



HIGHLIGHTS

29,668

Estimated number of arrivals on Islands since the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement

1,526

Number of arrivals on the Islands in March 2017

25,487

Number of expressions of will to seek asylum in Greece since 20 March 2016

1,882

Asylum-seekers transferred from the islands to improved accommodation on the mainland in state-run sites or UNHCR accommodation

Population on the Islands

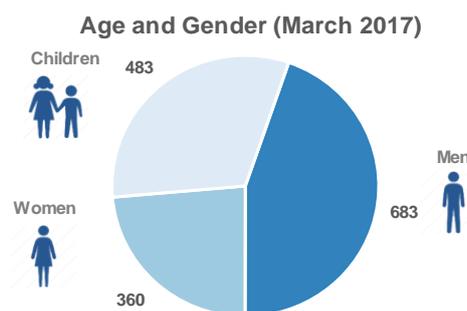
Some **13,915** estimated on the Aegean Islands

March 2017	Arrivals	%	Population
Lesvos	336	22%	4,387
Chios	825	54%	3,607
Samos	248	16%	1,982
Kos	36	2%	2,392
Leros	47	3%	927
Rhodes	5	0%	620
Other	29	2%	
Total	1526	100%	13,915

Source: Hellenic Police/Coordination Centre for the Management of the Refugee Crisis

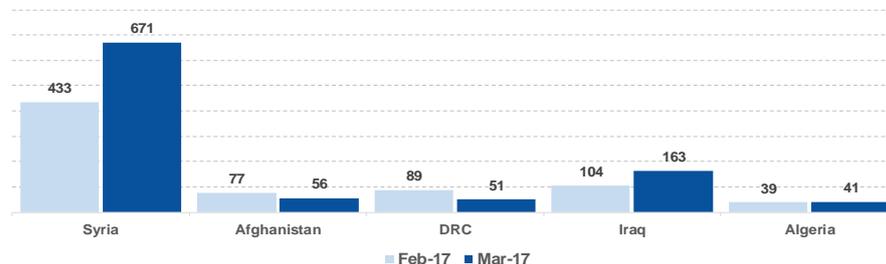
Funding

USD 246 million requested



Source: Hellenic Police.

Most common nationalities of arrivals in Greece



Source: Hellenic Police.

UNHCR Presence

79 national and **16** international **39** affiliated workforce and **11** staff of which deployed to support authorities

1 Islands Unit based in Athens
6 Islands offices (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos, Rhodes)

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

The Aegean islands have been at the forefront of the 2015/2016 European Refugee Emergency with over 1 million people arriving in total, the vast majority from refugee producing countries. Before 20 March 2016, the population was transient, with arrivals remaining on the islands for a limited time, sometimes hours or a few days, before continuing their journey. The situation changed after the closure of the so-called ‘Balkans route’ and the implementation of the Joint EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. Arrivals decreased significantly, the length of stay on the island increased, and the needs of the refugee and migrant populations on the islands changed, especially for people and families with specific needs.

Currently, according to the authorities some 7,510 people are hosted in sites on the Aegean islands. UNHCR estimates that the number of asylum seekers and migrants on the islands is lower. In addition, some 977 are accommodated in urban facilities run by UNHCR and funded by the European Commission. The Greek government, supported by UNHCR and the broader humanitarian community, has made positive steps in improving conditions and services at the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on **Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Leros**.

The situation on the islands has generally improved, but challenges with overcrowding and insecurity remain, and sub-standard conditions must still be improved. Protection risks for people staying on the islands continue, particularly the risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Children, including unaccompanied children, remain in inadequate shelter with inadequate access to specific services and non-sufficient access to formal or non-formal education, which also severely impacts their psychosocial well-being. Some sites lack regular access to essential services, such as psychosocial counselling, healthcare, and interpretation.

Months after their arrival on the Greek islands many asylum-seekers are still waiting for the full registration and processing of their asylum claims. Discriminatory practices, which delay the registration of claims of some nationalities (such as Afghans and Iraqis), are not in line with EU and Greek standards. A comprehensive plan is needed for the strengthening of the institutions allowing for the rapid full registration and processing of asylum claims in accordance with the requirements of the Asylum Procedures Directive (APD) and Greek law. On **Samos**, 25 people of different nationalities, gender, and age remained in Vathy RIC, despite having arrived in March 2016. Three of them were recognised refugees and the others were asylum-seekers who registered their claims at least six months ago. In addition, there are eight unaccompanied boys who have remained in Vathy RIC for more than six months.

Coordination gaps also remain and the Greek Government, the Ministry of Migration Policy (MoMP) in particular, should establish clear coordination structures with all humanitarian stakeholders to ensure a coherent and efficient response where gaps are addressed, overlap avoided, and resources optimized.

UNHCR’s role in Greece focuses on working with the Government, non-governmental and other organizations, volunteer networks and communities to ensure the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in Greece. UNHCR advocates for the improvement of policies and services that affect the lives of refugees. UNHCR supports the Government to improve the process through which people can apply for asylum and access rights.

Where necessary, UNHCR helps the Government to fulfil the basic needs of asylum-seekers and refugees. In some cases, UNHCR provides support when there are gaps related to shelter, water, sanitation, food, basic household items, health, education, information provision, coordination and site management. UNHCR does this either directly or by working with partners. UNHCR’s role varies from location to location, depending on the identified needs and partnerships.

UNHCR assists asylum-seekers by connecting them with partners who can provide social and legal advice and representation.

UNHCR also provides support to government officials, the staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others to enhance their capacity to understand and respond to the needs of refugees.



UNHCR provides blankets to newly arrived Afghan refugees on Lesvos. © UNHCR/A. Zavallis, December 2015.

AEGEAN ISLANDS RESPONSE

Protection

- Border procedures.** Despite fewer people traveling to the Aegean islands, UNHCR and its partners maintain shoreline support to new arrivals, in line with its protection mandate. Since the implementation of EU-Turkey Statement, UNHCR also monitors readmissions to Turkey, from the pre-removal stage to the departures at the ports. Between 20 March 2016 and 31 March 2017, 45 persons have been readmitted to Turkey under the provisions of the EU-Turkey Statement. On **Kos**, a pre-removal detention centre has started operating since 30 March 2017.
- Monitoring.** UNHCR undertakes protection monitoring in all sites on the islands and offers legal counselling to asylum-seekers through partners. Furthermore, UNHCR provides information on rights and obligations, including on procedures to seek asylum; identifying and referring people with specific needs to authorities and other service providers; and carries out regular protection monitoring. UNHCR supports the Regional Asylum Offices (RAOs) and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in identifying and referring vulnerable people for priority registration and facilitated access to asylum procedures. Asylum Offices on the islands are focusing on examining registered applications of persons belonging to nationalities with recognition rates over 25 per cent, such as Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians, Iranians, and Eritreans. Family reunification cases and vulnerable individuals are exempted from the borders procedures. In March, an in-depth training on protection was organised for staff of NGO Solidarity Now that is running an accommodation facility on **Tilos** island hosting some 50 asylum seekers and refugees.
- Child Protection.** Over 181 unaccompanied children reside at open accommodation facilities run by partners Iliaktida, Praksis, and Save the Children on the islands. While efforts for their transfer to appropriate shelters continue, on **Kos**, approximately 75 unaccompanied children remain at an overcrowded separate area of the Pyli RIC with minimum specialised services and supervision. On **Chios**, UNHCR's partners Praksis and Save the Children organised an open day for families and children in the Child and Youth Friendly Space of the Vial RIC, to familiarise themselves with the activities organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Education for young mothers, children and youth.
- Sexual and Gender Based Violence Prevention and Response (SGBV).** As part of capacity building, a series of trainings were organised on the islands. UNHCR on **Lesvos** co-organised with international NGOs International Rescue Committee and Save the Children a one day training in the Moria RIC on 'Gender Based Violence and Child Protection in Emergencies'. Staff members of the Reception and Identification Service, Frontex and EASO participated. On **Samos**, UNHCR organised a two-day workshop on the 'Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking', with guest speakers from the Hellenic Police and Europol. Around 30 participants, including authorities and partners actively attended the workshop. Lastly, on **Chios** a refresher training was organised on identification and referral pathways for case workers involved in SGBV response.
- Accommodation Scheme.** UNHCR – with the support of the European Commission (EC) – accommodates some 977 vulnerable asylum-seekers in apartments and hotels at special rates through partners Iliaktida, Arsis and Praksis. UNHCR also continues to support the Greek authorities with transferring vulnerable people from overcrowded sites on the Aegean islands to improved shelter on the mainland in sites and UNHCR's accommodation scheme. The inter-ministerial body (KEPOM) coordinates transfers and the allocation of asylum-seekers to state-run facilities. In March, UNHCR supported 512 transfers to the mainland. On **Kos**, UNHCR continues to implement a transport service to ensure a mean of transport between the RIC, hotel accommodation and Kos town for vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers.



*Youth friendly space in Vial RIC, Chios
© UNHCR/O. D'Amato, March 2017.*

Humanitarian Assistance



Refugees play football in front of UNHCR pre-fabricated containers at the Moria RIC funded by the EC © UNHCR/A. Zavallis, February 2017.

- Shelter.** Improving living conditions for refugees and migrants continued to be the number one priority for humanitarian actors in Greece. UNHCR actively supported the Greek Government, under the coordination of the MoMP, in moving people to improved accommodation and upgrading shelter in sites. However, poor living conditions persist in several refugee sites in the Aegean islands, more sustainable solutions will need to be found by the government in coordination with the local authorities. On **Lesvos**, UNHCR installed, at RIC Moria, 19 two-storey and nine single-storey pre-fabricated containers. At Kara Tepe – the open accommodation site managed by the local Municipality – some 219 out of 290 planned EC-funded prefabricated containers are already hosting asylum-seekers. As works at Moria RIC are still ongoing, approximately 230 people are temporarily hosted in the nearby temporary 'Olive Grove' site where a Rubb hall and 11 UNHCR family tents have been set up. On **Samos**,

the Rubb hall at Vathy RIC was compartmentalised providing twelve private living spaces for a total 72 persons in bunk-beds - through partner Samaritan's Purse. On **Leros**, some 25 prefabricated containers (out of 103) are in need of major repairs and over 10 can no longer be used. On **Rhodes**, conditions are very concerning in the informal 'Old Sfageia' facility that hosts some 50 people, including families with children. UNHCR is working with the local municipality in order to identify the most appropriate solution.

- **Water, Sanitation, Hygiene.** On **Chios**, UNHCR is providing eight shower and ten toilet containers in the Vial RIC, while on **Leros**, UNHCR partner Samaritan's Purse ceased its water, sanitation and hygiene services, at the end of the month. On **Samos**, UNHCR and Samaritan's Purse installed three toilet and shower containers in the RIC and extended area, significantly improving the sanitation and hygiene conditions at the RIC. Samaritan's Purse continued to carry out maintenance of all toilets, showers and water taps in the site. On **Leros**, approximately 90 asylum-seekers attended a session on best hygiene practices.
- **Core Relief Items.** In March, 1,600 core relief items were distributed on the Aegean islands – through Samaritan's Purse – including hygiene parcels, sleeping bags and blankets. On **Samos**, Samaritan's Purse and Save the Children launched a hygiene campaign in the Vathy RIC during which 80 hand sanitizers were distributed.
- **Food.** On **Lesvos**, UNHCR has expressed its readiness to support the Municipality in Kara Tepe accommodation facility by providing temporary food assistance, while transitioning to the more sustainable and self-sufficient communal kitchen modality. For this purpose, two kitchen containers have been purchased and are available for installation in the site.
- **Health.** UNHCR is following closely and is concerned over reports of possible ceasing of medical and psychosocial services contracted to NGOs on the islands RICs. In particular, the following issues are of great importance and continuation of the services will need to be ensured: the identification and referral of vulnerable people, including unaccompanied children; the medical treatment of persons in the RICs; the asylum procedures as the RIS vulnerability assessment which is shared with the RAOs for the exemption of vulnerable persons from the border asylum procedures. On **Lesvos**, UNHCR facilitated three presentations from psychologists of the NGO Boat Refugee Foundation dedicated to stress and panic attacks management and relaxation techniques. Asylum seekers mainly from Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan participated. UNHCR continued to provide transportation services for approximately 500 persons with specific needs from the Vathy RIC on **Samos** to the public hospital benefitting around 500 persons per month, as well as interpretation support, through partner METAdrasi.

Cash Card Assistance

- With the support of the EC and in cooperation with cash partners, over 1,100 people benefitted from UNHCR's cash card programme to cover for basic needs, such as clothes, hygiene items, transport and communications. Given the diverse nature of the sites on the islands, UNHCR – in coordination with the Ministry of Migration Policy – has reviewed the distributed amounts to reflect the services provided in the sites and accommodation facilities. For example, on **Chios** some basic core relief items are not distributed to those receiving cash. A verification exercise took place on the islands in order to expand the cash card programme in the coming months.

Education

- **Formal Education.** UNHCR is working with the Ministry of Education to identify solutions for children moving between locations so that they can continue attending school and certify their attendance. On **Samos** and **Kos** only a handful of refugee children – 4 and 7 respectively – attend public schools. UNHCR is working with partners to explore options for non-formal education where formal education is not yet available.
- **Non-formal Education.** On **Chios**, UNHCR's partner Save the Children signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education for the use of space donated by UNHCR for informal education activities in the Child Friendly Space in the Vial RIC and on 8 March, the Ministry of Education organised non-formal pre-primary school activities. On **Samos**, upon UNHCR's initiative, the Ministry of Education and Save the Children organised visits for refugee children to the Archaeological Museum. On **Leros**, a two-day workshop on 'positive discipline, classroom and behavioural management' was held for teachers, RIS and partners staff members in educational space 'LEDU'. LEDU aims to enhance the skills of refugee students, aged 6-18 years old, in order to obtain again a basic connection to the educational process, to integrate smoothly into the official national education system, under the Greek Ministry of Education programs, and continue their education without interruption.

Communicating with Communities

- **Participatory Assessment.** As part of its continuous effort to include the refugee's perspectives in its interventions, UNHCR led participatory assessments in all sites of the Aegean islands in order to jointly discuss protection risks, identify capacities and

ascertain potential solutions. With the assistance of NGOs present on the sites, focus groups discussions were held representing women, men, boys and girls from 12 to 50+ years old and covering Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, English and French languages. The exercise revealed a widespread feeling of fatigue and uncertainty about the future. Following up on this, UNHCR is planning to implement a number of community initiatives with the aim to encourage skills development and help increase sentiments of optimism and positivity among the population.

- **Information Provision.** UNHCR continues to organise individual and group sessions to asylum-seekers on their rights and obligations and the asylum procedures. On **Chios**, UNHCR completed the upgrade and signage of the information desk in the Vial RIC and three notice boards were installed. UNHCR on **Samos**, through the installation of an additional antenna, expanded the coverage of the WIFI services in Vathy RIC which, among others, allows refugees and migrants to obtain information regarding asylum procedures.
- **Community Dialogues.** UNHCR, in coordination with site management authorities in the sites, convenes on a regular basis community-based discussions. These platforms serve as a dual channel of communication for better dissemination of information inside the site and as a feedback mechanism where issues of interest, such as hygiene, childcare and information provision are discussed. For example on **Chios**, UNHCR organises bi-weekly meetings with a women’s committee to address protection and other concerns of women and girls, as well as to encourage meaningful and active participation of women in the refugee committees.

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance



Asylum seekers on Samos participate in the language programme of the European Commission at the University of Aegean. ©UNHCR/D. Anagnostou, March 2017.

- The sessions of a European Commission online language program organised by UNHCR and the University of Aegean continue on Lesbos and Samos. UNHCR facilitates the visit of asylum-seekers to learning spaces of the University of the Aegean on **Lesvos** and **Samos**, and soon on **Chios**, for participants of the program. Volunteer students from the University of the Aegean help participants with technical issues and can address simple linguistic questions. By the end of the course, some 2,000 refugees from the islands will have the chance to benefit from the online language classes of 12 European languages.

- On **Samos**, UNHCR donated 600 hot water bottles, 600 pieces of women’s clothing and around 200 men’s shirts to the Samos Association of Large Families, while on **Leros** UNHCR through its partner WAHA donated a surgical lamp to the public hospital in recognition of the effort to support the provision of medical services to refugees and migrants. On **Samos**, UNHCR initiated its first visit to a local school, in a series of visits planned in coordination with the Ministry of Education, to raise awareness on refugee issues. Over 70 children from

the elementary school of Mesaio Karlovassi attended the initiative. On **Lesvos**, UNHCR’s partner Iliaktida facilitates trainings for unaccompanied children with the local Kalloni Football Club in Mytilini.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- UNHCR assists the Government and the municipalities in chairing interagency meetings and coordinating interventions that take place on the Aegean islands.
- UNHCR works with international and national organisations in supporting the Government to manage the refugee situation on the islands: Danish Red Cross, Samaritan's Purse, METAdrasi, Arsis, Praksis, Iliaktida. Working groups per sector are organised on a weekly basis on **Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos** and **Leros** with the participation of national and local authorities, European institutions and volunteer groups.

Sector of Intervention	National NGOs	International NGOs	United Nations	Authorities and others
Protection	METAdrasi	ICMC, DRC	UNOPS	Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction
Child Protection	METAdrasi, Praksis, Arsis, Iliaktida	Save the Children		
Communicating with Communities		DRC, NRC		
NFI/Shelter		Samaritan's Purse, DRC	UNOPS	
WASH		Samaritan's Purse, DRC		
Site Management Support			UNOPS	Reception and Identification Service
Health		WAHA		
Education		Save the Children		
Public Awareness	Tenet		UNOPS	
Accommodation for Relocation and Integration	Praksis, Arsis, Solidarity Now, Iliaktida			
Community mobilisation		Samaritan's Purse, DRC		

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- UNHCR's requirements in Greece for **2017** amount to **US\$ 245.9** million, including **US\$ 238.7** million under the **2017 [Refugee and Migrant Response Plan \(RMRP\)](#)** for Europe. At reporting, the total recorded contributions for the operation amount to **US\$ 28** million from the European Union, all of which fall under the RMRP.
- The financial support provided by donors who have contributed with non-earmarked and broadly earmarked funds, as well as for those who have contributed directly to the situation and the Greece operation allows to provide direct assistance in protection and help find solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers. In this changing operational context, UNHCR is appealing to donors to provide contributions that can be allocated as flexibly as possible.

Major donors of unrestricted and regional funds in 2017: [Sweden \(76 M\)](#) | [Netherlands \(52 M\)](#) | [Norway \(41 M\)](#) | [Denmark \(23 M\)](#) | [Australia \(19 M\)](#) | [Switzerland \(15 M\)](#) | [Germany \(12 M\)](#)

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