



### HIGHLIGHTS

**32,934**

Number of arrivals on the islands since the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement

**2,110**

Number of arrivals on the islands in May 2017

**1,243**

Number of places in improved accommodation on the islands

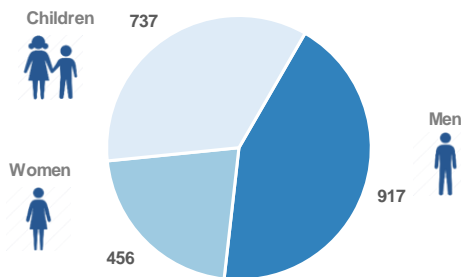
**775**

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

### Arrivals in May

**2,110** arrivals on the Aegean islands

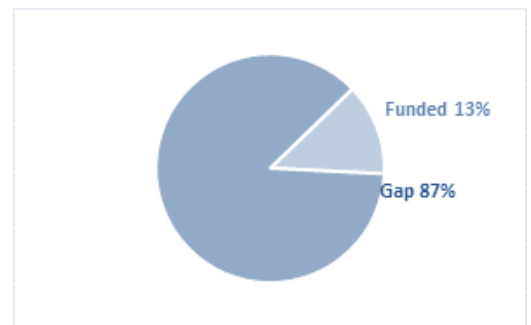
Age and Gender (May 2017)



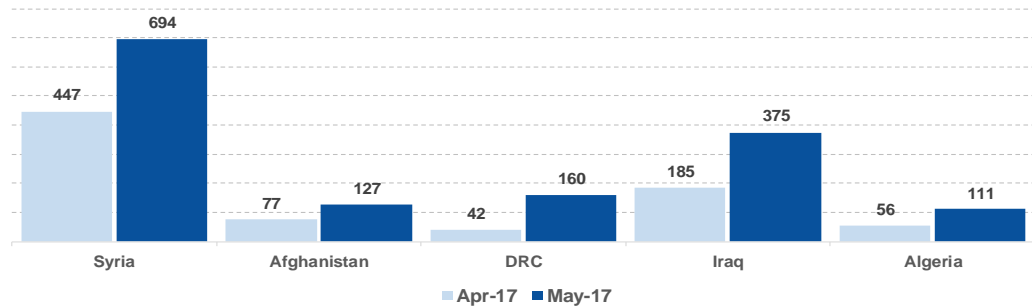
Source: Hellenic Police.

### Funding requested for Greece

**USD 246 million**



### Most common nationalities of sea arrivals



Source: Hellenic Police.

### UNHCR Presence

**73** national and **9** international  
**38** affiliated workforce out of which **13** staff  
deployed to support authorities

**1** Islands Unit based in Athens  
**6** Islands offices (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos, Leros, 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.



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

The Greek authorities estimated some 62,193 refugees and migrants to be in Greece at the end of May, of whom, 48,185 on the mainland and 14,008 on the Aegean islands (Source: KEPOM). There were an estimated 2,110 sea arrivals on the Aegean islands, a decrease from April’s 1,156 sea arrivals (Hellenic Police). UNHCR has its own estimates for assistance delivery purposes which indicate lower figures and have been shared with the Government. Some 1,243 places in urban facilities are 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 in some locations, notably on Chios due to recent overcrowding. 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 insufficient 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 and healthcare, while measures to address the high temperatures of the summer months have not yet been in place. On 20 May, a fire broke out in the PIKPA facility on **Leros** which is managed by the Reception and Identification Service. In the absence of a fire brigade service, the fire was eventually extinguished, in coordination with the authorities, by UNHCR’s security guard. The fire destroyed the first floor of the building, where unaccompanied children were hosted, rendering it uninhabitable. No injuries were reported and restoration works are underway by the volunteer groups working at the site.

Authorities have accelerated the pace in registering asylum claims in recent months, but gaps remain. A comprehensive plan is still 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.

Coordination gaps also remain and the Greek Government, the Ministry of Migration Policy (MoMP) in particular, should continue to strengthen coordination structures among government agencies, with local authorities and all humanitarian stakeholders to ensure a coherent and efficient response where gaps are addressed, overlaps avoided, and resources optimised.

UNHCR’s role in Greece focuses on working with the Government, non-governmental and other organisations, 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.

# AEGEAN ISLANDS RESPONSE

## Protection

- Border procedures.** Despite fewer people traveling to the Aegean islands comparing to last years, UNHCR and its partners maintain shoreline support to new arrivals in the north of Lesbos, in line with its protection mandate. In May, **Chios** received the highest number of new arrivals (some 1,000) since April 2016 (1,145). Between 20 March 2016 and 31 May 2017, 1,181 persons have been readmitted to Turkey under the provisions of the EU-Turkey Statement. Since the implementation of EU-Turkey Statement, UNHCR also monitors readmissions to Turkey, from the pre-removal stage to the departures at the ports.
- Monitoring.** UNHCR undertakes protection monitoring in all sites on the islands and provides information on rights and obligations, including on asylum procedures. UNHCR identifies and refers persons with specific needs to responsible authorities and service providers. Vulnerable non-Syrian asylum seekers have now to remain on the island until the completion of their asylum interview on the merits at first instance. Only after the interview they receive an asylum seeker's card without geographical restriction and they are allowed to depart to the mainland. UNHCR follows up closely this new development and advocates with authorities for the adequate provision of services to persons with specific needs, in particular if their compulsory stay on the islands is prolonged.
- Legal assistance.** UNHCR provides legal counselling and representation to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection on the islands through partners Metadrası and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in cooperation with the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR). In particular, Metadrası has provided legal aid to 150 asylum seekers at the appeal stage of the asylum procedures which is mandatory as per European and national law. Moreover, legal counselling and representation has been provided to more than 225 persons through Metadrası and DRC/GCR, in particular to vulnerable individuals within asylum procedures and family reunification cases.
- Child Protection.** Over 212 places for unaccompanied children have been secured in open accommodation facilities by partners Iliaktida, Praksis, and Save the Children on the islands. On **Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros**, UNHCR's partners Praksis and Save the Children operate Child and Youth Friendly Spaces with activities ranging from sports and chess games. On **Lesvos**, following advocacy on age assessment procedure by UNHCR and child protection actors, an asylum seeker for whom it is impossible for the doctors to conclude on his/her age, will be registered and treated as a minor, given the benefit of the doubt. Within the same context, Lesbos RAO has started notifying Metadrası's guardians – a UNHCR partner – in case the age of a person changes during the asylum procedure. Both developments will make more efficient the protection of unaccompanied or separated children. On **Samos**, UNHCR's partner Save the Children, organized a training on 'Child Protection Safeguarding' in which around 30 Police staff participated. On **Leros**, bullying incidents among unaccompanied children hosted at the RIS-managed facility of PIKPA were reported. Upon UNHCR's facilitation, all children have been receiving targeted psychological support by the International Organization of Migration and no further incidents have been reported so far.
- Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Prevention and Response.** In sites with large single male presence such as the Moria RIC on **Lesvos** and Souda site on **Chios**, sexual and gender based violence risks continue to exist. On **Lesvos**, UNHCR provided trainings to various local actors active in different sectors, including education and health, on how to integrate SGBV guidelines in their everyday work. On **Chios**, UNHCR held a meeting with the women's committee of Souda site to raise their awareness on available options and services in case they experience violence.
- Accommodation Scheme.** UNHCR – with the support of the European Commission (EC) – accommodates some 932 vulnerable people in apartments directly, or 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 May, UNHCR supported the transfer of 775 people to the mainland.

## Humanitarian Assistance



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

- Shelter.** UNHCR actively supports the Greek Government, under the coordination of the MoMP, in upgrading shelter in sites. Nevertheless, poor living conditions persist in several refugee sites in the Aegean islands and more sustainable solutions will need to be found by the Government in coordination with the local authorities. In the Moria RIC on **Lesvos**, ground works for the placement of prefabricated containers were completed and 88 prefabricated containers have been placed. On **Chios** and **Samos**, the recent increase of arrivals has deteriorated living conditions for people in the sites. More specifically, both sites on **Chios** have reached maximum capacity with over 300 people – including vulnerable – staying in tents and makeshift shelters at the beach adjacent to Souda. In the extended area of the Vathy RIC on **Samos**, approximately 500 people live under poor living conditions. The area has no electricity

exposing people to serious protection risks, including SGBV. As a preventive measure, UNHCR and its partner Samaritan's Purse started works for the installation of solar lights in the area.

- **Water, Sanitation, Hygiene (WASH).** UNHCR's partner Samaritan's Purse continues to undertake maintenance works of key WASH facilities on **Chios, Samos, Kos** and **Leros**. In Souda site on **Chios**, UNHCR is providing 19 WASH facilities to replace the old ones and installing additional lighting to increase safety. The issue was raised following regular UNHCR monitoring and as a result of the recent participatory assessment conducted with women residents of the site. On **Leros**, complications continue with the intermittent maintenance of the sewage treatment plant in the premises of the Lepida RIC constituting an environmental hazard for the surrounding area and a health concern for the residents of the site. On **Kastelorizo**, UNHCR and its partner Samaritan's Purse are working with the local authorities for the improvement of WASH facilities available to new arrivals.
- **Core Relief Items.** In May, 1,500 core relief items were distributed on the Aegean islands – including hygiene parcels, sleeping mats and blankets. As part of the gradual handover to the authorities UNHCR is organising trainings on the distribution and verification of core relief items.
- **Food.** On **Lesvos**, UNHCR supports the Municipality by providing temporary food assistance to the population of the site. In addition to the provision of accommodation containers in Kara Tepe, UNHCR placed two communal kitchens containers and connected them to the sewage and water supply networks. This will offer greater independency to the residents of the site as they will be able to benefit from the limited cash assistance provided by UNHCR with the support of ECHO.
- **Health.** UNHCR is concerned over the uninterrupted continuity of medical and psychosocial services at the RICs and RIS managed facilities. Staffing limitations in the RICs create subsequent gaps in the provision of services, in particular with regards to hygiene conditions and health. On **Lesvos**, access to medication, mainly for chronic conditions, is limited among the health actors in the Moria RIC. On **Chios**, with the withdrawal of RIS medical partner Praksis and UNHCR's partner WAHA from the Vial RIC, people face difficulties accessing medical services and prescribed medication. In addition, there are significant gaps in the medical screening and vulnerability assessments of new arrivals.

## Cash Assistance

- As of April, UNHCR is leading the Greece Cash Alliance (GCA) funded by the European Commission. The GCA builds on the work of UNHCR and other cash actors and is conceived as a joint action between six humanitarian agencies (International Rescue Committee, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Mercy Corps, Catholic Relief Services, Samaritan's Purse and Care International) to ensure that all eligible asylum seekers and migrants in Greece continue to receive monthly cash assistance.
- In May, 945 people benefited from cash assistance on the islands, while just over 600 new cards were distributed by UNHCR and partners on the islands 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 MoMP – has reviewed the distributed amounts to reflect the services provided in the sites and accommodation facilities. On **Samos**, the entire refugee population is now being covered by cash assistance.

## 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. With pre-school education becoming mandatory, further clarity is needed on the implementation of the guidelines of the Ministry of Education related to the islands as school attendance, in general, greatly varies depending on the location. Indicatively, on **Samos** out of the 400 refugee children, only 7 receive formal education. UNHCR on **Lesvos** has started preparations and will provide prefabricated containers in Kara Tepe to be used as kindergarten space inside the site. Some 98 refugee children on Lesvos would be eligible to attend kindergarten.
- **Non-formal Education.** UNHCR is working with partners to explore options for non-formal education where formal education is not yet available. With the rightsizing of UNHCR's presence in Greece, activities of the Youth Friendly Space organised by UNHCR's partner Save the Children in Kara Tepe on **Lesvos** are now implemented in a significantly smaller scale and will be held in the premises of the Child-Friendly Space. UNHCR on **Samos** facilitated a visit of ten refugee women from different nationalities to the Archaeological Museum. The women were given a tour by museum guides and showed great interest in the exhibits. On **Leros**, eleven refugee boys and girls from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan of the 'LEDU' non-formal education facility who had participated in the EUROPALSO English language exams in April received their certificates in an event at the local sailing club. A painting exhibition, chemistry



*Refugee children receive their English language certificates on Leros © UNHCR /Anastasia Papakonstantinou, May 2017.*



experiments and dancing were also organised during the event. On **Rhodes**, UNHCR initiated computer courses, in coordination with the University of Aegean. Approximately twenty people – all beneficiaries of UNHCR accommodation – attended the first class on modern technology and communications.

## Communicating with Communities

- Information Provision.** UNHCR continues to organise individual and group sessions to asylum-seekers on their rights and obligations and the asylum procedures. In the Moria RIC on **Lesvos**, an information point was launched with the participation of UNHCR, the International Organization of Migration, RIS and RAO/EASO. The info point helps asylum seekers and migrants to have better access to information with regular info sessions, maps with key locations and timetables on educational activities, as well as lists of asylum appointments. With 34 new arrivals on **Kastelorizo**, UNHCR conducted a mission on the island to provide information and conduct sessions with asylum seekers.
- Community Dialogues.** UNHCR, in coordination with site management authorities in the sites of the islands, 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. Indicatively, female support groups continue to be convened by UNHCR at the Pyli RIC on **Kos**. In the last meeting, the importance of recreational and educational activities as a tool to prevent SGBV was raised and the women expressed their interest in teaching Arabic, sewing and conduct recreational activities for children and attend art, music and English courses. On **Chios**, UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council organised a meeting with some community representatives from Vial and Souda at the ‘Agora’ Community Center during which cash assistance, bus transportation and security concerns were discussed. UNHCR on **Samos** continued outreach visits to local schools, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, to raise awareness on refugee issues. Over 650 children from different elementary schools on the island attended the presentation of UNHCR.
- A number of worrying violent incidents during consecutive days occurred on **Leros** between the refugee and the local population, including a physical assault of an LGBTI asylum-seeker. The recent incident highlights the need for expedited processing of registration, identification and asylum processing of LGBTI people, and their prompt transfer to a safe place in the mainland where they cannot be easily traced and identified. On **Chios**, clashes between asylum-seekers of different nationalities, with twelve people having been arrested, aggravated the already tense relations with the local community. UNHCR is concerned over recent incidents and underlines the importance of peaceful coexistence projects that foster closer relations and mutual trust between the refugee and local population.

## Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

- While efforts to build resilience of the refugee population continue, implementation gaps remain. For example, on **Lesvos** the local Citizen’s Bureau has not been issuing social security numbers (AMKA) to asylum-seekers for the past two months, despite relevant provisions in national legislation.
- The sessions of a European Commission online language program organised by UNHCR and the University of Aegean continue on **Lesvos** 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 **Chios**, UNHCR’s partner Samaritan’s Purse organised a cooking event in a local restaurant with the participation of men and women from Syria, Iran and Eritrea who prepared traditional dishes from their country of origin. An event bringing together local and refugee mothers and children was organised, in celebration of the World Mother Day, by UNHCR on **Samos** in collaboration with the Regional Division of Samos and the Association of Parents, Guardians and Friends of Persons with Mental Disabilities. The children jointly prepared cards for their mothers and an event with speeches by mothers and UNHCR on the experience of motherhood followed. On **Rhodes**, UNHCR was invited by the local Municipality to present its mandate and role in Greece during the inauguration of the ‘Community Centre’ – funded by the EC – a platform bringing together local actors working on social inclusion and access to labour market. The Centre will also aim to foster integration and work opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees.



*Greek and refugee children drawing cards for their mothers during the Mother’s Day event organised by UNHCR on Samos. ©UNHCR/D. Anagnostou, May 2017.*

## WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- UNHCR on the islands works with international and national organisations in supporting the Government to manage the refugee situation: Danish Refugee Council/Greek Refugee Council, Samaritan's Purse, Metadrasi, Arsis, Praxis, 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.
- UNHCR assists the Government and the municipalities in chairing interagency meetings and coordinating interventions that take place on the Aegean islands.

## 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\$ 31.1** million from the European Union, all of which fall under the RMRP.
- The financial support of donors with non-earmarked and broadly earmarked funds and those contributing directly to the situation in Greece allows UNHCR to provide direct assistance in protection and help find solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers. In this changing operational context, UNHCR appeals to donors to provide contributions that can be allocated as flexibly as possible.
- Major donors of unrestricted and regional funds to UNHCR 2017: United States of America (95 M) | Sweden (76 M) | Netherlands (52 M) | Norway (41 M) | Private Donors from Spain (24 M) | Denmark (23 M) | Australia (19 M) | Canada (16 M) | Switzerland (15 M) | France (14M) | Germany (12 M)

### Contacts:

Boris Cheshirkov, Associate Comms/PI Officer (Islands), UNHCR Greece, [cheshirk@unhcr.org](mailto:cheshirk@unhcr.org) Tel: +30 695 185 4661

Elena Marda, Liaison Associate (Islands), UNHCR Greece, [marda@unhcr.org](mailto:marda@unhcr.org), Tel: +30 695 18 01 242

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