



## GREECE UPDATE No.14

### LESVOS

29 January 2021

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UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is supporting the government-led response after a series of fires destroyed the Reception and Identification Centre in Moria (Lesvos) in September 2020.

UNHCR has scaled up its support for all asylum-seekers affected and urges for comprehensive and humane solutions to address difficult living conditions on Greek islands.

#### BACKGROUND

In September 2020, a series of fires ravaged the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, leaving 12,000 people homeless. Nearly 7,300 asylum-seekers and refugees, the majority women and children, are currently sheltered in the Mavrovouni site, which was set up by the authorities to host those affected. Many others, including unaccompanied children, were transferred to alternative accommodation.

The Greek authorities lead the response with support of UN agencies, including UNHCR, as well as international and national NGOs and volunteer groups.

#### LATEST IN BRIEF

A cold spell hit Greece on 17-20 January, with most asylum-seekers and refugees on the Aegean Islands experiencing extremely difficult conditions, especially those accommodated in tents or makeshift shelters. A week later, partners reported that strong winds on 28 January resulted in damage to four accommodation tents and some 50 tarps, which have all been replaced by the time of writing. Earlier, as a preparedness measure, UNHCR had provided 72,800 asylum-seekers countrywide with a one-off top-up to their monthly cash assistance to help them cover their increased winter needs.

UNHCR continues to advocate with authorities to make more space available for protective,

temporary accommodation, and for further transfers to the mainland where conditions are overall better and relocation to other EU States.

On 19 January, according to the Hellenic Coast Guard, one man perished in a shipwreck in a rocky area on the southern coast of Lesbos. Twenty-seven people were rescued. Forty-four persons arrived in the island from 1 to 17 January, according to the authorities. Safe and regulated alternatives to these dangerous journeys are crucial so that people do not risk their lives to find safety.

#### UNHCR'S RESPONSE

##### Site planning and shelter

Thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees in the Mavrovouni site, including pregnant women, older people and people with disabilities, had to endure freezing temperatures and snow in mid-January.

While efforts by the Greek authorities are underway to upgrade the site's electricity network, it is currently insufficient to provide power and heating for the entire site. At the request of the Government, UNHCR procured and delivered 950 heaters to cover the needs of all site residents. In addition, IOM installed 74 heating units in four accommodation Rubb Halls. However, the heaters can only be operational once the authorities upgrade the electrical network.



**12,000**

asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

**nearly 7,300**

asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site



**700**

tents (570 provided by UNHCR) were set up

The **570** UNHCR tents have insulation and wood flooring



Gaps remain in water, sanitation, hygiene and health services



As of 17 January, two people were in quarantine as a precautionary measure, but there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the site since 25 December

Following concerns raised by stakeholders, including UNHCR, regarding reports of possible lead contamination at the site due to the area's past use as a military shooting range, authorities undertook soil sample testing. On 23 January, the government reported that of twelve samples taken from the site, one sample collected outside of the residential area indicated higher lead levels. Authorities announced various mitigation steps like fencing-off the affected area around a dilapidated hillside bunker. In an adjacent zone, the authorities plan to raise the ground level by 50-70 centimetres by introducing new gravel and topsoil. Additional precautionary risk-mitigation measures include installing a cement cap at ground level in the administrative, reception and registration areas, which are not part of the contaminated zone.

UNHCR notes the assurances given by the authorities and reiterates that no effort should be spared to ensure that all people who reside and work in the site are safe. All necessary measures to mitigate any potential health risks should be promptly implemented.

According to reports from partners, strong winds on 28 January resulted in damage to four accommodation tents and around 50 tarps, which had all been replaced by the time of writing.

Meanwhile, additional site improvement works to ensure proper drainage continued. UNHCR completed graveling and minor road repairs that improve access to accommodation Rubb Halls and hygiene and sanitation facilities.

### Basic assistance

In support of the authorities, since September, UNHCR has provided basic core relief item packages for 10,000 people, including sleeping bags, blankets and plastic mats. In view of the harsh weather, partners involved facilitated the distribution of winter clothes, such as raincoats, boots and gloves.

In addition, 7,520 asylum-seekers and refugees in Lesvos benefitted from UNHCR's country-wide one-off cash top-up assistance to cover the increased needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in winter. This form of assistance offers greater flexibility and empowers asylum-seekers and refugees to choose how to cover their basic needs. It also contributes directly to the economy of the host community, since refugees and asylum-seekers purchase goods and services locally.

### COVID-19 prevention and response

At the Mavrovouni Medical Hub, UNHCR is working to install 20 Refugee Housing Units to expand the capacity of the quarantine area and provide more effective isolation.

To prevent and mitigate the spread of the pandemic, asylum-seekers have undergone rapid

COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the emergency site. Based on health protocols, all persons testing positive have been directed to the isolation area, alongside family members. According to the authorities, two people are in quarantine as a precautionary measure, but there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Mavrovouni site since 25 December (as of 17 January).

UNHCR completed all works in the quarantine area for new arrivals in Western Lesvos Municipality. The site was graveled, leveled, equipped with proper drainage systems, and 45 insulated tents were set up. All shelter is connected to the electricity network powered by two generators. Hot water for showering and washing is supplied through six solar-powered water heaters. As part of broader site planning, UNHCR also installed two containers that are used for reception and administration purposes, one tent for Médecins Sans Frontiers' medical service provision, and two storage units.

### Protection of vulnerable people

Mothers living in the Mavrovouni site expressed to UNHCR their concerns over safety during night hours, the long distance of hygiene facilities from their lodgings and limited privacy. Similar issues were also raised by single women to UNHCR's partner DIOTIMA, which works to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. UNHCR and its partner relay these issues to the authorities and provide recommendations to resolve them in cooperation with the refugee communities, while providing some limited case management, as resources do not allow for full coverage of all needs.

UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM delivered a training to some 30 staff of humanitarian organizations working in Lesvos on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and sexual harassment to strengthen understanding of standards of conduct, accountability and individual responsibility, with a special focus on sexual exploitation and abuse. These trainings aim at transmitting the skills and tools that staff working with refugees need to detect and respond to sexual misconduct and harassment.

Services were boosted at UNHCR's Protection Desk with the joining of lawyers and interpreters of the Greek Council for Refugees and METAdrasi. This will facilitate and increase the reach of legal information available to asylum-seekers and refugees in the site.

UNHCR will continue its response and welcomes much-needed support through flexible funding that would allow it to address the needs of all asylum-seekers impacted by the fires in Moria. Please visit [UNHCR's donation page](#) to learn more about how you can support those most affected.

UNHCR's operation in Greece is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Moria fires emergency in addition to regular programmes.

#### Donors who contribute to support UNHCR's activities in Greece in 2021

European Union | Austria | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | SAP (UK) Ltd | Education Cannot Wait | Norway

#### Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2021 global programme



#### UNHCR Presence

##### Staff:

**234** National Staff  
**29** International Staff

##### Offices:

**1** Country Office in Athens  
**2** Sub Offices in Thessaloniki, Lesbos  
**3** Field Offices in Chios, Samos, Kos  
**2** Field Units in Evros, Leros

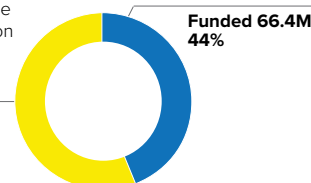


**119,700**  
Population in Greece

**100,600** in the mainland and **19,100** on the islands

**USD 150.5M**  
requested for the  
Greece operation

**Gap 84.1M**  
**56%**



#### Situation in Greece

There are approximately 120,000 asylum-seekers and migrants in Greece, including 4,200 children who arrived alone in the country or were separated from their families along the journey. While the situation in mainland Greece is better overall, most of the roughly 19,100 asylum-seekers at the reception and identification centres and the Mavrovouni site on the Greek Aegean Islands as of 3 January must cope with difficult living conditions and are exposed to various security risks, including gender-based violence.

UNHCR has long [warned](#) of the urgent need to address the situation and conditions for asylum-seekers on the Aegean Islands. More support is also needed from European countries and European Union institutions in providing immediate protection to those most at-risk through continued resources, ensuring capacity in the country and responsibility-sharing through expedited relocations of unaccompanied children and other vulnerable people.

UNHCR will continue to assist Greek authorities in responding to both short-term and long-term challenges.

For more information on the refugee situation and UNHCR interventions in Greece, you may refer to UNHCR's [Operational Portal](#).

#### Human interest story



#### 'All I want is a doctor for my brother and a school for me'

More than 2,200 asylum seekers and refugees have now been relocated from reception centres on Greek islands and elsewhere in Greece to other European countries.

*Somali refugee, Nasro, 18, waits in a hotel room in Athens with her mother and brother before their relocation flight to Germany.*

[Link to the story](#)

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