



NORTHERN GREECE – THESSALONIKI

FACTSHEET

1 – 31 December 2016

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

3,982

Accommodation places with services for relocation candidates/other asylum-seekers established by UNHCR in northern Greece by the end of December

160

Accommodation places for unaccompanied children established by UNHCR in northern Greece by the end of December

6,436

Asylum-seekers transported by UNHCR from northern, central and western Greece to Regional Asylum offices, embassies, medical facilities and cultural events in December

29,015

Non-food items (clothes, footwear, blankets, etc.) distributed by UNHCR in northern Greece as part of the winterization plans in December

436

Prefab houses provided/installed in Nea Kavala, Alexandria, Lagadikia, Diavata sites by UNHCR as part of the winterization plans by the end of December

124

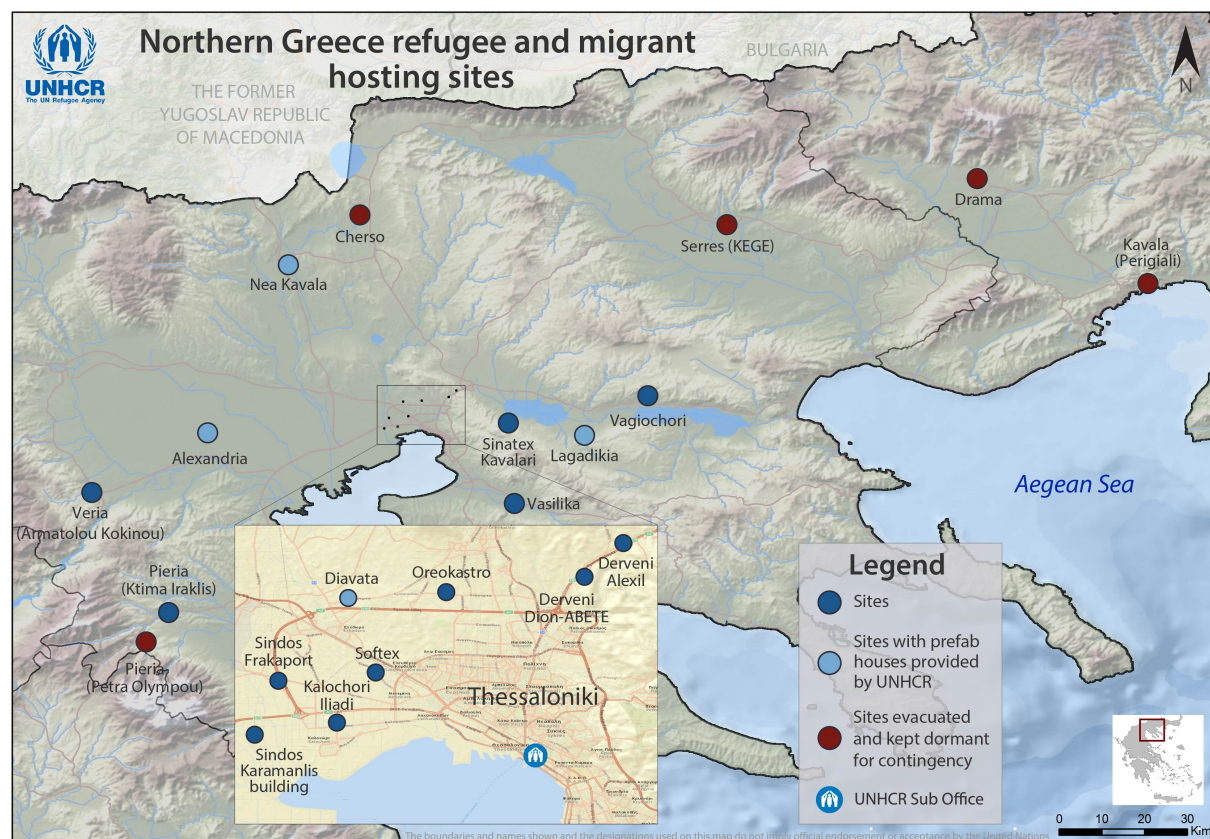
Water and Sanitation facilities (shower and toilet containers or chemical units) installed/maintained by UNHCR in northern Greece in December

13

Inter-agency coordination sectoral working groups established and chaired/co-chaired by UNHCR in northern Greece

104

National (84) and international (20) staff deployed to UNHCR Sub-Office Thessaloniki area of operations



OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

- UNHCR is active, through a variety of interventions, in **all 16 sites remaining open in northern Greece** (Macedonia and Thrace regions) and hosting over **6,762 asylum-seekers**. As suggested to the Greek authorities, UNHCR is providing **Site Management Support to four sites**: Nea Kavala, Alexandria, Lagadikia and Vasilika (the latter up to the full site evacuation for winter). In line with its protection mandate, UNHCR also provides **protection services and monitoring** in all sites. Furthermore, the organization continues to offer **some 4,000 accommodation places for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers in apartments, renovated buildings, host families and hotels**. UNHCR also facilitates the transfer of refugees to the accommodation facilities, and to appointments at the Regional Asylum offices in mainland Greece, for the full lodging of their asylum claims.
- In December, the situation in northern Greece was marked by **significant developments in the winter preparation plans**, funded by the [European Commission – Humanitarian Aid](#). Activities included installation of **prefabricated houses** in additional sites, provision of **heating solutions**, upgrade of the electrical infrastructure, installation of safety devices and trainings on fire hazard, and distribution of winter clothes and footwear. The month also saw the continuation of **evacuation activities coordinated by the Ministry of Migration Policy, UNHCR and IOM**, in Cherso, Serres, Drama and Kavala sites. Following the full evacuation of Petra Olympou in November, also Cherso was evacuated and site residents accommodated by UNHCR in hotels and apartments. In parallel, according to the authorities and IOM, the other three sites were temporarily evacuated in order to undertake winterization works that will last for a few months. Moreover, since the second half of December, UNHCR has been supporting the **evacuation/decongestion of prioritized warehouse sites** (Sindos/Frakaport, Sindos/Karamanlis, Kalochori/Iliadi, Oreokastro and Vasilika), in close collaboration with authorities and partners. Over 600 vulnerable asylum-seekers have been moved to accommodation in apartments and hotels provided by UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).
- Thanks to these improvements in the living conditions, as well as the start of the cash assistance program in several sites in northern Greece, an overall reduction in the amount of security related incidents was recorded in December.



UNHCR prefab houses are installed in Diavata site as part of the winterization plans © UNHCR / December 2016

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In northern Greece, the **inter-agency coordination structure** is led by the Ministry of Migration Policy (MOMP) and includes the following sectoral Working Groups (WG) meeting on a bi-weekly basis: **WASH WG** chaired by IRC; **Hygiene Promotion WG** chaired on rotation by different NGOs; **Protection WG** and its sub-working groups on **Legal Aid**, **Child Protection**, and **Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV)**, **Psychosocial Support (PSS) WG**, **Communication with Communities (CwC) WG**, and **Urban Response WG**, all chaired by UNHCR; **Health WG** chaired by the Ministry of Health (EKEPI) and co-chaired by UNHCR; **Site Management Support (SMS) WG** chaired by NRC; **Shelter/Non-food Items (NFI) WG** chaired by the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and **Education WG** chaired by Save the Children.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Protection

- Blue Dots – Child and Family Support Hubs.** In northern Greece, UNHCR and partners continued to keep operational four **“Blue Dots” Child and Family Support Hubs** in **Lagadikia, Diavata, Nea Kavala and Alexandria sites**. The site of Cherso was evacuated during December and therefore the actors offering services under the Blue Dot scheme were dispersed to other areas in northern Greece to assist where needs exist. The Blue Dot [project](#) was launched in February 2016 by UNHCR, UNICEF and ICRC, aiming to step up protection for the growing number of refugee children and women in Europe. The first Hubs were set up along the Balkan route with a view to provide safe spaces for vulnerable families on the move towards North Europe, and in particular for children, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their families. After the closure of the Balkan route, the Blue Dot Hubs address the refugee population remaining in countries that once were mainly transit points. The Hubs provide safe areas for children and their families, mother and baby spaces, playgrounds, protection, counselling and other vital services, all in a single and easily identifiable location. As with the accommodation in hotels and apartments the number of refugees increased in urban areas, a first **urban Blue Dot in Thessaloniki city, named “Blue Refugee Centre”**, was inaugurated by UNHCR’s partner Solidarity Now. Existing services include social and legal info point, info help line, gender focal point, informal educational activities, recreational activities, facilitation of seminars and focus group discussions. Planned services comprise medical corner with support to Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) cases, breastfeeding area, Internet corner/tea corner/reading area, vocational and language courses.



In collaboration with authorities and IOM, UNHCR staff assists asylum-seekers from Kavala site to move to alternative accommodation provided by IOM © UNHCR / December 2016

■ **Child protection.** Under the framework of the Blue Dots, UNHCR continues to actively promote and develop alternatives for care arrangements and alternatives to detention for unaccompanied or separated children (UASC). An interim solution was identified in the establishment of Safe Spaces for UASC at adequate sites. Minimum standards for the Safe Spaces, including the need to set up the space in the proximity of the site management, to provide continuous guardianship and services, etc. were developed by UNHCR and NGO partners at the national Child Protection Sub-Working Group. These were endorsed by the Greek authorities. In northern Greece, during December, the **Safe Space in Diavata remained active**. The UASC from the Safe Space of Alexandria were moved to accommodation facilities by IRC in early December, while preparation for winter was ongoing at the site. In Lagadikia, UNHCR's partner Arsis, in coordination with the Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), has moved all UASC who used to live at the Safe Space in the site to shelters in urban settings in October. Currently there are eight UASC, who spontaneously arrived at the site in November-December, who are staying in prefab houses with foster families, and they have custodians from METAdrasi who are visiting regularly. The Ministry of Migration Policy expressed the intention to create more safe zones and joint assessments with NGOs of the Child Protection sub-working group and UNHCR are being conducted across Greece in order to identify the most suitable sites in terms of safety, presence of actors offering services and proper living conditions. While pursuing immediate and mid-term solutions for unaccompanied children, UNHCR further strengthened its efforts to identify shelters as a longer-term solution. Through its partners Arsis and Praksis, as of the end of December, UNHCR continued to provide in northern Greece **160 places for unaccompanied children in five transit or longer-term shelters**, currently accommodating over 120 boys and girls between five and 18 years old.

- **Protection monitoring.** The UNHCR field team conducted a monitoring visit to the Doirani Police station, located near the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM). UNHCR **regularly monitors conditions of detention** and advocates with the authorities for ensuring that all third-country nationals expressing the wish to apply for asylum may do so.
- **Support to accommodation capacity for asylum-seekers and alternatives to camps.** In support of the Greek authorities' efforts to expand reception capacity and in line with its policy avoiding camps as the situation improves, UNHCR continues to identify new accommodation places for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers, thanks to funding by the [European Commission – Migration and Home](#). In northern Greece, UNHCR established **3,982 accommodation places** by the end of December in **flats, hotels, apartment buildings, and host families**, located throughout **12 different municipalities**, including Thessaloniki, Kilkis, Katerini, and Volvi among others. The places are **expected to increase to some 4,500** in the next months. The project is implemented by UNHCR in partnership with the Municipality of Thessaloniki, and NGOs Praksis, Arsis, Solidarity Now, Iliaktida and Catholic Relief Service (CRS). In December, UNHCR also continued to **support the Government's winterization plans by facilitating the transfer of asylum-seekers from the sites to more appropriate and dignified accommodation**, directly or by providing assistance to the authorities and other humanitarian actors. UNHCR and IOM assisted the Ministry of Migration Policy to transfer all asylum-seekers from **Cherso** to Koutsochero site, in Larissa, and to accommodation places established by UNHCR in Lamia, Porto Heli and Giannitsa areas. All asylum-seekers from **Serres** were moved to 26 prefab houses installed by UNHCR in Alexandria, and to hotel accommodation in Vrasna provided by IOM. UNHCR and IOM facilitated the transfer of 20 vulnerable asylum-seekers from **Diavata** to alternative accommodation in Preveza and assisted the NGO Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland (ASB) in moving 62 asylum-seekers from Diavata to Koutsochero. UNHCR also supported the Ministry of Migration Policy and IOM to evacuate the sites of **Drama and Kavala**, from where a total of 417 asylum-seekers were transferred to hotel accommodation provided by IOM in Serres, Vrasna, and the Municipality of Volvi. Since 21 December, in agreement with the authorities, UNHCR is also supporting the **evacuation/decongestion of prioritized warehouse sites** (Sindos/Frakaport, Sindos/Karamanlis, Kalochori/Iliadi, Oreokastro and Vasilika). Until the end of the month, UNHCR identified a total of 728 asylum-seekers for priority evacuation from the sites, on the basis of three criteria: fully registered for relocation, length of stay at the site and vulnerability. By the end of December, **300 asylum-seekers were moved to accommodation provided by UNHCR and its partners**, while the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) accommodated over 300 in hotels and apartments rented by this NGO.
- **Communication with Communities (CwC).** In December, UNHCR continued to promote effective CwC at the sites in northern Greece, particularly in relation to the mitigation of fire risks associated with the use of gas and kerosene heaters. UNHCR and the Greek Fire Brigades provided **fire safety equipment, training and information materials in Vasilika, Nea Kavala, Lagadikia and Alexandria sites**. Training on the proper use of fire extinguishers and fire blankets was provided to focal points nominated by the refugee community, including men, women and



Awareness material displayed on prefab houses in Alexandria site and fire safety training conducted in Lagadikia site by the Greek Fire Brigades, in collaboration with UNHCR, for refugee men, women and children © UNHCR / December 2016

young people. The training was done in conjunction with dissemination of awareness material in Arabic, Farsi, English and Greek, on fire hazard, carbon monoxide poisoning and the correct use of heaters. UNHCR also completed installation of additional information billboards in Kalochori/Iliadi and Alexandria sites to display important information material and explain roles and responsibilities of the different actors that work in the sites. Furthermore, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Swiss Embassy in Athens and the Greek NGOs METAdrasi and Society for the Development and Creative Occupation of Children (EADAP), developed a **mini-lexicon to facilitate basic communication between refugees, migrants, and service providers** at all sites in Greece. The tool is based on the most recurrent questions/phrases/terms recorded during daily exchanges between refugees/migrants and service providers (site managers, NGOs, etc.). It also builds on other two mini-lexica for health and education, previously developed by the Swiss Embassy and EADAP and already in use. Over 6,000 copies of the mini-lexicon in Arabic, Farsi, Kurmanji, Sorani, Urdu and French will be distributed to asylum-seekers in northern Greece during February 2017.

Education

- **Formal education.** UNHCR continued to support the Education Program implemented by the Ministry of Education. As of December, according to IOM, which is providing transport from sites to schools, **102 refugee children living at Lagadikia and Derveni Dion-ABETE sites attend local schools** (72 children going to primary schools, and 30 to secondary schools). Refugee children in Drama and Serres sites used to attend school as well, until the sites have been temporarily closed for winter and the population moved to hotel accommodation provided by IOM. According to the Ministry of Education, more children residing at other sites in northern Greece will have access to formal education in January and February 2017.
- **Informal education.** To complement efforts to integrate refugee children into the public school system, UNHCR and partners continued to conduct informal education activities (**community-based schools, language classes**, etc.) within the framework of the Blue Dots. In December, the representatives of the Ministry of Education brought a group of 31 children from **Lagadikia** and 15 children from **Vasilika** to attend a puppet and a mime show respectively, at the Music Hall of Thessaloniki. UNHCR's partner Save the Children organized a music concert at Vasilika, where local and refugee musicians played together and entertained the community. In **Nea Kavala**, Save the Children continued to provide informal education/recreational activities at the site, taking place at a large container space comprising two classrooms and one child-friendly space. On average, over 80 children are involved. The NGO also organizes activities with children above 10 years old, including common activities for girls and boys, as well as others specifically targeting girls (pilates, beauty sessions, knitting, etc.). In **Alexandria**, Greek class for women is being rolled out by IRC. In **Veria**, NRC successfully started an informal education program with 50 children (ages 6-15) being taught Arabic, Science, Art and English. English classes are available also for adults. Solidarity Now provides informal education/recreational activities for children at the hotel hosting refugees previously living in Drama site, in Serres area. Save the Children started a similar project for refugee children formerly living in Serres site and now residing in hotel in Vrasna area.

Health

- UNHCR, through its partner MdM, donated **ultrasound equipment to the Family Planning Unit of Ippokrateio Hospital in Thessaloniki** in the framework of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the three parties, which will be signed in January 2017. UNHCR also donated wheelchairs previously used by asylum-seekers in Petra Olympus site, which was fully evacuated in November, to local hospitals to benefit the host communities.

Food Security and Nutrition

- An **industrial kitchen in Alexandria site** was inaugurated on 25 December. For the first time, asylum-seeker chef and volunteers from the refugee community cooked dinner in the kitchen for which equipment was provided by the volunteer group Refugee Support. One meal in the afternoon, six days a week, is now being prepared by a refugee team with the assistance and supervision of volunteers, and served to the site population. To complement these efforts, UNHCR plans to install hot plates in each prefab house for individual/family cooking.



Shelter improvement realized by the asylum-seekers at Alexandria site, thanks to material and tools provided by UNHCR and coordinated by a very skilled community carpenter © UNHCR / December 2016

Shelter and Non-Food Items

- **Shelter, heating and infrastructure upgrading.** UNHCR finalized the **installation of prefabricated housing units** in the sites in northern Greece that the government had assigned for winterization to the Agency, and at the same time continued to complement efforts by other humanitarian actors and authorities in other sites. From early October to the end of December, UNHCR completed the installation of **436 prefab houses in Nea Kavala, Alexandria, Lagadikia and Diavata, providing a roof to over 2,100 asylum-seekers**. In **Alexandria**, following the set-up of 80 prefab houses in November, **26 additional units were installed in December** to accommodate asylum-seekers being evacuated from tented sites. An initiative that was very welcome by more than 400 asylum-seekers in Alexandria site was the distribution of **shelter material and tools** by

UNHCR to empower them to independently upgrade their shelter. Pending the upgrade of the public power systems of the two sites for which the Army assumed responsibility, UNHCR's partner DRC completed the installation of a generator and electric cable wiring for all prefab houses in both Alexandria and Nea Kavala. Thanks to this temporary power supply, the site residents of these two sites have safe electricity in their prefab houses and can use the air-conditioners for heating. In **Nea Kavala**, UNHCR also installed **five solar light poles**. In **Lagadikia**, UNHCR, in partnership with DRC, the Ministry of Migration Policy, the Army and the Police, set up a total of **60 two-room prefab houses, which are housing some 270 asylum-seekers**. Authorities completed the upgrade of the electrical system and all prefab houses have access to heating through individual air-conditioning system. In **Vasilika** warehouse site, UNHCR, through its partner International Medical Corps (IMC), completed the installation of plastic curtains for the hanger doors, as well as the roadside permanent fencing works. Temporary electrification of the hangars started on 22 December thanks to collaboration with ASB. In **Diavata**, to complement winterization efforts by the responsible NGO ASB, UNHCR installed **96 prefab houses, allowing the whole population of the site to move from tents into prefab houses**. UNHCR also completed fencing works for the office area in Softex and the installation of a playground for children in Oreokastro. To ensure heating while the aforementioned electrification works by DRC were carried out, UNHCR distributed a total of **175 kerosene heaters in Nea Kavala** through its partner Samaritan's Purse. Samaritan's Purse also distributed 18-liter jerry cans of fuel to each prefab house, which is replenished every three days, with the extra provision of a 6-liter jerry can per household. UNHCR, through DRC, also provided **69 electric heaters** to Lagadikia to be used in the prefab houses. UNHCR delivered **256 fire blankets** to Nea Kavala (70), Alexandria (106) and Lagadikia (80), and **39 dry powder extinguishers** (6-kg each) for every fourth prefab house in **Alexandria**. Through Samaritan's Purse, UNHCR also installed **183 carbon monoxide detectors** to Nea Kavala (120) and Alexandria (57), and **180 smoke detectors** in each prefab house in Nea Kavala. All equipment was provided as part of comprehensive measures to address safety concerns regarding fire and heating, in addition to trainings.



"Our lives changed dramatically after receiving the heaters! Before, we used to burn plastic and anything else we could find to warm up at least a little bit" said Manaa Al Hussein, father of 43 years old from Syria, now living in a UNHCR prefab house in Nea Kavala site © UNHCR / December 2016



Happy asylum-seeker mother and daughter at Nea Kavala site wearing hats and scarves donated to UNHCR by ZARA © UNHCR / December 2016

■ **Non-food items.** In December, UNHCR complemented the winter non-food items (NFI) distribution that had been conducted in all sites in October-November by distributing **winter clothing and footwear donated by ZARA**. Over **17,770 items (such as jackets, blouses, trousers and boots among others)** were provided in five sites in northern Greece, including **Veria, Alexandria, Vasilika, Sindos/Frakaport, and Nea Kavala**, through UNHCR's partner Samaritan's Purse. In Alexandria, the clothes were handed over to the volunteer group Refugee Support for distribution through the kiosk system already in place. In Nea Kavala, the clothes were distributed through the community free shop set up and run by the volunteer group Drop in the Ocean. This system allowed asylum-seekers to choose and try on their items in a dignifying and relaxed manner, together with their families, which was appreciated by the population at the site. Besides winter clothing, UNHCR also distributed additional NFIs, such as thermal blankets (2,693), hygiene items (2,325) and portable solar lights (350). **In total, 29,015 NFIs were provided to asylum-seekers in northern Greece sites during December.**

Water and Sanitation

- In December, UNHCR continued to provide **WASH improvements and maintenance** directly and through its partners in northern Greece. In **Vasilika**, through its partner IMC, UNHCR completed the construction works of two shelters for the water tanks and the boilers. Furthermore, it set up two shades above the entrance doors, filled two trenches with gravel at "hangar 5 and 6", insulated the water pipes and repaired the broken pipes and taps. Also through IMC, UNHCR ensured payment for the rental and cleaning of **45 chemical toilets, one disabled toilet and 30 portable showers**, and desludging of eight septic tanks every three days. In **Vagiochori**, UNHCR ensured the payment for the transportation of **two shower containers (for a total of twelve showers)** and the material required to connect them with the water supply and sewage. In **Nea Kavala**, UNHCR ensured the payment for rental and cleaning of **20 chemical toilets**. Through its partner Samaritan's Purse, it also provided maintenance and cleaning of **16 WASH containers** three times a day, installation of four generators at boilers 1.5KWatt each, regular water chlorination and tests on water quality, desludging of all septic tanks, maintenance and de-clogging of six laundry stations and taps, maintenance of pumps, repairing of broken pipes and taps, and hygiene promotion activities.

Site Management Support (SMS)

- UNHCR conducted a **Code of Conduct (CoC) training for humanitarian actors in Nea Kavala**. The discussion was constructive and all partners were willing to participate. In particular, the Site Manager from the Army shared his feedback and inputs on the draft CoC document, and asked UNHCR to translate the final version in Greek, in order to make it easily understandable to all actors and Greek authorities working at the site. UNHCR's Site Management Support Capacity Building Officer, in collaboration with DRC, conducted

SMS training to 21 staff from UNHCR and partners on 14 December in Thessaloniki. It was the second part of a comprehensive training package, which will end with a “training of trainers” for the local and central authorities, in Greek language.



Young asylum-seekers at Alexandria site enjoy a Christmas show organized by UNHCR as part of the community-based interventions for the festive season © UNHCR / December 2016



An asylum-seeker woman in Vasilika site smiles after choosing her gift at the free shop set up by UNHCR as part of the community-based interventions for the festive season © UNHCR / December 2016

Cash Assistance

The month of December was positively marked by the **implementation of the cash assistance program** in several sites in northern Greece. UNHCR's partner CRS/Caritas, together with IRC and IFRC, conducted mass information sessions with the refugee communities and completed card registration in **Lagadikia, Alexandria, Vasilika, Softex, Oreokastro, Sindos/Frakaport, Sinatex-Kavalari, Kalochori/Iliadi and Derveni** sites. The first cash amounts were loaded on the cards during the last week of December 2016. So far, **over 7,000 asylum-seekers have been registered and provided with debit cards** by all cash actors, for cash withdrawal at ATM machines or direct payment at shops. Through its partner CRS/Caritas, **UNHCR provides cash assistance to over 1,800 asylum-seekers**, at Lagadikia (654), Vasilika (388), Sinatex-Kavalari (252), Derveni-Alexil (399) and Derveni/Dion-ABETE (187). CRS/Caritas partner is providing constant assistance to solve any expected glitches and hiccups or issues around the distribution and use of cash cards. The cash assistance program will progressively be expanded, as agreed with the Greek authorities, in order to cover all sites in northern Greece. UNHCR and partners will also be providing cash/voucher assistance to **all asylum-seekers living in apartments, hotels and other buildings under UNHCR's accommodation scheme in northern Greece from February 2017**.

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

Community-based interventions. UNHCR continued to support community-based interventions in several sites in northern Greece, aimed at encouraging refugees and asylum-seekers' participation in the day-to-day activities at each site, for empowering them and reducing the level of frustration in the population. In December, UNHCR and partners organized **28 community-based interventions to celebrate the**

season's festivities in northern Greece, benefiting some 5,000 asylum-seekers. At many sites, Christmas celebrations with the **presentation of gifts** to children and adults were held. At other sites, asylum-seekers were transported to **Christmas village markets** in nearby towns, thus allowing exchanges with the host communities and sharing of festive customs. In **Lagadikia**, UNHCR supported interaction between the host and refugee communities, through a joint lit-up of a Christmas tree donated to Lagadikia village. At the event, UNHCR gave presents to all the children, and afterwards everybody gathered at the community cultural centre for treats and music. UNHCR and its partners DRC and MdM also escorted refugee children to the local Primary School to attend Christmas celebrations. UNHCR donated two CD players to the school and distributed UNHCR bookmarks to all students. In collaboration with DRC, UNHCR also provided a laptop and assisted the group of 15 asylum-seekers who call themselves “Lagadikia Band” to produce short films about everyday life in the site, people's fears and expectations, using their mobile phones. Finally, UNHCR in coordination with MdM, provided a wide variety of beauty items for creating a “beauty saloon” in the site for women's engagement. In **Vasilika**, UNHCR set up a free shop where the residents could choose as Christmas token various gift bags (including beauty and hair products for male and female, scarfs and gloves for male, toys for children, adult board games, etc.). UNHCR also distributed various board games for adults like chess, backgammon, jenga, etc. and provided equipment for the child friendly space, the mother-baby area and the recreational area for vulnerable asylum-seekers, including two Refugee Housing Units, baby devices, and a CD player. In **Alexandria and Veria**, UNHCR and partners organized festivities for children, including a puppet show, decoration of a Christmas tree, and distribution of toys and traditional Greek Christmas sweets. In **Nea Kavala**, UNHCR's partner Save the Children facilitated excursions of 90 children to the Christmas Village in Kilkis, and UNHCR distributed traditional Greek Christmas sweets to the whole population at the site. UNHCR also supported transportation of over 200 asylum-seekers accommodated in the **urban areas and Pieria (Ktima Iraklis)** site to visit the Christmas Market in Katerini, organized by the local community. Activities at the market included screening of videos, painting and handcraft workshops, games for children and adults, and presentation of gifts for all children. UNHCR provided 500 toys, sweets and juices in support of the event. In **Diavata**, UNHCR purchased items



Asylum-seeker children from Pieria (Ktima Iraklis) site play at Katerini Christmas Market, at a trip organized by UNHCR as part of the community-based interventions for the festive season © UNHCR / December 2016



Asylum-seeker children from Oreokastro site attend a road safety training/game organized by UNHCR and the Traffic Police at the White Tower of Thessaloniki © UNHCR / December 2016

for a beauty salon and board games for adults. In **Kalochori/Iliadi**, UNHCR set up a free shop with Christmas gifts for children and adults, donated a satellite dish, a 43" TV, chairs and tables for the multifunctional area for recreational activities. With the support of the Municipality of Thessaloniki and UNHCR's partner Solidarity Now, UNHCR also organized an exhibition of wooden creations by a carpenter and drawings from a painter from the refugee community, at the Thessaloniki Christmas Village at Aristotelous Square. . In **Softex**, UNHCR in collaboration with Intervolve provided beauty items to female asylum-seekers for creating a "beauty salon" at the site, and distributed various board games for the community cultural centre. In **Sindos/Karamanlis**, UNHCR provided barber equipment (scissors, combs, fire water for sterilization, broom, 10 barber sheets) to a talented asylum-seeker who provides classes and offers free haircuts to the male population at the site. In **Derveni**, beauty salon items and board games were also distributed. Furthermore, UNHCR facilitated a visit of children from **Sindos/Frakaport** to the 13th Thessaloniki High School to attend a Christmas celebration, and, in collaboration with Solidarity Now, organized a visit by 30 teenagers of **Sinatex-Kavalari** site to the Thessaloniki Christmas Village. The trip included recreational activities such as face painting, creative construction of musical instruments, Christmas market, live music concerts, and a walk by the sea. With Solidarity Now, UNHCR also supported asylum-seekers from the urban area and sites to sell their creations at a kiosk at the Thessaloniki Christmas Village. Finally, on 30 December, UNHCR and the Traffic Police organized an **event on road safety** for 25 children from **Oreokastro** site, at the White Tower of Thessaloniki.



Young asylum-seekers from Alexandria and Kalochori/Iliadi sites play football at the final tournament game organized by UNHCR as part of the community-based interventions © UNHCR / December 2016

In addition to the festive season-related activities, UNHCR also supported Terre des Hommes in organizing a **football tournament for asylum-seekers**, divided by teams according to the site of residence. Terre des Hommes provided transportation, lunch boxes, uniforms and athletic shoes, as well as medals and some prizes for winners (Greek-Arabic dictionary). UNHCR organized the medical examinations for the football players, in collaboration with the mobile team of Praxis, and escorted them to the pitch. The final match, disputed between Alexandria and Kalochori/Iliadi teams, ended with the winning of the Kalochori/Iliadi team. Through its partner Solidarity Now, UNHCR has also established the "**Thessaloniki Community Centre**" (in Ptolemon Street), which refugees, migrants and local people in need of services can approach. Over 100 people were received at the front desk in December and provided with basic services, including psychosocial support, legal aid/counselling, health care by the medical NGO MdM located in the same building, one communal activity per day at 17:00 h targeting different groups (children, mothers, teenagers, youth, etc.), and distribution of in-kind donations received by Solidarity Now (baby clothing, shoes, winter clothing, snacks).

Logistics

- UNHCR continued to **support the process of full registration of asylum-seekers** conducted by the Asylum Service **through the provision of countrywide transportation from sites to the Asylum Service offices and back**. In December, **UNHCR Thessaloniki's Transportation Team** has facilitated transportation of **4,172 asylum-seekers from the sites in northern, central and western Greece to the Regional Asylum Office** in Thessaloniki (1,988), Alexandroupoli (694) and Athens (1,490), and of **127 asylum-seekers to different embassies** for interviews related to family reunification and relocation. UNHCR also continued to provide **transport for relocation candidates and other vulnerable asylum-seekers entering UNHCR accommodation scheme assisting 1,448 people** in December to move from the sites to more dignified accommodation in apartments, hotels or other buildings. In December, UNHCR Thessaloniki Transportation Team provided **transportation for 196 non-emergency medical cases** from sites and accommodation facilities to hospitals and medical clinics. Transportation was likewise ensured for **493 asylum-seekers to attend events and cultural initiatives**, organized in collaboration with the local authorities and partners. Cumulatively, UNHCR Thessaloniki Transportation Team **between September and December 2016 has provided a total of 22,434 asylum-seekers with transportation**.

GAPS, CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

- The administrative treatment of third-country nationals who arrived in Greece after 20 March 2016 and reach the north of the country, either from Evros land border or from the Aegean islands, remains unclear. Some of them have not yet lodged their asylum application and are not registered in the sites, and therefore cannot be included in the cash program or other types of assistance programs. UNHCR provides legal counselling about the asylum procedures in Greece to such cases in order to ensure that all third-country nationals can take an informed decision, and is advocating with the Greek authorities to clarify their administrative treatment and options.
- Where the installation of heating systems/upgrading of electric network and infrastructures by the Army and NGOs was delayed, discontent remains high. This is especially the case of the warehouse sites in Thessaloniki area (Sindos/Karamanlis, Sindos/Frakaport, Kalochori/Iliadi, Softex, Oreokastro, Derveni, and Sinatex-Kavalari). UNHCR continues to liaise with partners to fill gaps and find solutions, including referrals to alternative accommodation. Frustrations of those who are not yet accommodated in flats, apartment buildings or hotels are increasing as they see others moving out of the sites. UNHCR counsels asylum-seekers on the process and criteria of the accommodation scheme implemented by UNHCR and partners. Meanwhile, the speeded evacuation of the warehouse

sites has also resulted in a fast transition from camp-type to urban environment. Monitoring of the new accommodation spaces and assuring the peaceful coexistence with the host communities are arising as the main challenges of 2017, together with legal aid.

- In some sites, such as Oreokastro and Kalochori/Iliadi, the cash program has created a pull factor. Some asylum-seekers who are living in apartments, out of their own means or with the support of volunteers, or are residing in other sites have been arriving on site asking to be registered for the cash assistance. Site Managers from the authorities, humanitarian organizations providing cash and UNHCR continue to explain that the cash program would be progressively implemented and cash cards provided to asylum-seekers in all sites and urban areas, so there is no reason to move. It is hoped that as information sessions continue, this issue will be addressed.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- UNHCR Sub-Office Thessaloniki provides protection and assistance to persons of concern directly and through **14 implementing partners**: Arsis, CRS, DRC, Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Iliaktida, IMC, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Intersos, MdM, METAdrasi, Praxis, Samaritan's Purse, Save the Children, and Solidarity Now. UNHCR also has a **successful partnership with the Municipality of Thessaloniki** and regularly liaises with the other local municipalities.

MISSIONS AND EVENTS

- In December, UNHCR continued to support the participation of 25 refugee children (aged 14 to 18) from several sites to the **photography/documentary seminar** hosted by the **Thessaloniki Film School**. On 10 December, the seminar session was enriched by the screening of the videos made by the young refugees and the participation of the **renowned British musician Brian Farrow**, who played for the children.



Renowned British musician Brian Farrow joined the photography/documentary workshop for refugee children titled "Life through the eyes of the others", organized at the Thessaloniki Film School, in collaboration with UNHCR © UNHCR / December 2016

Contacts:

Liene Veide, Communication/Public Information Officer, UNHCR Thessaloniki, veide@unhcr.org, Tel: +30 69 45 720301

Carlotta Wolf, Associate External Relations Officer, UNHCR Thessaloniki, wolf@unhcr.org, Tel: +30 69 55 580911

Skerlida Agolli, Senior Information Management Assistant, UNHCR Thessaloniki, agolli@unhcr.org, Tel: +30 69 55 194972

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