

# GREECE REFUGEE EMERGENCY RESPONSE- UPDATE #8

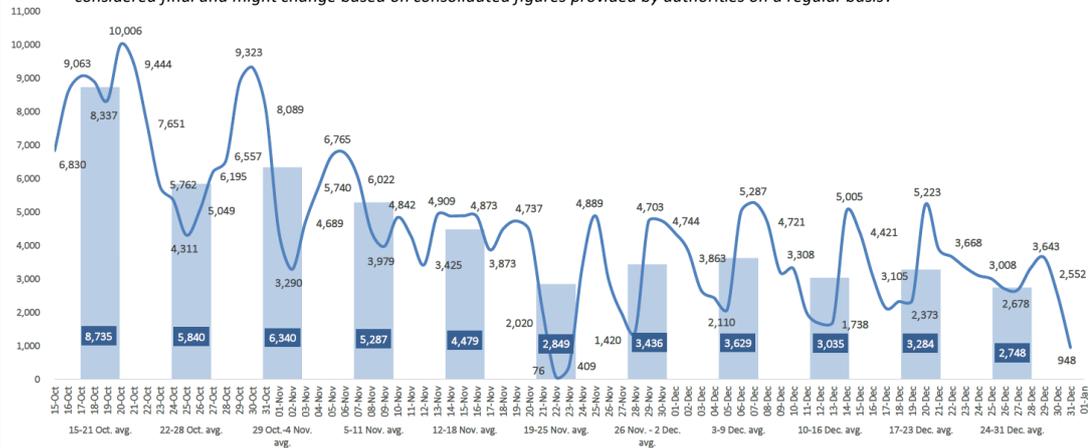
29 November – 31 December 2015

## HIGHLIGHTS

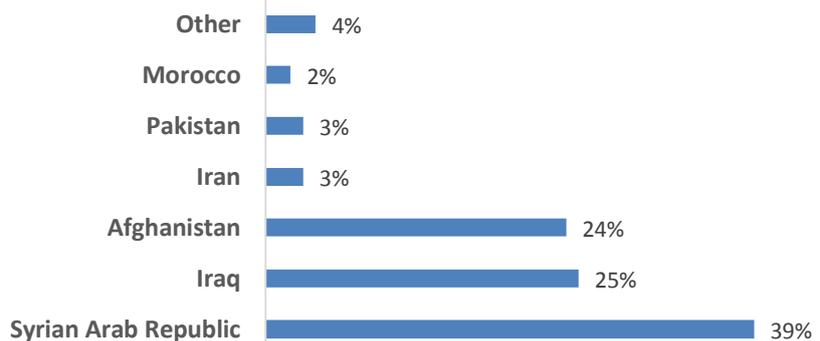
- As of 31 December 2015, 856,723 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece since 1 January 2015, including 108,742 people during the reporting period.
- During the reporting period, six shipwrecks were reported off the coasts of Lesbos, Farmakonissi and Kastelorizo islands, due to adverse weather conditions in combination to unseaworthy vessels, causing the death of about 40 people.
- On 9 December, a Police operation took place in Eidomeni, on the Greek side of the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYROM), to evacuate people of nationalities not allowed to cross. About 2,300 people were transferred to the open temporary accommodation sites of Palio Faliro and Elliniko in Athens. UNHCR maintained continued presence in both sites, focusing on the identification of people with specific needs, the provision of legal information and the identification of asylum and relocation candidates who were directed to the Greek Asylum Service and were provided accommodation through UNHCR's implementing partner Praksis.
- On 14 December, UNHCR and the EC launched a project for the creation of 20,000 reception places for relocation candidates and other asylum seekers in Greece, through apartment and hotel rental schemes, hotel vouchers and host family programs.

### Daily estimates and weekly averages

Daily arrivals are estimates based on the most reliable information available provided by the authorities. Daily estimates cannot be considered final and might change based on consolidated figures provided by authorities on a regular basis.



### Top nationalities of arrivals during December 2015



**856,723**

Sea arrivals in Greece in 2015 as of 31 December

**108,742**

Sea arrivals to Greece during the reporting period (29 November-31 December 2015)

**272**

Dead persons in the Greek waters from 1 January to 31 December 2015

**21**

Reception centres, transit sites, assembly points through islands and mainland

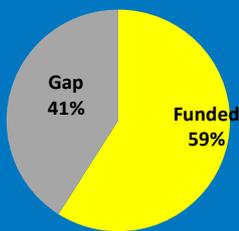
**82**

Asylum seekers relocated from Greece within the EU relocation scheme

## FUNDING

**USD 19.3 million**

requested for the situation in Greece in 2015



## PRIORITIES

- Boost reception capacity and provide emergency assistance in receiving countries through support for States, civil society and local communities.
- Strengthen protection systems and prevent *refoulement* including through presence and capacity building.
- Increase strategic messaging and advocacy to and about people of concern.

## UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

### Operational Context

The average daily arrivals in November was 5,042 and in December 3,333. Lower numbers of arrivals are attributed to the adverse weather conditions. Most of the new arrivals randomly interviewed by UNHCR staff stated that they crossed the sea in their second attempt. It was observed that many new arrivals in Lesvos landed near the airport shores instead of the sites in the northern part of the island, which are usually preferred due to shortest journey from Turkey to Greece as compared to the southern shores.

Due to the adverse weather during winter season, the overall sea crossing conditions have deteriorated and several search and rescue operations have been conducted by the Hellenic Coast Guard, supported by FRONTEX and other vessels from different EU countries, as well as private vessels. On 29 November, a wooden boat crashed into rocks as it approached the Eftalou shore, in Lesvos, carrying up to 150 people who sustained minor injuries. On 3 December, a boat transferring seven people capsized off Farmakonissi due to strong winds, leaving four survivors. Two further shipwrecks took place off Farmakonissi islet, on 9 and 10 December. The first one, involving a boat with 49 people onboard, claimed for 12 dead and 11 missing. The second, involving a boat with approximately 30 people onboard, claimed for four dead and about 20 missing. Another shipwreck occurred on the sea border between Greece and Turkey near Kastelorizo Island on 15 December, causing four dead and two missing, while 17 people have been rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard. Another shipwreck occurred off Farmakonissi on 22 December. From the twenty-nine people on board, 15 were rescued and 13 bodies (mostly children) were found. One person is still missing.

As a result of continued restrictions by the authorities along the Western Balkans route to the admission of refugees and migrants from countries other than Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, tensions have been rising at Eidomeni, on 2-3 December, leading to a temporary closure of the border. The Greek Police conducted an operation on 9 December, to evacuate from Eidomeni people of nationalities not allowed to cross the border. During the operation, the police stopped buses with new arrivals at Polykastro (5 km from the border area) in order to prevent congestion. Afterwards, they were allowed to proceed and Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis could cross the border normally. By the end of the operation, 45 buses departed for Athens from Eidomeni, carrying approximately 2,250 persons directed to the two emergency accommodation sites in Palio Faliro (Tae Kwon Do stadium) and Elliniko.

The Alternate Ministry of Migration Policy has been negotiating with the four Mayors of the Southern Attika suburbs (where Elliniko belongs), who had expressed their concern for the current reception plan in an open letter addressed to the Minister, to find more permanent solutions in Athens. An agreement was reached on the use of Elliniko (Hockey stadium) open temporary accommodation site for three months, while the Palio Faliro site (Tae Kwon Do stadium) terminated its operation on 17 December 2015.

A new police verbal order was issued regarding the detention of North African nationals (Maghreb Arabs) in Greece. Detention is being applied on the islands against Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians in accordance with the order. The situation remained volatile on Lesvos as 600-700 North Africans were unable to leave the island as a result of a police directive. By 30 December, some had stayed on Lesvos for over twelve days. Some 300 North Africans have been transferred to the pre-removal facility in Corinth where they were visited by UNHCR, ICRC and IOM. The Greek police confirmed that no-one has been readmitted to Turkey as of 29 December and that those who apply for asylum or assisted voluntary return (AVR) will not be sent to Turkey.

## Achievements



### Protection

#### Achievements and Impact

- Provision of information.** During the reporting period, UNHCR continued to conduct individual and group information sessions on the islands, in Eidomeni and at the temporary reception sites of Palio Faliro (Tae Kwon Do stadium), Elliniko and Elaionas in Athens. Information is provided in collaboration with the Greek Asylum Service, IOM and other partners, on issues like registration, asylum procedures, relocation, family reunification,

refugees' rights and responsibilities, existing assistance and support programmes, as well as updates on the situation at the border with FYROM.

In **Kos**, audio messages in three different languages (Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, English and French) were introduced as a new practice for provision of initial information on registration procedures and accommodation options upon arrival to refugees and migrants transported by UNHCR's night shuttle bus from the shores, and signs were placed at entry points to inform arrivals of this service.

The first Communication with Communities (CWC) coordination meeting was held in **Athens** on 10 December, chaired by UNHCR, and with participation of 17 organizations working in Athens and Eidomeni. Its aim was to coordinate all protection information efforts and outputs for refugees and host communities, to ensure streamlined message content and tools, to create partnerships in particular areas of protection information, and to avoid duplication. Another meeting will take place in early 2016.

- **Facilitation of access to registration procedures.** UNHCR continued to provide regular advice and support, including interpretation services, to the authorities during the registration process, by mediating to resolve eventual tensions among the refugee communities and between the refugees and the Police, at registration sites. In all locations, UNHCR raised awareness of people of concern on the importance of the accuracy of information indicated in the release notes, especially nationality. UNHCR continues to liaise with positive feedback so far, with competent authorities (FRONTEX, Hellenic Coast Guard and Police) to promote proper registration, with reference to the country of habitual residence, for Palestinians habitually residing in Syria who are currently registered as 'Palestinians'. UNHCR also successfully referred to FRONTEX several cases of people of concern being erroneously registered during the nationality screening, including families claiming to be of Afghan nationality and registered as Pakistani.
  - **Profiling and identification of people with specific needs.** In all islands and at Eidomeni, UNHCR continues support to people with specific needs through referrals, provision of information and ensuring their basic needs are met, including medical and disability cases, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). In **Lesvos, Chios, Kos and Eidomeni**, about 60 UASC were identified, interviewed and referred to the police. Family reunifications were facilitated in **Lesvos and Chios islands, and in Evros**, at the land border with Turkey. In **Samos**, following UNHCR's advocacy, the Public Prosecutor is applying a flexible definition of the family and allows children to remain with extended family members, as it is considered in their best interest.
  - **Asylum and relocation.** UNHCR continued to support the relocation process by providing information and counseling on asylum and relocation procedures in cooperation with EASO and other partners, as well as by identifying people with specific needs to be prioritized. During the reporting period, in Eidomeni, 35 people from Eritrea were informed and referred to the relocation procedures at the Asylum Service in Athens, as per their expressed will. Other 28 people were informed and referred for relocation in Lesvos. Through its implementing partner Praksis, UNHCR also continued to provide accommodation places to relocation candidates and asylum seekers in Athens and the islands. Capacity of 500 places to accommodate relocation candidates and other asylum seekers through UNHCR-Praksis project made available in 2015 has been fully utilized and was increased to 1,000 places to cover expected needs by the end of the year. A total of 82 asylum seekers have been relocated from Greece to Luxembourg, Finland, Germany, Portugal and Lithuania.
- According to the data from the Greek Asylum Service, a total of 13,197 people applied for asylum in Greece in 2015. Out of them, 1,171 people applied for asylum during the month of November and 1,314 people during the month of December.



*An Iraqi woman holds her 3 year-old son in her arms, while his siblings greet him, shortly after the family was re-united, having been separated trying to cross the Evros River from Turkey into Greece © UNHCR/A. Zavallis, 9 December 2015*

- **Response to shipwrecks.** In **Kos**, UNHCR continued to provide information, hotel accommodation and referral to volunteers for food assistance for one Syrian survivor of the shipwreck of 17 November. The survivor was provided with a ferry ticket to Athens and a follow up of his referral to Praksis for accommodation and legal assistance in Athens. In **Leros**, UNHCR has been providing continuous support and assistance to the survivors of

the shipwreck of 3 December, including facilitation of their communication with authorities through provision of interpretation services, facilitation of communication with their family members, provision of shelter, food, legal and procedural information and coordination of receipt of humanitarian assistance by volunteers and psychosocial support by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). In **Leros and Rhodes**, assistance to all the survivors of the Farmakonissi shipwrecks of 9 and 10 December was provided by the UNHCR teams in cooperation with partners on the ground, including ICRC who came on mission following UNHCR's request. UNHCR coordinated closely with the Hellenic Coast Guard for acquiring DNA samples from survivors and post mortem data for the purposes of matching with missing persons. Comprehensive assistance was also provided to the survivors of the shipwreck off Farmakonissi on 22 December, including the provision of Psychological First Aid (PFA) through MSF, social support through Praxis, communication through METAction interpreters, clothes provided by volunteers, accommodation and food. Further to successful UNHCR demarches, certificates were provided to survivors of shipwrecks by the Coast Guard authorities; this constitutes an important development and long claimed issue for these persons.



*A member of UNHCR assists the family of an elderly woman in a wheelchair to cross the border from Greece in to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia © UNHCR/A. Zavallis, 5 December 2015*

■ **Border crossing point of Eidomeni (GRE/FYR border).** During the reporting period, UNHCR continued to support bus transfers for people of different nationalities (Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Western Sahara and Ivory Coast) from Eidomeni to Athens, including potential cases for relocation. Families and children were prioritized. In Eidomeni, cases at risk of family separation were prevented. Referrals were made to the local Police to re-issue police certificates that went lost. Some individuals with refugee profile were referred to the UNHCR's partner Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) in Thessaloniki. UNHCR also continued to provide information on rights and obligations, including asylum and relocation procedures. The leaflet of the Greek Asylum Service was distributed.

During the increased tensions at the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in the course of the Police operation on 9 December, UNHCR maintained its presence through key protection and field staff and remained in close liaison with the central authorities in order to monitor the situation on the ground in Eidomeni, as well as the reception/accommodation capacity in Athens, and ensure the protection of the most vulnerable people. Five unaccompanied children under the care of the local NGO partner Arsis were evacuated with priority.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Protection of UASCs has been improved, but some gaps are still existing. In **Leros**, unaccompanied children pending the transfer to UNHCR-Praxis established transit facility in Kos, are kept under police custody resulting into a de facto detention condition which may imply staying in common spaces with others, until the Prosecutor release notes are issued. UNHCR continues advocacy efforts to avoid this situation and accelerate transfer to the facility in Kos. To this extent, Save the Children as UNHCR partner started operation in Leros as of 10 December on child protection activities, which will also offer another opportunity to Greek authorities to avoid such situation.
- Numerous cases of erroneous registration came to the attention of UNHCR that continues to liaise with competent authorities (FRONTEX, Hellenic Coast Guard and police) to promote proper registration, particularly regarding the nationality and age of refugees and migrants.
- UNHCR has observed that smugglers are overloading dinghies and using less durable type of vessels which are arriving in worst condition than before. Persons onboard are experiencing significant psychological stress out of fear that they will not make it to shore, in addition to the distress caused by the deteriorating crossing conditions due to adverse weather. Vulnerable groups like women, children and the elderly are amongst the ones who are more in danger during the perilous boat ride. Often braving rough seas, many arrive on the shores of the islands in a state of shock and suffering from hypothermia, and are in need of targeted assistance.

- UNHCR remains concerned about reports of ill treatment and of family separation incidents during transfers from Farmakonissi. To address this issue, UNHCR continues to advocate with the authorities on the need to transfer people from Farmakonissi to Leros as soon as possible, so as for them to benefit from mainstream State services, and requested a special permit to establish a presence on the island in support of the humanitarian response, through and with the Hellenic Coast Guard. In parallel, UNHCR has offered to the competent authorities (Ministry of Defense and the Coast Guard) all its support and technical assistance for the creation of basic reception conditions that can serve the needs of refugees and migrants reaching Farmakonissi.
- Due to the limited detention capacity at entry points, varying practices were observed in relation to the police detention order of nationals from North Africa. UNHCR has addressed a letter to the central Police Headquarters requesting for prompt registration and profiling of the specific group, due treatment of vulnerable groups (UASC, families, elderly, persons with specific needs) and full provision of information as regards rights and obligations, including on asylum.



*A member of UNHCR staff helps a paramedic carry a young woman from Afghanistan suffering from hypothermia to an ambulance, after she reached the shores of Lesvos in an inflatable boat full of Afghan refugees © UNHCR/A. Zavalli, 12 December 2015*

## Site Planning, Shelter, CCCM and Basic Relief Items

### Achievements and Impact

#### Shelter

- In 2015, UNHCR provided and installed a total of 314 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs), 101 family tents and nine prefab/rub halls in the islands, Eidomeni and Athens.
- In December 2015, UNHCR continued the winterization of shelters as well as other infrastructure, in collaboration with partners and the authorities. This includes installation of insulated flooring for Refugee Housing Units (RHUs), fitting of inner linings for the insulation of rub halls, and heating systems. The work is under way. Various actors are working on the flooring of the RHUs, by elevating them. Roofs are being covered with UNHCR tarp. For RHUs heating, UNHCR's partner Samaritan's Purse (SP) received the final clearance from UNHCR to install propylene cylinders inside each unit, following an assessment by UNHCR site planners. In order to minimize the safety risks connected with the use of heaters, the following measures are undertaken: the cylinders are covered with a casing – with a rounded end so nothing can be placed on top of it – and will be attached to the floor by a concrete base to prevent easy removal. For rub halls, the heating system consists in a diesel air blowing system, similar as it is founded in Eidomeni. In **Samos and Chios**, the flooring is completed. In **Lesvos, Leros and Eidomeni**, the work is in progress.
- In **Athens**, upon request from the Alternate Ministry of Migration Policy, UNHCR provided 800 blankets and mats to Palio Faliro (Tae Kwon Do stadium) and 200 to Elliniko reception sites, as well as two rub halls and ten tents that were installed in Elliniko to increase the reception capacity in view of arrivals from Eidomeni, following the Police operation to evacuate the border conducted on 9 December.
- **Hotspots.** Following the re-prioritization of the hotspot locations announced by the government due to opposition by the local community in Kos, UNHCR continued to support the authorities in the site planning and construction of the hotspots on Lesvos, where the Moria site is almost ready, Chios, where the refurbishment of the old factory of VIAL has started, and Leros, which should be completed by early 2016. On Samos the site remains to be identified. The Greek Prime Minister, Mr. Alexis Tsipras, accompanied by the Alternate Minister for Migration Policy, Mr. Ioannis Mouzalas, visited Chios and Leros islands on 16 December to inspect the hotspots under construction, and met with UNHCR Greece Representative and Senior Operations Coordinator.

#### Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

- Through the coordination meetings and working groups, UNHCR and partners continued to improve the coordination of assistance provided on sites.

- UNHCR hosted and chaired a meeting with organizations operating in **Athens** in order to identify which partners have the capacity to assist the authorities with the sites in Athens in WASH and potentially Food / Non-Food Items (NFIs) or any other basic assistance. A contingency plan for refugees and migrants arriving from the islands who will remain in Athens as they will not be authorized to cross the border was also discussed.

## Humanitarian assistance



*Afghan refugees wait to board a UNHCR bus that will transport them to the Moria Registration Site, shortly after reaching the island of Lesbos, having crossed part of the Aegean Sea from the coast of Turkey to Greece. © UNHCR/A. Zavallis, 12 December 2015*

- During the reporting period, over 4,649 sleeping mats, 34,765 blankets, 2,039 hygiene and feminine kits, and 2,212 raincoats were distributed on the islands. Between September and December 2015, a total of 139,318 Food / Non-Food Items (NFIs) have been distributed by UNHCR throughout Greece.
- In **Lesvos**, UNHCR stepped up activities and coordination with volunteers in the south, due to increased trend of arrivals along airport road, Mytilene port, and near Moria. A roving UNHCR team received people on shore and in the water with volunteers and provided transportation. In addition, UNHCR is piloting a 24-hour bus transportation coverage along the airport road to the port and a hotline system to alert buses of new arrivals will be established and shared with volunteer groups.
- On **Chios**, UNHCR along with the municipal site management staff have begun providing meal vouchers to vulnerable or destitute individuals staying at the Souda accommodation site.

## Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Reception capacity in **Chios** is stretched due to a large number of arrivals and limited departures. Ships coming to Chios are already full of passengers and limited tickets are sold. UNHCR is liaising with the local authorities to find alternative options to accommodate the overflow.
- In **Samos**, due to lack of coordination among actors, there are often tensions among populations during distribution. UNHCR is working to overcome this challenge through the regular coordination meetings being held at Samos and central level.
- In **Eidomeni**, the newly applied practice by the Greek Police that no groups arriving by bus to Eidomeni could enter the two sites, but were guided directly to the border, caused confusion in the provision of humanitarian assistance. Food, water and blankets distribution was taking place on the way to the check point on an ad hoc basis but without sufficient time to assess needs. UNHCR hold a meeting with the Secretary General of the Ministry of Citizens Protection on 18 December to discuss the situation in Eidomeni and suggest possible solutions to the direction of re-operating the sites on the purpose of very basic provision of services (especially medical) and additional identification of vulnerable cases by UNHCR.

## Working in partnership

- UNHCR continues to closely cooperate with the European Commission and relevant EU agencies, including FRONTEX and EASO; as well as with local and governmental authorities.
- UNHCR and partners continued to build capacity of volunteers. In Lesbos, more volunteers from the north are operating in the south, due to the increased number of arrivals, and UNHCR held a coordination meeting with the main volunteer groups to agree on division of responsibilities and communication channels.
- UNHCR's emergency assistance and protection services in Greece are delivered through several partners, including: the Church of Greece, Ecumenical Refugee Council, Greek Refugee Council, DRC, Hellenic League for Human Rights, and Hellenic Theatre Drama & Education Network, ICMC, METAction, Mercy Corps, Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction, Praksis, Solidarity Now, Save the Children, Samaritan's Purse, WAHA. These partners have supported the provision of legal assistance and information on rights and obligations, the addressing of immediate relief/medical needs of persons of concern and the protection of children and transfer of unaccompanied children to specialized facilities on the mainland, as part of the annual programme and the emergency appeal.

UNHCR continues to closely cooperate with, among others: A21, Agkalia, Apostoli/IOCC, Arsis, Caritas, FIRC, Hellenic Red Cross, Human Appeal, IOM, IRC, Islamic Relief, Médecins du Monde, Medin, Mercy Corps, MSF, NRC, OXFAM, Spanish Red Cross.

- In line with the Refugee Coordination Model, UNHCR supports the Government's coordination efforts at central and local level, facilitating general and sectorial coordination meetings. Seven general coordination meetings take place on a weekly basis on all locations and every other week at a central level. Twenty six sectorial coordination meetings are also organized every week or every other week on the islands and Eidomeni.

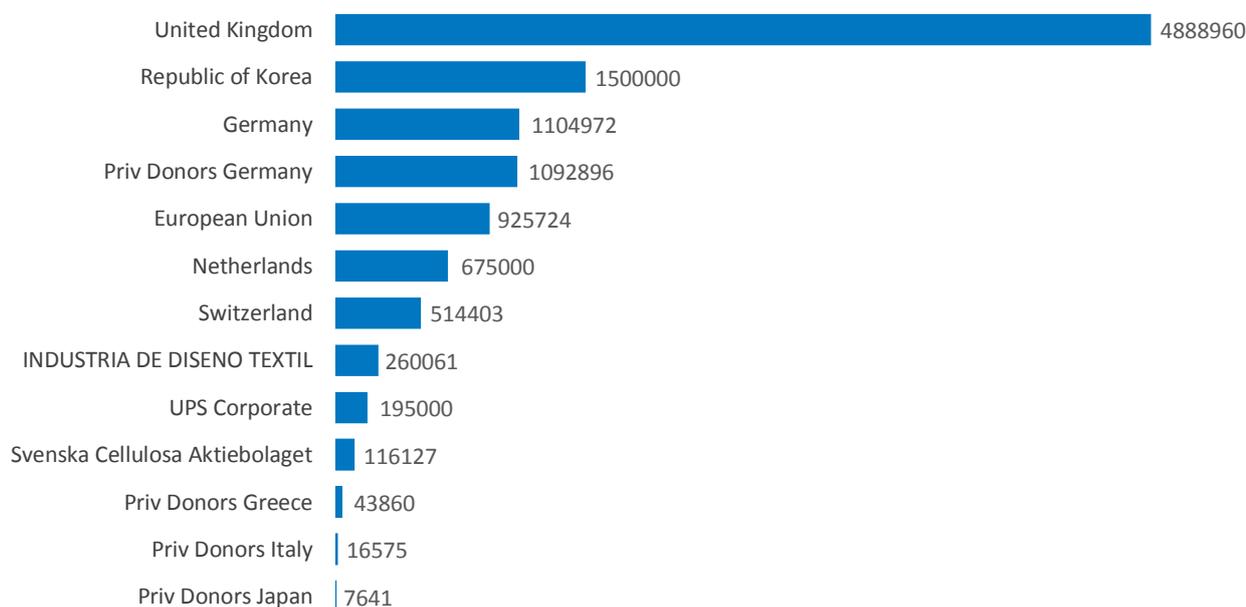
## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

UNHCR's [Winterization Plan for the Refugee Crisis in Europe](#), released on 5 November, appeals for **USD 96.15 million** in additional support for Greece and affected countries in the Balkans for the winter months (November 2015 – February 2016). This is in addition to UNHCR's revised appeal for the [Special Mediterranean Initiative](#) (SMI) of **USD 128 million** for June 2015 – December 2016, which outlines the Office's response to the refugee crisis in Europe, and also incorporates targeted programmes in countries of asylum or transit in Africa and the North Africa sub-region.

In response to the fast-evolving situation, UNHCR is continuing to update its requirements for the response to the crisis in Europe. Currently, UNHCR's total 2015 requirements in Europe for the response to the refugee crisis, including winterization activities, stands at USD 58.76 million.

As of 14 December, **USD 75.3 million** has been received for the SMI, representing **91 per cent** of the total 2015 requirements (USD 83.2 million), including winterization activities. This includes **USD 11.4 million** received for Greece, representing **59 per cent** of the total 2015 requirements for the country (USD 19.3 million).

### Earmarked Funding for Greece in USD



UNHCR is very grateful for the financial support provided by donors who have contributed to their activities with un-earmarked and broadly earmarked funds as well as for those who have contributed directly to the situation. Major donors of unrestricted and regional funds in 2015: [The United States of America](#) | [Sweden](#) | [United Kingdom](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [Norway](#) | Private donors in Spain | [Denmark](#) | [Australia](#) | [Japan](#) | [Canada](#) | [Switzerland](#) | Private donors in Italy | [France](#) | Private donors in the Republic of Korea | [Finland](#) | Private donors in Japan

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