." (Aya)*

It is perhaps within the asylum process that this dynamic, namely trust in the process and actors, and a sense of security comes to the fore. A number of participants stated that they did not receive confidence in the asylum process. That said, the actual interview was described in positive terms and in the end they were also satisfied with the work of the interpreters:

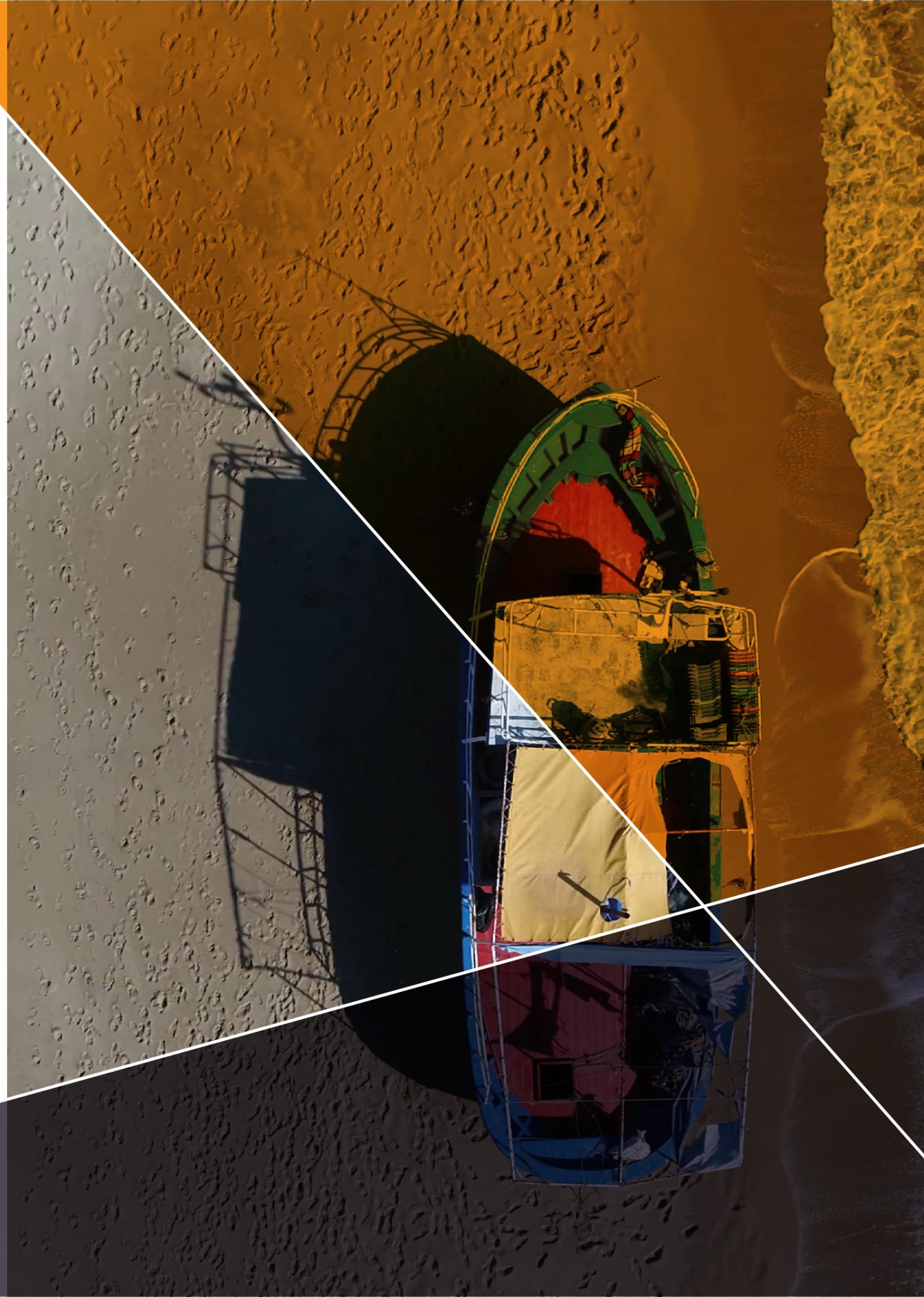
*"I had to wait for seven months until they gave me the appointment for an interview. After that, it took until I got the results. I was not provided with any information about the procedure and the differences but the experience was good...There was one interviewer and an interpreter during the interview." (T)*

However, when the process does not go as expected, the perceived negative experiences of the relocation registration to arrival in Malta, fosters an accumulative sense of distrust and suspicion. The anxiety experienced when a request for asylum is rejected, may be intensified having passed through the relocation process. Having passed the initial eligibility criteria to participate in the relocation scheme reinforces an expectation of a positive outcome from the asylum claim:

*"I received my resolutions after seven months after my application. I think I got rejected because my case was not good, that day something happened with the interviewer, he was not feeling well and we had to wait. That day we got another interview appointment but again he was quite ill that day, I think he didn't touch our case, we did the interview in 30 minutes. Now we are going to appeal with the help of lawyers. We didn't expect that because we came here through the relocation process." (Maria)*

<sup>21</sup> The name has been changed.

<sup>22</sup> Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology.





## DIGNITY

The need for security in the face of ongoing violence, respect rather than humiliation, the need to take control over their lives rather than remain dependent – each of these factors emerged as impacting participants' sense of personhood, self-worth and dignity. The findings suggest that, overall, the support services provided throughout the relocation exercise are limited to the bare minimum. The necessary material and non-material support to meet basic human needs and sustain human life in dignity, are perceived to be lacking. Without the support and resources necessary to take control of their lives, what emerges is a sense of temporariness, once again a sense of liminality (see also above).

The findings suggest that more emphasis must be placed on providing care and multifaceted support – tailor made to meet the needs of each individual and family – to ensure a life of dignity whilst seeking solutions and making the transition to a more secure future.

### The need for security and safety

Each of the participants described a sense of ongoing precarity, from fleeing conflict in their homelands, to arrival and trying to make a life for themselves in Malta, the (ongoing) journey is described as an unending violation of their sense of basic human dignity.

From fleeing war, to facing dangers at the EU borders, each of these experiences are experienced as fear in the face of continued and never-ending violence:

*“Everywhere you go to there are weapons...in the environment you cannot live a human life. You would always be scared. You are always in danger. For example, when the government and the militia fight for an area and the government wins, they would take all of the people out of that area and shoot them.” (Ahmed)*

*“The conditions in the camp at the Macedonian border were very bad. The Macedonian soldiers used tear gas to stop people to cross the border to Macedonia, and a lot of children died.” (Ahmed)*

*“When we arrived in Malta we found ourselves in dirty prison, even in Hal Far.” (Ali)*

## Dignified living conditions

The participants expressed different experiences within diverse camp settings, in both Italy and Greece. For some, the camps provided for their basic needs, and afforded a degree of comfort. Other described freezing conditions, with limited access to food. That said, the participants all described isolated contexts that negatively impacted access to the labour market – a fundamental source of human dignity – and some semblance of normality outside of a camp setting:

*“In the place close to Albania it was comfortable to live in. The only disadvantage was that it was far away from the city. There was everything we needed, sports complex, toilets, good food three times a day. People were brought to schools and I was able to take English lessons in the camp. It was possible to cook for yourself and we were given things like shampoo, everything we needed. Access to healthcare was provided for everyone in need. A lot of NGOs were presents, especially people from Spain, and also a lot of interpreters. People were legally allowed to work, but it was hard to find a job. People could send money back to their families, something I cannot do from Malta.” (Ahmed)*

The physical conditions within the open centres in Malta are described in particularly adverse terms. The participants expressed a sense of humiliation at being forced to reside in conditions verging on squalor, detrimental to their health and wellbeing in all seasons. Worth citing in length, the following passages highlight the indignity expressed by the majority of respondents, and the conditions that they are forced to endure:

*“Most people in this centre are waiting there to run away in another country. The living conditions are bad, it stinks (the canal near the open centre) and the rooms are full of cockroaches, even the bed. When you wake up in the morning you would find cockroaches between your legs...Sometimes would find big rats in the room. There are no fans, no heaters, some days we were going to die because of the heat. And no interpreters so can't speak. There is no access to clean water to drink, and the food is not good. There are no shops close by. The toilets are not good and its cold.” (Ahmed)*

*“Quite bad. The building is very old and there is no heating. There is no carpet and we sleep in bunk beds with uncovered sponge mattresses. The kitchen is ill-equipped and there is not even a table and chairs where we can sit, so we eat on the bed. It is very humid and cold in the winter. There is no washing machine. But we have the ‘best room’. Every family has their own room.” (Ibrahim)*

Participants claimed that the conditions in Malta and the support structures made available to them were not what they had been promised. Participants with young children, or expectant mothers, described a situation that would not appear to be conducive to their family's wellbeing, both in terms of space for play, and safeguarding health. The findings also suggest that basic provisions such as milk powder were not made available, indicating that service providers were not prepared in advance:

*“We have been living in the open centre for four months now. The condition here are really poor. And the social workers treat us really bad. They don't allow our kids to run around, there are no space for them to play.” (Aisha)*

*“The first time we received a box of milk for the child it was expired. When we were in Marsa someone told us we would be transferred to a flat, and not to an open centre.” (Elias)*

*“It is bad. There are no heaters. I have to go to the kitchen from my room outside through the rain to cook. I have to take all my things and run to the kitchen. Compared to that it would be better to have tents. There are only small benefits. It is completely different of what I had expected, I was surprised. It's a horrible situation. The children will suffer if someone is sick.” (Ali)*

*There were no locks for the doors of the bathrooms, and it was always dirty to an extent that you can't stay in more than 30 seconds.” (Burhan)*

In the following passage, the participant emphasises how the physical conditions effect mental wellbeing – this in turn has a disruptive impact on the transitional process from open centre to life in the community:

*“It has been so hard. When we came here it was so hot that we had to buy fans, now is so cold that we needed to buy heaters. Because there was nothing available for us. It is stressful, because everybody is stressed, because they have to fill in papers, look for house or work.” (Aya)*

## Dignity and independence

The following passages suggest that when the material conditions (in particular financial support and shelter) provided to new arrivals offer only rudimentary subsistence, they fail to uphold the individual's dignity. The findings suggest that when participants are made to feel like recipients of charity, this reinforces a disparate power relationship between the recipient and the ‘giver’, and produces a sense of disempowerment and humiliation, rather than empowerment:

*“We fled from Syria not because we are poor, not because we need money, not because... but because my sister dead and her family dead. And I was afraid about my children, I didn't come here to beg and to take money from others.” (Elias)*

*“I want to be clear that we didn't come here for money, it's not a matter of money. I'm just telling you what they told me, that's why I'm speaking about money. Maybe they can cut the money from me I don't need money. But I want them to treat me like a human being. We fled from Syria because of the war, the basic reason of our problem in Syria that they don't respect us. And I come here and here they don't respect me. So it's the same situation.” (Aisha)*

The findings also indicate that the financial support made available upon arrival is not adequate for the dire situation refugees find themselves in on arrival – a reality that is particular to the refugee experience. As a consequence of war, and the forced migration process, many refugees will have lost most of their material possessions. The majority of participants appeared to have arrived in Malta with nothing, it is therefore understandable and reasonable that their immediate needs will be more diverse and urgent:

*“I had brought only 20 Euros from Greece, which was not enough for the first two weeks. I got money immediately, but not for the whole months, only for the amount of days that were left in that month...I was given 27 Euros for two or three weeks. In the beginning that is not enough because you need to buy things like some food and clothes and especially a phone card, because there is not Wi-Fi at that place and I had to call my wife.” (Teklu)*

*“After seven days I received the first payment. After 12 days I received 260 Euros. It was not enough at all in the beginning. I did not have anything.” (Ali)*

Upon arrival in a new country, refugees are inevitably highly dependent on external support. The findings demonstrate the long drawn out process following months and years in limbo with no, or limited, access to employment. As such, the need for adequate income support upon arrival is paramount. The following passages suggest a lack of consistency in the timing of such support, with some participants reporting that they were forced to rely on the charity of other refugees upon arrival. Others conveyed a sense of humiliation associated with receiving the money and the way it is distributed or allocated according to ‘behaviour’:

*“They begin to give us the allowance I think after 15 days if I remember properly, and during that I borrowed money from people around me, people I met them for the first time in my life. We received after the three days (for 13 days) and after that every month we received our payment. Sometimes if we ‘misbehave’ they cut our salary as a way of punishment.” (Burhan)*

*“I get the money, about 15 or 20 days after I arrived...but they treat you bad when they give you the money, in the way they look at us. If you don’t sign, you lose your money for that week. However, when they haven’t seen you to sign, even if you see them and say good morning, they would not remind you to sign to get your money.” (Ahmed)*

*“We received the money immediately. Euros 130 for me and my baby.” (Sami)*

*“In the first three days after we arrived at Balzan Open Centre, there was nobody who gave us food or anything else. We did not have anything, no money. A woman who lived in the Centre and had some food from someone, gave us food. After that we received the money regularly.” (Aya)*

*“I only received once the money. Euros 120 in the first months when we arrived. You have to go to sign three times a week and if you do not sign you do not get the money.” (Mohamed)*

Delays in the provision of income support, coupled with the inadequate amounts made available upon arrival, do not appear to provide for basic survival needs and a dignified life:

*“Not enough because you want different things for food, for drink, for clothes. Also, there is no WIFI in that place also you be buying card for data, you should be buying car for calling to family and friends and something. So Euros 130 for that, if you buy all these things in one day it’s not enough.” (Teklu)*

Arrival in Malta is clearly marked by considerable struggle – a situation that is particularly manifest for families. Participants claimed that they needed much more immediate support in financial terms, and also to access information in order to orientate themselves and acquire some semblance of security. The following passages highlight the complexities and numerous barriers (including social, economic and health) newly-relocated refugees have to contend with in their day to day experiences, and how these obstacles intersect, reproducing hardship:

*“They just helped us with the school. They didn’t give us the basics like shampoo or nappies for the babies. We don’t have a big salary and we are a big family, they asked us to buy everything. We needed to go to the hospital, they told me that I had to take the bus and I get there myself. They don’t help me with the basic products like nappies for my kids. We are buying everything with the small amount of money that we received.” (Aisha)*

I was pregnant and had to go to hospital on my own and pay everything from the per diem payment. That was not enough, I need more, like for healthy food, travel to hospital, during pregnancy. I had to buy everything with that money, clothes, shoes, everything. And it was so loud and stressful to live there and be pregnant.” (Aya)

*“On the first week of school the bus never came to pick our kids, and we couldn’t bring them. We ask the centre for help and what she said was that we have to bring them by bus.” (Aisha)*

The participants also provided a number of examples of how a lack of interpreters and/or cultural mediators represent a systemic barrier to accessing basic services, including health care. In the absence of the necessary support and resources, professionals are restricted in their ability to fulfil their role. As the following passages suggest, such barriers may complicate diagnoses, create unnecessary stress and also leave the individual feeling overlooked and disregarded:

*“We were able to go to the hospital. However, I was told my wife was fatally ill. A second appointment informed us that she was pregnant.” (Ibrahim)*

*“They did not give us any support. They have a lot of people from different nationalities. Everyone speaks a different language. But there weren’t any translators. When I went to the hospital with a social worker I felt like I am taking him and he is the patient because he talked to the doctor without knowing my issues.” (Ahmed)*

## Dignity, care and personhood

Participants also remarked on the level of care made available. Care, in this regard, appears to be associated with being treated with dignity, as a unique individual, thereby reinforcing a sense of personhood. Perceptions varied, the participants were able to differentiate between those individuals within service provision that appeared to have a genuine concern for their wellbeing, vis-à-vis those who delivered services with a sense of indifference.

Even when the physical conditions were generally perceived as inadequate, participants discerned a level of care. In the second passage reference is made to the fact that provision of care was unaffected by the applicant's employed status, heightening the applicant's sense of dignity and self-worth: care was not provided out of charitable considerations but out of respect for the applicant's dignity.

*"Yes, people was really kind to us. We didn't have the chance to work...My daughter didn't go to school but there was a big tent that provide English lessons for them." (Maria)*

*"They did their best to welcome us in Greece. We stayed in tents but we had everything we wanted, they provided us with food and benefits (Euros 350). We were much better than in Malta. There were good services. You were allowed to work and when one of the children was sick the ambulance would come and pick them up immediately. Also, when you had to go to any place, they would bring you there." (Ali)*

*"We went to Athens airport. An IOM member was responsible for the journey and she travelled with us. AWAS was waiting for us at the airport and took us to the camp." (Sara)*

The following narratives suggest a lack of care is experienced in different ways, including a lack of accessible information (see also above), and a general sense of not being taken seriously. The findings suggest that when participants are not able to make informed decisions, when they have to wait (bringing in time again) or depend on others, when they feel punished for communication barriers, asking questions or making complaints, or lack the necessary resources to take control over their lives, the general narrative is one of humiliation:

*"No information and no interpreter. People got angry about us and put us in the clinic." (Ahmed)*

*"I was there for a week. After four days JRS and UNCHR came to provide information. There was no other information given by anyone else." (Teklu)*

*"We were told for the medical check-up, but no information was given about asylum, the procedure, rights, or the situation in Malta until later by the UN and JRS. The information that we did get was in Arabic." (Sara)*

*"Even the employees there, if you speak to them and they do not understand you they get angry. I am new here in Malta - why is there no interpreter?" (Mohamed)*

*"If you ask for something that they have, they will give it to you. It was also possible to get a social worker, but he was not helpful." (Teklu)*

*"They said to us in Marsa that "you will not be in a camp, you will be in a flat". So we came here, they said to us "it's a flat", we said to them "it's not a flat, it's a camp", they said "no, this is a flat, the camp is there"..." (Elias)*

It is clear that the decision to relocate was taken with the belief that the participants would be able to finally take control over their lives and secure their future. Certainly, none of the participants envisaged or planned to remain living in transit, or indeed to remain living within a camp setting. The camp set up, the conditions therein, and the level of support (material and non-material) made available to them is experienced as temporary at best, and it is this that hinders moving on: insecurity within the camp (experienced as stuck in limbo and lacking the resources to move on) breeds insecurity within the individual.

The findings clearly indicate how a lack of appropriate economic and social support prolongs dependency on the system and does not facilitate the transition to independence and integration: particularly in the case of families. In the long run, the level of economic sustenance made available may allow for survival at the margins, but it does not provide the support needed to move on and thrive.

## Stepping out of limbo: securing a future

The findings suggest that a failure to invest in the arrival phase prolongs dependency. It is evident that the resources necessary to be feel empowered, to move on, and to pursue life goals – including inter alia information, material and non-material support, and security – are lacking. This is particularly the case for families, and vulnerable persons who face greater protection risks. The final section of analysis provides some insights in to how participants negotiate, plan, and move on with their lives, and what is needed to support them in this process.

## Relocation as a durable solution

The findings suggest that the conditions within Greece and Italy were precarious, providing limited access to rights, and a drawn-out period marked by anxiety and concern for their future. These findings are also relevant in the context of understanding the level of expectation and hope built up in the beneficiaries' minds, where relocation presented a promise of a more secure and dignified life. The participants described different factors that motivated their decision to apply for relocation, common responses included a desire to continue their journey through legal routes, to escape the desperate camp conditions they were otherwise forced to endure, and more generally to improve their life conditions:

*"I wanted to do things legally, I didn't want to travel to another country illegally. I was given the choice of 12 countries, I selected eight, Malta was not one of them." (Aisha)*

*"I wanted to leave because the economic situation in Italy was really bad, and I thought I would have family reunification." (Teklu)*

*“At that time some people were sneaking to Macedonia and continue their journey to other places, but I have a lot of children and I didn’t want them to make this adventure, I was afraid about my children. So I had to stay in Greece and it was my only choice, I didn’t have another choice, this is the only choice I had, that’s why I register.” (Elias)*

*“The situation in the camp was desperate, and my wife was pregnant. We thought about moving the family back to Turkey, but time was running out because my passport had expired, I needed to move as soon as possible. I did not choose Malta, I didn’t even know it was on the list of destinations.” (Ibrahim)*

### Information to navigate the new terrain

Participants applied for relocation to regain a sense of stability and place. Information is central to this process, crucial in managing expectations, and an important resource for the integration process. Access to information enables and supports the transition period and provides a sense of security in understanding and feeling in control of the process. Recent arrivals find themselves with no established community, and no social relationships to rely on for information on services, processes, and locality. A sense of isolation is rendered real and tangible – upon arrival refugees are lost and require concrete support in finding their feet.

As the following passages demonstrate, basic information, guidance, and support, on how and where to find key services is paramount in order to avoid unnecessary stress:

*“No. For example when you need health care, they do not provide you with information. You go to the wrong hospital (Mater Dei) and they send you to another one (“Why did you come to Mater Dei?”), because we were not told to which one to go at the Open Centre.” (Teklu)*

*“No help with the asylum case. After two or three days after we arrived at the open centres we were given appointments with the Refugee Commissioner. We asked for directions or help finding the office but we were refused. It took a group of us over three hours walking around, to find the office. It’s like we were lost in the desert.” (Ibrahim)*

What emerged throughout the analysis is the perceived absence of information required to navigate the structures and processes to begin life in Malta. Over the years the process from arrival towards integration has developed in an ad hoc manner.

It is worth noting that the reality faced by relocated refugees is very different to that faced by boat arrivals. In the case of the latter, in the absence of a clearly presented set of procedures, refugees relied on the informal networks and support systems that they developed in detention. In the case of relocated refugees, such support networks, particularly in the early phases, are simply not in place.

### Community support

Whilst the findings in the previous section highlight how relationships between refugees, particularly new arrivals, may serve as an important social and economic resource, the following narratives also demonstrate how such social bonds appear to be limited to intra-ethnic rather than inter-ethnic (including with the indigenous communities). Some participants may also experience marginalization a result of, inter alia, language barriers, poverty and different forms of discrimination:

*“Difficult, because I was the only Syrian in the open centre while there are a lot of Africans.” (Ahmed)*

*“There are many Syrians so I have a big social network. But I am working two jobs so don’t not have a lot of time to socialise. My social life is with my wife.” (Ibrahim)*

*“I made some friend in the open centre, they are from my country of origin.” (Sami)*

*“Difficult, because a lot of different people. The communication between each other is very difficult.” (Aya)*

*“I didn’t spend much time at the open centre, I went out in the morning and came back in the evening. The restaurants and cafeterias in St Julian’s and Sliema, they all know me. Because I have nothing to do and I also eat outside. There also was a problem because when people saw my cross around the neck they discriminated me. I changed my religion in 2008 and for them it is a strange thing. Your name is Mohamed and you are a Christian. It gave them the indication that I was Moslem and I converted. It was really difficult for me. I don’t speak with anyone and no one speaks with me. I asked the people from Open Centre to not put Mohamed as my name in the cleaning plan. But they still did it. I can feel that they see my name and think that way and they are discriminating me.” (Mohamed)*

Findings also suggest that access to basic information and technology may provide an opportunity to develop new social relationships and a bridge to new social networks, thus facilitating the integration process. Refugees who may be more independent and resourceful are still in need of support to navigate a new context:

*“We don’t have regular Wi-Fi access and we need it to keep on study English and others. No legal support except from JRS for the asylum process or seeking employment. For healthcare I had to go to hospital and there was some social support in the Centre.” (Maria)*

*“No. I tried to find a course but in the Open Centre you do not get information. I went to MCAST and Jobsplus on my own, when I found out about these places.” (Teklu)*

## Language barriers

Language barriers negatively affect participants' ability to successfully bridge information gaps that occur during their migration and relocation process. Some of the participants were informed about English language lessons from the open centre, others were informed of classes by JRS or through friends.

The majority of participants have attended lessons at some point, although it would appear the majority are not aware of the number of opportunities actually available. The findings also suggest the courses do not cater for more advanced students:

*"Now I am in English course after nine months and I knew about it from my Italian friend." (Burhan)*

*"No, except a course that was run by the open centre and was happening in Marsa, but they stopped it after two weeks." (Teklu)*

*"Yes, first I attended to English lessons provided by JRS at Zejtun, the centre gives English lessons but those are just for beginner." (Maria)*

The findings suggest that intersecting conditions experienced by refugees (loss of community, language barriers, loss of material possessions and economic poverty, trauma etc.) are not recognized. When such experiences then intersect with, inter alia, gender, family composition and disability, the situation becomes even more precarious. For example, gendered obstacles to accessing language classes remain prevalent, two of the female participants stated that they couldn't attend because they did not have baby-sitting support, and also because of travel barriers:

*"Yes, the open centre put me on English lessons but I cannot go because of my children." (Aisha)*

*"There was a volunteer who for five months she gave us English lessons, then she stopped. JRS offered to give us lessons in Birkirkara, but she I have a baby and all the children, I cannot leave them in the Open Centre." (Elias)*

Over the past decade the provision of English language lessons, including for women with children, has increased. The findings suggest a need for more communication and collaboration between different stakeholders, particularly the management of open centres and NGOs providing language classes. Language classes can be an important resource in facilitating the transition from open centre to the community, and also the transition in to employment.

## Access to Education

Education can be a crucial resource in developing a sense of belonging and building relationships within Maltese society. The participants with young children appear to be satisfied with the Maltese education system, and were also happy with the support they received from social workers in this regard:

*"My daughter is happy in a Maltese primary school. She is very young." (Ibrahim)*

*"The children are going to school here. The social worker from the Open Centre was very helpful." (Ibrahim)*

One of the participants was furthering his education, whilst others expressed an interest in doing so, but cited opportunity costs as a barrier – the intersecting conditions of the refugee experience implies that such decisions must be either put on hold or discarded. The findings also suggest that recognition of immigrants' skills and competence-based qualifications does not go far enough. The intersecting barriers that appear to be so particular to the refugee experience, including lack of social networks, and importantly, the opportunity costs of further study, indicate the need for a more holistic and supportive approach:

*"I can't afford to take time off work to study even though I would like to have my law qualifications recognised from Syria." (Ibrahim)*

*"No, husband applied for it. He is a nurse but he had to continue education to get more credits until being able to work as a nurse." (Aya)*

## Access to Employment

The participants shared different experiences in relation to their employment experiences in Malta. Those participants who had found employment generally reported positive experiences. Employment opportunities within the immediate vicinity of open centres appear to be available:

*"Good. I'm working in a factory in Hal Far." (Teklu)*

*"My husband got a job in a factory near the open centre, they hire him in the roundabout." (Maria)*

Circumstances, including family composition, and disability, impact the number of options available, and also the degree to which an individual might exercise agency. For example, as a result of impairment, employment opportunities will be more limited, therefore the transition into employment becomes harder. Under such circumstances, a lack of regular income will also hinder the integration process, intensifying inequalities and marginalization:

*"I have health problems so I have not tried to find a job. My wife is pregnant now and she also has to take care of our kids so she never tried." (Aisha)*

*"I never worked in Malta. I don't think it's difficult to find work here, but I cannot do so without papers. I also have diabetes and so I cannot do certain jobs." (Sara)*

The findings suggest the participants had not received specialized support according to their particular needs (including for example, education and vocational training and identifying skills and interests for employment).

## Access to Housing

Access to the labour market marks an important transition to independent living. However, as the following passage highlights, even when employment experiences are positive, affordable housing remains a huge challenge, contributing to a sense of insecurity:

*“This is the best part of my life in Malta. I love the company I’m working for and my colleagues. It’s an international company...Within the first few weeks I received a bonus for overachieving in the targets at the insurance company where I work. I also work evenings in a restaurant. However, both salaries are very low. 900 Euros a month at the insurance company, 300 a month for the restaurant. When you see the average monthly rental price in Malta I worry about how my family will cope.” (Ibrahim)*

A number of the participants cited the poor living conditions (including hygiene and privacy) in the open centre as their motivation to find private accommodation. Access to affordable, decent and habitable housing is paramount, but remains an unlikely prospect for many:

*“I am desperate to leave the centre, but I cannot find accommodation.” (Ibrahim)*

*“Rent is really expensive and we cannot afford to move with just one salary.” (Maria)*

The conditions in the open centre may be experienced as so detrimental that refugees feel forced to make the transition before they are financially stable or have completed the asylum process. Such decisions may risk further poverty, precarity and homelessness:

*“The rent is high, so we have to share a flat. It is not easy, especially with a little child. It is not good, but we have no choice.” (Aya)*

*“It is much better than in the open centre. Difficulties are that I don’t have papers. I pay in the months 500 Euros without contract. I am living in fear that the landlord tells me to move out and I have nowhere to stay. (...) The moment they found out I am refugee and don’t have papers they gave me one room for 700. Now I found one flat with two rooms for 500 Euros, but its far away, in the suburbs.” (Mohamed)*

Access to affordable, secure and habitable accommodation is experienced as a barrier in making the transition from life in an open centre to living independently in the community. A stark rise in rental prices, intersecting with racism and precarious low paid employment, compounds the problems faced by refugees – rendering the transition impossible for many:

*“The rent is so high and the houses don’t deserve this amount of money, and a lot of landlords didn’t want to rent me because I am refugee.” (Burhan)*

*“I need to find a flat, but it’s very difficult. Landlords are racist and put the phone down*

*when I tell them I’m Syrian. The price of rent is high, and I don’t earn much money, and I am still sending money to friends and family that supported me after I left Syria, while I was in Greece and Turkey.” (Ibrahim)*

*“I like the sun, sea and people in Malta. But the biggest problem is accommodation and I feel that very soon me and my family will have to leave if we cannot find a place. I am desperate and fed up.” (Ibrahim)*

The findings point to the urgent need to address systemic barriers, including racism and a culture of impunity among landlords. In the absence of a workable housing strategy, one can expect protracted refugee contexts within the open centres, or further displacement as refugees seek durable solutions elsewhere.

## Legal status and documentation

A positive asylum outcome and being in possession of the necessary documentation are perceived as vital in making the transition to ‘life’ in Malta. This in terms of mind set, and also in terms of process, namely finding employment and finding affordable housing in the community.

The findings suggest that delays in the asylum process actually contribute to poverty and precarity, wherein long delays necessarily prolong access to the labour market and the transition to financial autonomy. The following passages provide some insights in to how this drawn out process is often a source of stress, delaying important transitions (for example access to the labour market and finding accommodation in the community) that are left pending a positive asylum outcome, thus disrupting the integration process:

*“Every Friday I go to Msida to ask. Every time they tell me go, we will call you. This is my situation from July and now we are in December. I send a letter to the RefCom with a friend to ask why this is taking so long. I arrived in Malta in April and did the interview in May. The second, the long interview was in July. When we did the interview they told us, three weeks and we will give you the white card. And they told us its after that white card it will take three months maximum that you will get the passport and the ID card. There is nothing that we get. The interview was good. I told them the truth what I went through, what I faced in Syria. Sometimes I think if I would have told them lies I would now have my ID card.” (Mohamed)*

*“I need to get my documents to get out of Marsa open centre. I don’t need all these things to happen to me. I need to live in peace, instead of feeling like an enemy towards someone who works in the open centre.” (Ahmed)*

*"The most important thing for me is to settle. I want my papers and residence permit and then I will feel I can think about my future. When I feel settled I will have a job and feel secure and protected." (Sara)*

*"I cannot plan the future in Malta if I don't have papers. We are stuck for the moment." (Maria)*

*"I need that my children get education and that I can start working. That they will not stop to support my children. I hope I can go out of the Open Centre. If I find a job and an accommodation and my children can go to school, I will stay in Malta." (Ali)*

The outcome of the asylum process is largely experienced as positive, representing an important transition towards life in Malta:

*"The relocation to Malta has a positive impact on my life. When I was in Greece, I did not feel settled because I did not apply for protection. In Malta I feel I can have a future now." (Sara)*

For those participants who were forced to flee without their family, the limitations associated with subsidiary protection remains a source of anxiety and deep concern. The following passage raises questions vis-à-vis the criteria for relocation, when family reunification is a major need, the Maltese context cannot provide for a durable solution:

*"I am very disappointed about the outcome because I want to bring my wife, otherwise I will lose her. I was expecting to get refugee status and am appealing the decision and waiting for an outcome...I can provide for my wife and give her everything she needs, I just need permission." (Teklu)*



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*"I missed humanity. There is no humanity. From the beginning if they put you in a prison it means you are not human. They cannot provide anything? Why do they take people when they cannot even provide accommodation?"*

*I need to live in dignity. Not to be controlled by anyone." (Mohamed)*

### Conclusions

Whilst the findings cannot affirm the quality and extent of the information participants received, the passages presented in this report reflect a narrative repeated throughout the interviews. The information the participants received prior to relocation is largely deemed as incorrect, at times perceived as purposely misleading. The findings also suggest that inaccurate information on the relocation process at the outset feeds into how participants experience the agencies engaged throughout the process. The relationship is recurrent: unable to differentiate between different service providers, suspicion and scepticism emerge as a necessary defence mechanism. When hope of moving on and getting a grip of the future appear to morph in to a sense of disempowerment, the sense of insecurity and uncertainty is intensified.

The findings indicate that the initial stages of the relocation are particularly challenging. The participants' experiences suggest that the receiving agencies were not sufficiently informed and/or not prepared for the particular needs of the new arrivals. In the past refugees arrived in Malta with no prior notice, as such their particular needs would be assessed and addressed during the reception period, ergo, detention. The relocation exercise presents an alternative narrative wherein the period of waiting can provide the opportunity for case preparation including assessment of vulnerability and preparation for the asylum process.

The findings point to the need for more consultation and coordination between all service providers. Preliminary care-plans should be in place prior to the refugees' arrival, service providers should be informed of the make-up of different families and individuals, including specific needs particularly related to vulnerability in order to coordinate appropriate support structures. Upon arrival, these care plans should be discussed and further developed with the beneficiaries in order to provide for a sense of security, control, and self-worth.

It is pertinent to note that publicly available information on the relocation scheme, including a series of promotional videos used by EASO, is intended to encourage participation from asylum-seekers, with a slogan "Choose relocation: Safe and legal!"

At the outset, the rationale and context of the relocation exercise need to be underlined, also in terms of our own assessment thereof. The relocation Decision of 22 September 2015 captures the scheme's basis clearly in saying "Italy and Greece in particular have experienced unprecedented flows of migrants, including applicants for international protection who are in clear need of international protection, arriving on their territories, generating significant pressure on their migration and asylum systems."

In essence, therefore, the Decision presents a context wherein Italy and Greece were struggling to cope with the large number of asylum-seekers and other migrants. When seen from the perspective of the asylum-seekers and migrants in Italy and Greece at the time, these challenges meant reception and asylum systems that were difficult to access and that could only offer a rather low level of quality and efficiency. Clearly, vulnerable persons were hit harder by these shortcomings, and this reality was explicitly acknowledged in the relocation scheme's prioritisation of these groups of people.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, and as mentioned in the above analysis, it is important to underline the fact that the relocation scheme and the refugees' engagement with it did not occur in the early stages of the flight experiences. Having already travelled for several months, at times passing through a number of countries, and having already experienced the European Unions' asylum systems in Greece or Italy, the refugees 'encountered' the relocation scheme at a relatively advanced stage of their flight from their homes.

From our perspective, whilst acknowledging the serious difficulties experienced as a consequence of large-scale arrivals of asylum-seekers and migrants, we nonetheless underline the negative consequences of the Dublin Regulation in the way it obliges asylum-seekers to remain in a particular Member State on the basis of the Regulations' criteria. In practice, the context of large-scale arrivals has so far been experienced by those Member States at the European Union's borders, resulting in the obligation of these Member States to shoulder the responsibility of the vast majority of arrivals: reception, asylum, removal, integration. Together with the serious strains this system has caused on these Member States, it has a terribly dehumanising effect since it almost ignores personal situations: living conditions in the Member State allocated responsibility, community/social ties, language/vocational skills, cultural issues, etc. Therefore, whilst we welcome the relocation scheme insofar as it is intended to offer asylum-seekers a safe and legal route to protection within Europe, it may also be seen as an attempt to resolve a crisis partially caused by the European Union's own defective policy and legal regimes.

In this above-described context, a well-managed relocation scheme should – at least in principle – offer destination Member States the unique opportunity to more effectively accommodate refugee arrivals thanks to the predictability and manageability of the arriving refugees. Within a system that allows Member States to sift through case data – including information relevant to asylum claims and also to vulnerability issues – and select the individuals it will be receiving, a minimum level of preparedness is certainly to be expected, possibly beyond that Member State's standard asylum and reception systems.

Additionally, it is also pertinent to note that, whilst the €6,000 per relocated person might not be particularly relevant for some Member States, in others it could readily contribute to offering some kind of individualised support, including possibly attention to psycho-social, legal, or vocational needs.

Overall, the relocation process as experienced by the interviewees seems to have been marked by feelings of betrayed expectations. Participation in the relocation scheme was presented as a more attractive alternative to remaining in Greece or Italy (in the former case, with the EU-Turkey Statement looming darkly overhead) or moving on in an unsafe and illegal manner, and participants confirmed their willingness to cooperate with a scheme that offered them – whether directly or indirectly – a better option, a way out of their extremely difficult present and future circumstances. The realities they encountered upon arrival in Malta fell far below their expectations, with serious questions needing to be answered

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the Decision mentions vulnerable persons not only in terms of their prioritisation within the scheme, but also in relation to the decision as to which Member State the person should be relocated to: "(I)n the case of particularly vulnerable applicants, consideration should be given to the capacity of the Member State of relocation to provide adequate support to those applicants..." (Recital 34).

in relation to how their expectations were raised in Greece or Italy, by which entity and on the basis of which information.

For example: were they told that Malta does not grant family reunification rights to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection? Were they told the reality of living conditions in the open centres? Were they aware of the possibility of having their asylum applications rejected on one of the very same grounds for which they were being accepted for the relocation scheme?

Without clarity as to information-delivery responsibilities in Greece and Italy, it can only be concluded that the system was characterised by a mixture of disorganisation, lack of coordination, deficiencies in information provision, and more particularly a lack of sensitivity towards the experiences of refugees and the journeys they were forced to make. It is evident that most of the interviewed refugees expressed the feeling of a lack of control over their circumstances. Furthermore, the combination of this lack of information and painfully slow pace of the entire relocation procedure left the refugees in a state of limbo regarding their future prospects. Whilst it is understood that the process, particularly selection of the destination Member State, was never intended to be based entirely on preferences indicated by the refugees, access to clear, honest and intelligible information is central to establishing trust and partnership between the refugees and the process, thereby also improving the procedure's overall success and effectiveness. The idea of including information provided by civil society should not be discarded.

It was also interesting to note the juxtaposition of refugee experiences in Greece and Malta. In Greece they might have lacked many basic material elements, yet they seem to have felt cared for and supported, albeit within an overall struggling system. Once in Malta, they were not only shocked at the very low quality of material reception conditions offered to them at the IRC and in the open centres, but they were mostly upset at the institutional attitude adopted in their regard. Far from welcoming them, it seems like Malta's reception services engendered a further sense of isolation and abandonment. These struggles were particularly felt by families.

They lacked the immediate support – financial, information, and basic material – that was needed for them to find their feet in their new environment. In this regard, it is underlined that insufficient investment was made in the procedure's final stages, seeing the asylum-seekers arriving in Malta. There seems to have been a lack of coordination amongst the relevant entities, leading to lack of clarity as to the required procedures and a sheer lack of structure in some parts. As noted by the refugees, the provision of care was contingent upon the commitment of individual professionals, as not an intrinsic part of the system. Whilst this report is not primarily concerned with reception conditions in Malta, the experiences recounted by the interviewed refugees raise questions as to the feasibility of the relocation exercise in this regard. We question the wisdom of relocating refugees with a clear a priori risk of homelessness due to various factors (including individual vulnerabilities), without an overall plan about how to mitigate this risk.

We also question the treatment of vulnerable persons throughout the entire process. It is not clear whether or at which point any vulnerability assessment was actually conducted, either in order to provide immediate care and support – within the difficult context Greece and Italy were experiencing at the time – or in order for this information to be transmitted to Malta for eventual intervention. In fact, we are uncertain as to the quality and quantity of information sent to the Maltese authorities. What is certain is that, whilst the Maltese authorities informed us that no vulnerable individuals were relocated to Malta, our experiences with the relocated refugees tell us otherwise and we are gravely concerned these refugees were neither identified as vulnerable nor immediately provided with the attention they required and were entitled to under EU and national law.

## Recommendations

These recommendations are not only intended to stimulate an evaluative discussion on Malta's participation in the relocation scheme, but ought to also be considered as input for any future EU responsibility-sharing mechanism. From our perspective, they represent minimum and therefore core criteria of any such system.

1. The starting point of refugees' participation in the scheme must be acknowledged: people who have forcibly fled their homes, possibly already crossed several countries and having specific needs resulting from these flight experiences. The uniqueness of each individual's needs to be acknowledged and respected and this necessarily requires specific attention to their multi-faceted realities and complex needs.

In the specific case of Malta, an individualised assessment should be carried out for each relocated person/family in order to address their multi-faceted needs and to highlight any potential vulnerabilities.

2. All Member States ought to live up to their legal obligations in terms of reception conditions and asylum procedures. Particular attention needs to be paid to the following elements: material living conditions, access to health care and social support, nutrition – especially for situations involving children, elderly or sick persons, access to employment, comprehensive provision of legal aid and procedural information.

3. The scheme should require participating Member States to accept a minimum percentage of vulnerable refugees identified through the use of transparent criteria.

4. If a voluntary relocation scheme is intended to offer safe and legal routes to protection, it must incentivise asylum-seekers to actively and fully participate by making their participation worth their human investment. As a minimum, attention must be paid to the nature of promises made (directly and indirectly) and emphasis must be placed on fulfilling any such promises. Further attention needs to be paid to the way the scheme is presented and explained to refugees, to avoid fuelling unrealistic expectations.

5. Information provided to applicants must be comprehensive of the most important and relevant elements, including: degree of choice, reception conditions, access to employment, access to education, family reunification, the asylum procedure (including the possibility of having applications rejected), long-term options, integration scenario and available support services. All information must be accessible and transparent, and the possibility of providing information offered by civil society ought to be considered. In this regard, provision of written information about the relocation programme in the asylum seeker's mother language could improve transparency and reduce the potential risk of misunderstandings.

Furthermore a system where service providers and asylum authorities in each respective Member State vet the information provided about their own country would minimise the risk of an overly favourable depiction of the situation in destination countries.

6. Information provision needs to take account of the exercise's continuing nature, and therefore not be limited to one-off activities but wholly integrated within the exercise's various stages.

7. All information relating to participating individuals must be transmitted to the receiving Member State, ideally before the individual's arrival. This should include copies of documents, and any assessments undertaken, including medical evaluations. In a spirit of mutual trust and true solidarity, the destination Member State should rely on assessments made in the sending Member State, particularly on elements relevant to exercise eligibility (such as nationality) and on care-related issues such as medical report (including psychological), and age and vulnerability assessments.

8. The duration of any individual relocation procedure should be considered in all aspects of the exercise, including post-arrival arrangements and procedures. In particular, since this duration could run into months, possibly years, the applications of relocated asylum-seekers should be prioritised in the destination Member State.

9. Given the predictability the scheme offers the destination Member State, care and support should be provided within a structured approach that is orderly, efficient and sensitive to the individual's needs and specificities.

10. In terms of the policy approach of the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, each individual should be assigned a case worker in order to ensure the above-mentioned structured approach to information, care and support.<sup>24</sup>

11. In order to strengthen the care component of this scheme, involve NGOs through planned collaboration with government agencies at all stages of the scheme, particularly in the context of information provision and support services (e.g. medical, legal, psycho-social). This involvement should be arranged within the above-mentioned structured approach under the coordination of the responsible care worker.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, *Strategy for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers and Irregular Migrants, 2016*, page 14, available at <https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS.../Migration%20Policy%20181215.docx>

## Appendix I - Q&A Relocation Information (2016)

### For relocations

1. When will I know if I have been accepted?  
When you are accepted, which would be as soon as possible, you will be informed by the persons taking care of you.
2. How long is the average time from acceptance to departure?  
The average time is expected to take about 2 weeks.
3. Who arranges the travel to Malta?  
The International Organization for Migration together with the people taking care of you will make travel arrangements.
4. What would my status be upon arrival: refugee, immigrant or citizen?  
On arrival you will be considered as an asylum seeker.
5. What documents will be issued for me?  
Whilst the asylum request is being considered, an **ASYLUM SEEKERS'S DOCUMENT** is issued which declares that the applicant is under the protection of the Office of the Refugee Commissioner and makes him eligible to various benefits.  
When a decision is reached and you are given protection, a **PROTECTION CERTIFICATE** will be issued which will show your status (refugee, subsidiary protection, temporary humanitarian protection), and this **CERTIFICATE** will enable you to be issued with a **RESIDENCE PERMIT, ALIENS PASSPORT, WORK LICENCE**, and also makes you eligible to various benefits which will depend on the type of protection given as per international law.  
A document issued by the Immigration Police will also be provided while still an asylum seeker.
6. Who will meet me upon my arrival?  
On arrival you will be met by Maltese officials, including those from the Health authorities to confirm that you are well.
7. Where will I stay following my arrival in Malta?  
Upon arrival you will be transferred to an Initial Reception Centre, from where you will only be allowed to exit once the health authorities confirm that you have been medically cleared. Once such medical clearance is forthcoming, you are allowed to reside independently. Alternatively, you may request the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) to be provided with services for not longer than one year in a reception (open) centre. You may request further information on this matter at the Initial Reception Centre.
8. What currency do I need?  
In Malta, the Euro is used.
9. Will I get any special treatment because I am being admitted under a resettlement/relocation programme?  
As an asylum seeker you will undergo the same process as any other person who requests protection.
10. Do I get any information about life in Malta and about my rights and entitlements?  
Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, Malta

