

## GREECE

### UNHCR OPERATIONAL UPDATE

August 2015

#### KEY FIGURES

**205,000**

Arrivals in 2015 (as of 28 August)

**850%**

Increase in arrivals from January-August 2015, compared to same period in 2014

**142,700**

Syrian arrivals (as of 28 August)

**91%**

From the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Iraq (as of 28 August)

**3,000**

Average daily arrivals during August

**6%**

In comparison to sea arrivals applied for asylum in Greece from January – July 2015

**1,200**

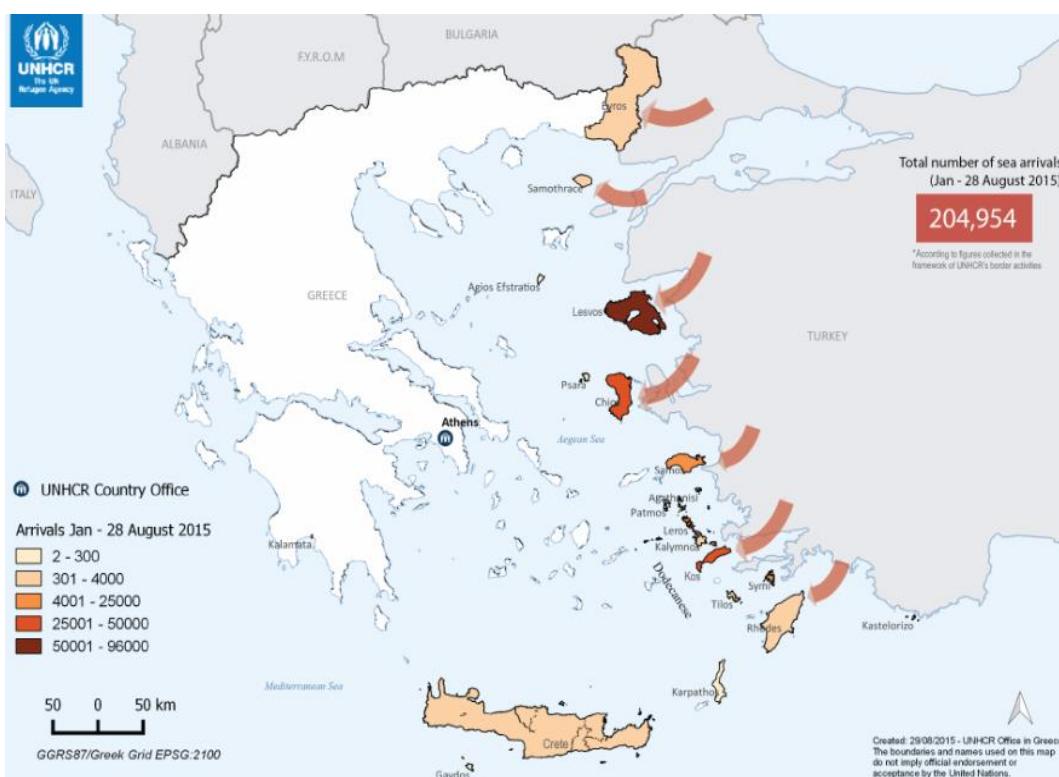
Asylum applications in Greece in July

#### PRIORITIES

- Assist the Government and civil society in responding to most urgent humanitarian and protection needs of refugees
- Support the Government to establish reception facilities for persons in need of international protection and adequately respond to register, receive and process asylum requests
- Enhance the coordination role of the Government, support the relocation plan by the EC and implementation of the hotspot approach in Greece

#### HIGHLIGHTS

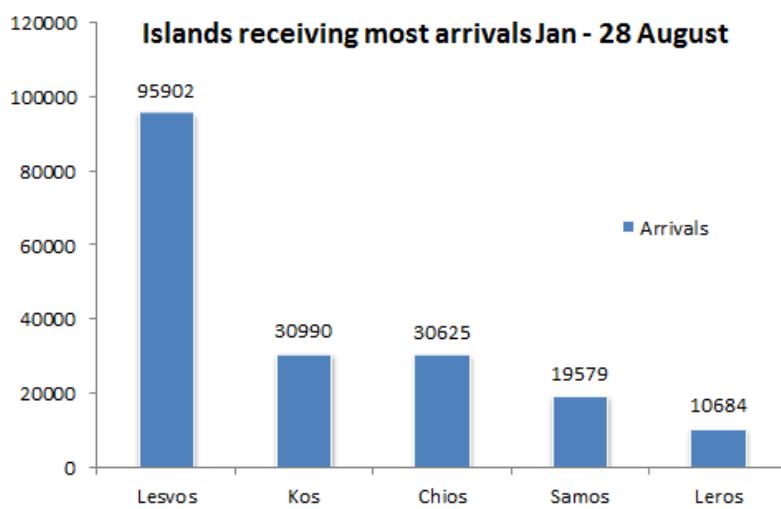
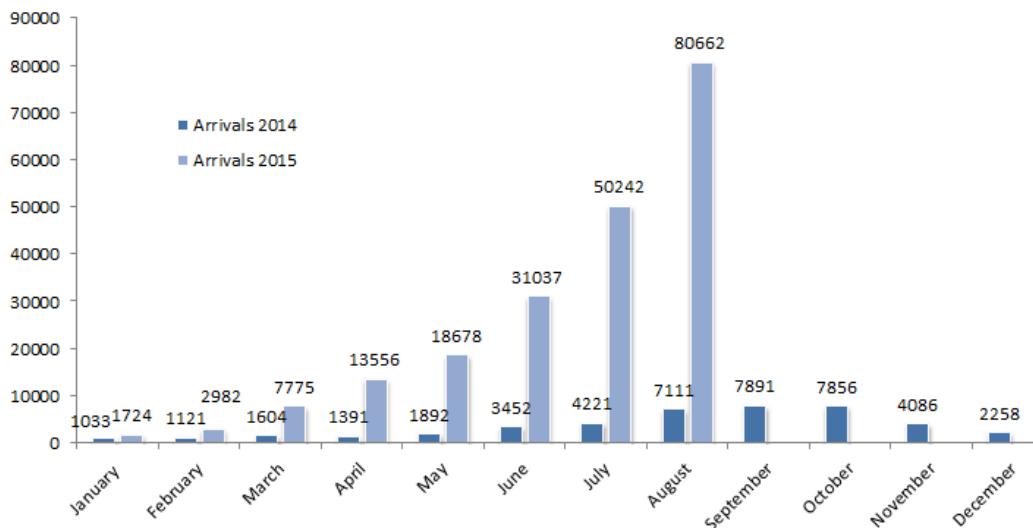
- Greece is facing an unprecedented refugee emergency with new record arrival numbers, whilst the congestion on the islands further increased. The reception infrastructure, services and registration procedures are falling far short of needs. On all main entry points, substandard conditions result in serious hygiene, health and protection risks.
- On 21 August, authorities of the former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia (fYRoM), temporarily stopped admitting refugees and migrants into their territories. Through collaboration of both border authorities, a system was established whereby border crossings take place in small groups, based on the availability of trains on the fYRoM side of the border. Due to increasing waiting times, on several occasions tensions escalated again. A transit centre will be opened early September.
- UNHCR currently has 20 protection/field staff positioned at key entry points and provides interpretation services through its implementing partner METAAction. In August over 17,300 persons benefitted from individual or group information sessions by UNHCR.
- A new “temporary accommodation site” was opened in Athens, with the capacity around 700 persons, offering essential services. UNHCR Site Planner closely assisted the Greek authorities by providing expert advice.
- As of late August, UNHCR provided Basic Relief Items including 2,700 sleeping mats, 6,890 sleeping bags and 2,250 hygiene kits, for distribution. 27,000 units of bottled water and 5,040 energy bars were made available to municipalities, local NGOs and volunteers.



## Operational Context

- Unprecedented numbers of new arrivals** – The Greek economic crisis had no impact on ongoing large-scale irregular movements from Turkey, in particular to the Northeastern Aegean and Dodecanese islands. The close proximity to Turkey means that sea crossings are comparatively less dangerous than the Central Mediterranean route, albeit loss of lives still occur. Enhanced

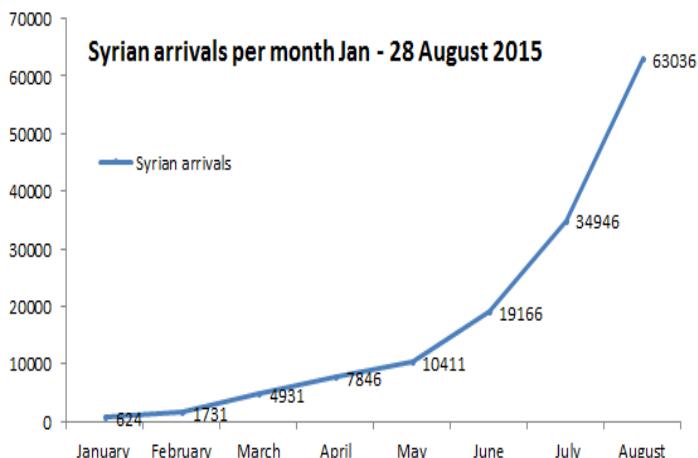
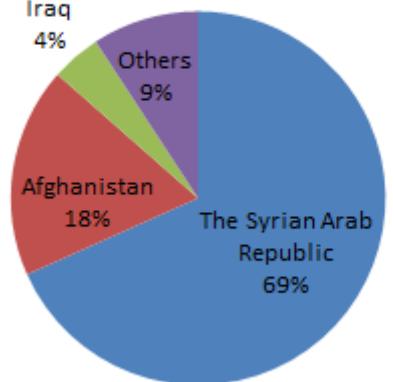
Search and Rescue operations by the Hellenic Coast Guard are ongoing on the route. New record arrival figures were observed on some islands, with the numbers of arrivals in some cases surpassing the total local population of the island. Greece is facing an 850% increase in arrivals from January - August 2015 compared to the same period in 2014. The trend of an accelerating increase is continuing. 40% of all sea arrivals in 2015 occurred in August, over 80,600. This is 30,000 more than in July and almost double the figure of the total arrivals in 2014 (43,500). Up-to-date arrival figures are available [here](#).



- Major congestion of the islands** – The increasing backlog in registration and the lack of availability of ferry tickets leads to major congestion of most islands receiving refugees and migrants, particularly on Lesvos, Kos, Chios, Samos and Leros. Average daily arrivals almost doubled from 1,600 in July to 2,900 in August. Lesvos has received the highest number of arrivals, almost half of the total in Greece, 96,000 in 2015 (as of 28 August) with 1,500 average arrivals per day. Over the last days of August, at least 12,000 refugees and migrants have been present on the island. On Kos, the average arrivals per day was 500 during August. Average daily arrivals on other islands in total was 1,000. Demonstrations sometimes amounting to clashes between the police and migrants occur on a regular basis, particularly on Kos and Lesvos. The deployment of special ferry services has led to temporary reductions of refugees and migrants present on some islands. However, the situation remains of concern due to high numbers of new arrivals and the lack of longer term solutions.

- Developments at the fYRoM border** – On 21 August, fYRoM authorities temporarily stopped admitting refugees and migrants into their territories. While hundreds of people gathered at the border, security forces used antiriot equipment causing some injuries. UNHCR appealed to the Governments involved to implement border management measures with humanity and in accordance with international obligations. Through good collaboration of both border authorities, a system was established whereby border crossings take place in small groups giving priority to vulnerable individuals, based on the availability of transport on the fYRoM side of the border. However, due to increasing waiting times, on several occasions tensions escalated in clashes and a surge of several hundreds of people crossed the border. The Paionia municipality is expecting to start construction of a transit centre close to the border early September.

- Profiling survey of Syrians** – The vast majority of arrivals in Greece are from countries in conflict, mainly the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by Afghanistan, and lower numbers of Iraqis. As of 28 August, 69% of all arrivals since the beginning of the year are Syrians and in July alone Syrians reached 78%. Interim results of an UNHCR survey targeting 670 Syrians entering Greece through land/sea borders, indicate that of the respondents:
  - 44% has children
  - 20% has one or more missing family members
  - 40% attended university education
  - 90% intends to apply for asylum in another country as Greece
  - 54% plans to apply for family reunification in country of asylum



- Opening of temporary accommodation site in Athens** – On 16 August the new Eleonas/Votanikos “temporary accommodation site” opened in Athens, where 90 prefabricated houses can accommodate up to 720 individuals, offering essential services. This is a positive development, provided that a series of issues related to its sustainability, including funding are adequately addressed. UNHCR has advocated for the development of this site and the UNHCR Site Planner has closely assisted the authorities by providing expert advice. UNHCR monitors conditions in the centre on a daily basis, which now operates at its maximum capacity. First inhabitants include around 200 people – mainly Afghan families – who had been sleeping rough in the park of Pedion Tou Areos in Athens.

## Achievements



### Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR currently has 20 protection/field staff positioned on key arrival points, including on Lesvos, Kos, Samos, Chios, Leros, Rhodes and the land border region. Protection teams are monitoring arrival processes and are meeting new arrivals in order to provide information on procedures, rights, responsibilities, and assistance. From January – August, 80,000 persons benefitted from individual or group information sessions by UNHCR, including over 17,300 in August. The teams also support local authorities in the profiling of the population in order to improve identification of vulnerabilities.
- UNHCR has deployed a team to Idomeni, at the fYRoM border which is assessing protection risks of people on the move. The team operates in close coordination with local authorities, NGOs and volunteer to address acute humanitarian needs.
- UNHCR increased the capacity of the interpretation service of its implementing partner METAction, which is providing support to the UNHCR teams and the authorities during processes. 19 interpreters are based on island locations and at the fYRoM border, covering two languages (Arabic; Farsi/Dari). An additional pool of interpreters for various languages is available in Athens, who can be deployed on mission on a needs-basis. With UNHCR funds, METAction is also providing interpretation in the Eleonas/Votanikos facility in Athens.

- As of the end of July, UNHCR provided through the services of METAction, escorts for the transfer of 195 unaccompanied children from arrival points to specialised facilities on the mainland, including 62 in July alone mainly from Afghanistan and Syria.
- UNHCR supported the coordination of registration processes for pending cases. UNHCR played a substantial role in crowd control, information provision and identification of vulnerable groups during the unpredictable registration processes.

### **Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps**

- Changing registration procedures, non-standardised assistance compounded by limited crowd management capacity continue to cause increased tensions and to raise security concerns. Urgent decongestion of the islands is a priority to defuse tension at local level and pressure on limited services.
- There is a need to set up systems to identify persons with specific needs particularly SGBV cases and traumatised individuals, during the registration process, as well as a need to develop an adequate referral process for such cases. Similarly, safety and security around reception centres and informal settlements should be strengthened to prevent violence, including SGBV incidents.



### **Emergency Assistance and Basic Relief Items**

#### **Achievements and Impact**

- As of late August, UNHCR has provided Basic Relief Items including 2,700 sleeping mats, 6,890 sleeping bags and 2,250 hygiene kits, for distribution at arrival points in 2015. More than 14,000 units of bottled water and 5,040 energy bars were made available to municipalities, local NGOs and volunteers for distribution.
- In late August, UNHCR has made available to its partner PRAKSIS, an emergency contingency stock of dry food items, water and basic medicines for distribution in Idomeni, at the fYRoM border. As of end August, more than 13,000 bottles of water were distributed by PRAKSIS and UNHCR teams in Idomeni.
- UNHCR supported targeted one-time assistance to particularly vulnerable individuals with acute needs. This assistance included travel tickets to reach support structures on the mainland, coverage of exceptional accommodation, wheelchairs, crutches and food.
- UNHCR has provided emergency temporary accommodation through its implementing partner PRAKSIS, for extremely vulnerable persons in Lesvos and in Athens from refugee producing countries. This enables them to fulfill all necessary administrative, social or medical procedures, in dignified conditions. Two apartments in Athens and one in Lesvos will be rented and appropriately equipped to host an estimated number of at least 56 extremely vulnerable individuals until the end of the year.
- On Lesvos, to address the challenge faced by arrivals having to walk up to 70 km to registration sites, UNHCR advocated to change the law so the transportation of undocumented people, under certain circumstances, is no longer criminalised. UNHCR also provided 3 buses to the Coast Guard to transport new arrivals to registration points.
- An UNHCR WASH Officer has been deployed to Lesvos and made a number of concrete recommendations to address imminent WASH needs.

### **Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps**

- There is a lack of basic reception conditions (shelter, water, food, sanitation) with serious hygiene, health and fire risks at all main entry points. Though a lot of effort is made to identify additional viable reception facilities and areas, they have so far not yielded results.
- Additional sanitary facilities are urgently needed, particularly toilets and a more effective waste management strategy.
- Current combined stocks of all actors of Basis Relief Items, fall short to address the needs of new arrivals.
- On Lesvos, given the increasing numbers of arrivals, transport options from arrival areas in the north to registration points in the south of the island, fall short of the needs – leading to increasing congestion also at arrival points.
- Significant WASH gaps are evident on all islands. On Kos, the municipality has closed all public toilets. UNHCR is exploring a voucher-scheme in cooperation with local hotels and restaurants. On other islands, some toilet/shower facilities are accessible to refugees and migrants, but cannot serve the large numbers of arrivals.



## Site Planning and Shelter

### Achievements and Impact

- The UNHCR Site Planner rendered daily expert advice to the Greek authorities in the construction of the Eleonas/Votanikos site.
- On Lesvos, tent settings in the informal settlement of Kara Tepe have been improved in line with UNHCR's recommendations. A master plan has been developed to improve the Moria informal settlement. Garbage bins have been installed.
- Site planning advice in close collaboration with the Paionia municipality, is ongoing for the transit centre at the fYRoM border.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- On Lesvos, there is a need to improve and rehabilitate existing registration and reception facilities. Discussions with authorities are ongoing.
- On other islands, notably Kos, Leros, Kalymnos, Simi and Tilos, there is an urgent need to identify suitable sites for registration and reception facilities. Discussions with authorities are ongoing.
- The police-run identification centres of Mersinidi on Chios and Vathy on Samos need urgent refurbishment and technical improvements to meet minimum standards.

## Working in partnership

- UNHCR's emergency assistance and protection services in Greece in the context of the Special Mediterranean Initiative, are delivered through implementing partners. This includes the Greek NGO METAction, which provides interpretation services and facilitates escorts of unaccompanied children from arrival points to specialised facilities on the mainland. UNHCR provides emergency food items, water and basic medicines as well as accommodation for extremely vulnerable individuals, through the Greek NGO PRAKSIS. Existing partnerships with two local NGOs, the Greek Council for Refugees and the Ecumenical Refugee Program of the Church of Greece, have recently been amended to include increased support for integration of recognized refugees and additional caseloads for family reunification under the Dublin procedures.
- On the islands and in the park in Athens, much of the response has been provided thanks to the solidarity of volunteers, community based organisations, and local NGOs, and in Athens, refugee communities play a key role.
- Additionally, UNHCR supports the government's coordination efforts by facilitation of an information sharing forum at Athens level. The forum brings together various NGOs and other organisations - reference is made to the 3W in the annex. A working group on Basic Relief Items is active and an Information Working Group will be initiated. On Lesvos, a local coordination groups is active, led by local authorities. On Kos, UNHCR brings together key humanitarian actors on a regular basis.

## Annex: 3W

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Links: [Arrival figures website](#) - [UNHCR Greece](#) - [Refugee stories](#) - [Facebook](#) – [Twitter](#)

# Who's Doing What Where? (Greek-Turkish borders, as of 26 August 2015)

