



## **EMN Ad-Hoc Query on how to return Syrian third-country nationals who want to return**

Requested by COM on 9th August 2016

### **Return**

Summary prepared by NO EMN NCP from responses by

Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom and Norway

*Disclaimer: The responses were provided primarily for the purpose of information exchange among EMN NCPs in the framework of the EMN. The contributing EMN NCPs did provide, to the best of their knowledge, information that was up-to-date, objective and reliable. Note, however, that the information provided did not necessarily represent the official policy of an EMN NCPs' Member State.*

### **Background information:**

During the 10th EMN REG meeting on 13th June 2016, some (Member) States reported in connection to the REG Ad Hoc Query on asylum seekers withdrawing their application that an increasing number of Syrian asylum seekers had withdrawn their application, indicating their willingness to return to Syria. This presents a challenge to most (Member) States in view of the difficulties to return third-country nationals to Syria, given the on going conflict. Against this background, the European Commission would like to collect more information on member States' practices and procedures to carry out the return of those Syrians who have expressed a willingness to go back to their country of origin. The result of this Ad-Hoc Query was to be discussed during the REG Meeting scheduled to take place on 13th September 2016.

## Questions asked

1. What is the scale of the phenomenon, i.e. how many Syrians have since the start of 2016: a) withdrawn their asylum application; and b) indicated that they want to return to their home country?
2. Can you please further elaborate on whether or not aforementioned numbers have fluctuated or remained stable throughout 2016?
3. Has your Member State so far carried out the return of Syrians to their home country? If not, please explain why not.
4. If so, how has your Member State been able to carry out return to Syria? Can you provide us more information on how the process is implemented in practice. For example: Does your Member State issue a return decision when a Syrian asylum seeker withdraws his/ her application? Are Syrians returned through the 'normal' AVR program? Or, is return alternatively organised through other ways than the mainstream programmes? If so, please explain why and how it is organised. Who is in charge of return to Syria (governmental authorities themselves or is the return outsourced to third parties such as IOM and/or other organisations)? Does your Member State implement returns directly to Syria, or do you use any transit countries in this process? If so, do these transit countries (e.g. Lebanon, Turkey) set any requirements (e.g. in terms of visa or cash requirements)? What services are provided to the returnees? Elaborate for example on any counselling provided, in-cash or in-kind assistance etc.

## Summary of responses

- While several responses indicated that there had been no withdrawals of asylum applications from Syrian citizens so far in 2016, the largest reported numbers were reported by NO (502), SE (324) and UK (103). The responses did not make clear, however, whether similar criteria had been used to classify an asylum application as having been withdrawn. In a few responses it was said explicitly that if an asylum seeker is not available (has absconded) before a decision has been made, then the application is classified as 'withdrawn'.
- None of the replies gave the number of applications for voluntary, assisted return and only 5 indicated a number of persons who had actually returned with assistance. The highest numbers given were 117 (AT) and 17 (BE), but again it was not clear that e.g. AT included those who were able to return unassisted or to a neighbouring country. Several responses signalled that such returns were known to have been undertaken. In addition to pointing to the on going conflicts and humanitarian situation in most of Syria, the main impediments to carrying out returns to Syria that were given were that IOM had ceased its return operations to that country as well as difficulties in obtaining the necessary travel documents and permits for travel to and through a neighbouring country. The latter was also given as problem frequently encountered by those wanting to a neighbouring country.