

KEY FIGURES

158,400

Arrivals in 2015 (as of 14 August)

750%

Increase in arrivals from January-July 2015, compared to same period in 2014

106,000

Syrian arrivals (as of 14 August)

90%

From the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Iraq (as of 14 August)

1,600

Average daily arrivals during July

8%

Of arrivals applied for asylum in Greece from January – June 2015

16,000

Relocation places from Greece over 2 years offered by the EU

PRIORITIES

- Assist the Government and civil society in responding to most urgent humanitarian and protection needs of refugees
- Support the Government to establish reception facilities for persons in need of international protection and adequately respond to register, receive and process asylum requests
- Enhance the coordination role of the Government, support the relocation plan by the EC and implementation of the hotspot approach in Greece

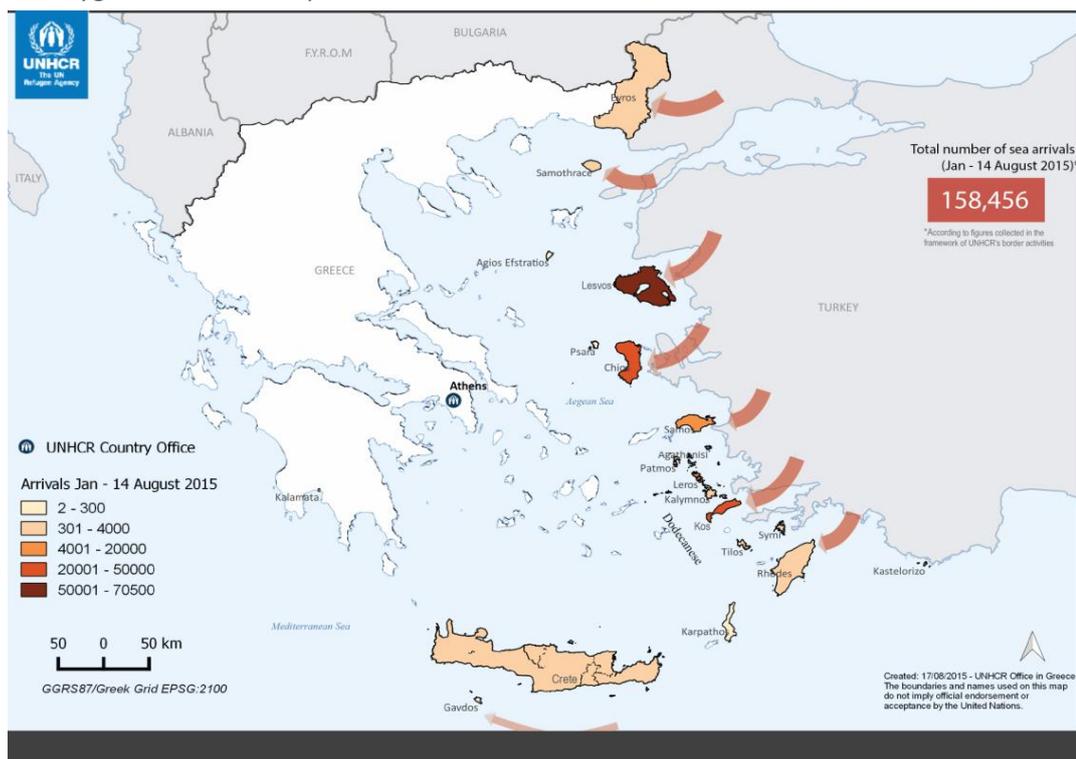
GREECE

UNHCR OPERATIONAL UPDATE

21 July – 21 August 2015

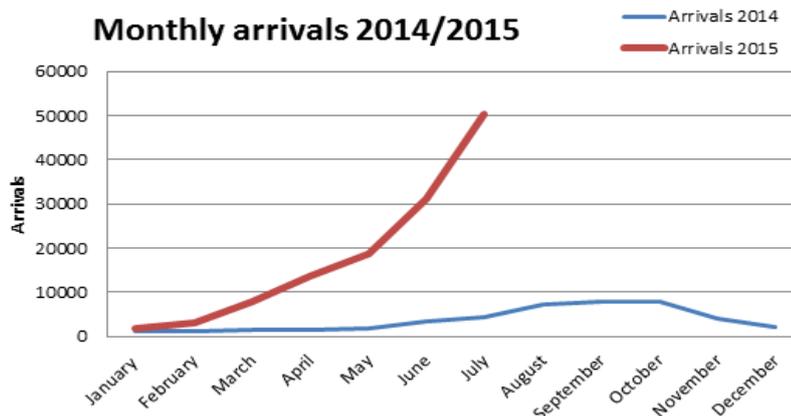
HIGHLIGHTS

- Greece is facing an unprecedented refugee emergency with new record arrival numbers on some islands, whilst the backlog and waiting time for registration further increased.
- On Kos, crisis management including the arrival of a cruise ship serving as temporary pre-registration and reception facility for Syrians, has led to an interim reduction of the registration backlog. However, the situation remains of concern due to high numbers of new arrivals and lack of longer term solutions. UNHCR supported the coordination of registration processes.
- 207 persons were relocated from the Pedion Tou Areos Park in Athens to a new “temporary accommodation site” with the capacity of 700 persons, offering essential services. UNHCR Site Planner closely assisted the Greek authorities by providing expert advice.
- UNHCR currently has 15 protection staff positioned at key entry points and provides interpretation services through its implementing partner METAction. In July 19,600 persons benefitted from individual or group information sessions by UNHCR.
- As of late July, UNHCR provided Basic Relief Items including 2,700 sleeping mats, 6,890 sleeping bags and 2,250 hygiene kits, for distribution at arrival points. 7,400 units of bottled water and 5,040 energy bars were made available to municipalities, local NGOs and volunteers. The reception infrastructure, services and registration procedures are falling far short of needs. On all main entry points, there is a lack of adequate reception conditions resulting in serious hygiene, health and protection risks.



Operational Context

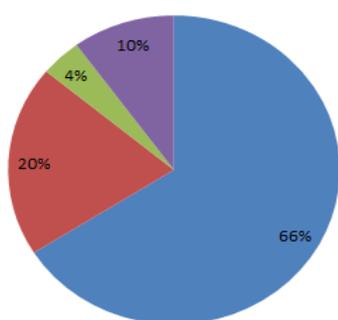
- Unprecedented numbers of new arrivals:** the Greek economic crisis had no impact on ongoing large-scale irregular movements from Turkey, in particular to the Northeastern Aegean and Dodecanese islands. New record arrival figures were observed on some islands, with the numbers of arrivals in some cases surpassing the total local population of the island. Greece is facing a 750 % increase in arrivals from January - July 2015 compared to the same period in 2014. The trend of an accelerating increase is continuing. In July alone, over 50,000 new arrivals have been reported, which is more than during the whole of last year (43,500) and 20,000 more than the previous month – an increase of almost 70%. The close proximity to Turkey means that sea crossings are comparatively less dangerous than the Central Mediterranean route, albeit loss of lives still occur. Enhanced Search and Rescue operations by the Hellenic Coast Guard are ongoing on the route.



- Challenges in reception, registration and asylum procedures:** once persons are rescued or enter Greece irregularly, they are arrested by the Coast Guard or Police to undergo an identification and registration procedure, including fingerprinting. Currently there are only three police-run “identification centres”, on the islands of Chios, Lesbos and Samos. Arrivals on other islands are accommodated in Coast Guard or Police structures or in open public spaces. The processing capacity by the Coast Guard, Police and First Reception Service has been severely affected by the unprecedented high number of arrivals, limited human resources, weak infrastructure, lack of technical equipment and coordination challenges. Consequently, it can take several weeks before new arrivals are registered, resulting in an increasing backlog despite enormous efforts of understaffed local Police. Due to the significant influx, the Greek Government does not carry out the full registration of Syrians on several islands and refers them to registration on the mainland. Arrivals can apply for asylum, however, their ability to do so is hampered by the limited presence and capacity of the Asylum Service on the islands (only Lesbos and Rhodes). Hence, most asylum claims are filed later at the Central Asylum Service office in Athens. However, the overall rate of asylum requests is only 8%, as of 30 June. Assisted voluntary returns of persons not in need of international protection, primarily implemented by IOM have temporarily ceased to the lack of funding.

Country of origin %

■ The Syrian Arab Republic ■ Afghanistan ■ Iraq ■ Other



- 66% of arrivals from the Syrian Arab Republic:** the vast majority of arrivals in Greece are from countries in conflict, mainly the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by Afghanistan, and lower numbers of Iraqis. As of 14 August, 66% of all arrivals since the beginning of the year are Syrians and in July alone Syrians reached 70%. A UNHCR survey targeting Syrians entering Greece, focusing on their profile, reasons of flight, conditions in interim countries and protection challenges, is ongoing. Interim results will be published soon.

- Backlog in registration on Kos:** with an average of more than 500 arrivals per day (as of 14 August) and limited registration capacity on Kos, there exists a significant registration backlog on the island which contributes to tensions. On 11 August, clashes between the police and the refugees and migrants broke out. The situation normalised more recently

and through temporarily introduced procedures in the sports stadium, around 2,500 Syrians were pre-registered within three days. On 15 August a commercially rented cruise ship begun serving as a temporary pre-registration and reception facility for 1,700 Syrians. On 18 August the ship departed to the mainland, collecting other Syrians from Kalymnos, Leros and Lesbos. Overall, the crisis management on Kos has led to an interim reduction of the backlog of registrations. However, the situation remains of concern due to high numbers of new arrivals, anxiety amongst non-Syrians, scarcity of ferry tickets to Athens and the lack of longer term solutions. If a similar pace of arrivals continues, further congestion is expected. Increased challenges also exist in Lesbos, with the highest number of arrivals.

- **Opening of temporary accommodation site in Athens:** since July, over 400 people – mainly Afghan families – have been sleeping rough in the park of Pedion Tou Areos in Athens. On 16 August, around 207 persons were relocated from the park to the new Eleonas/Votanikos “temporary accommodation site” where 66 prefabricated houses can accommodate around 700 individuals, offering essential services. Though the legal status and management of the centre remain unclear, this is a positive development. UNHCR has advocated for the development of this site and the UNHCR Site Planner has closely assisted the authorities by providing expert advice. More support is needed in order to make the site sustainable and to be replicable in other municipalities.
- **Greece as a transit point to Northern Europe:** from January-June 2015, just over 8% of all arrivals (4% of all Syrians) submitted an asylum request in Greece. Most others move in an irregular manner via the Balkan to other European countries. Vulnerable individuals in transit, such as single-headed households, single women and persons with medical, are particularly exposed to various protection risks. Another specific vulnerable group is unaccompanied adolescent boys. With the desire to move on to other Europe countries as fast as possible and avoid being escorted to centres for unaccompanied children, many register as adults in Greece.
- **Government operational plan:** on Friday 8 August, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras convened an urgent inter-ministerial meeting on an operational plan to address the most acute problems related to the influx. Planned measures intend to decongest the islands, reinforce first reception infrastructures, operationalise reception facilities for unaccompanied and separated children, strengthen identification mechanisms and establish a dedicated government agency for the response.

Achievements

UNHCR intervention in Greece is time-limited and targeted, focusing on support for the government’s response and temporarily addressing urgent gaps on the islands. UNHCR is mobilising emergency teams and resources, while continuing advocacy for an adequate European response.



Protection

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR currently has protection staff positioned on key arrival points: Lesvos (4), Kos (4), Samos (2), Chios (2), Leros/Kalymnos (1), Rhodes (1 roving capacity) and the land border region (1). Protection teams are monitoring arrival processes and are meeting new arrivals in order to provide information on procedures, rights, responsibilities, and assistance. From January – July, 62,000 persons benefitted from individual or group information sessions by UNHCR, including 19,600 in July. The teams also support local authorities in the profiling of the population in order to improve identification of vulnerabilities.
- UNHCR increased the capacity of the interpretation service of its implementing partner METAction. 19 interpreters are based on island locations, covering two languages (Arabic; Farsi/Dari). An additional pool of interpreters for various languages is available in Athens, who can be deployed on mission on a needs-basis.
- As of the end of July, UNHCR provided, through the services of METAction, escorts for the transfer of 133 unaccompanied children from arrival points to specialised facilities on the mainland, including 76 in July alone.
- UNHCR supported targeted one-time assistance to particularly vulnerable individuals with acute needs. This assistance included travel tickets to reach support structures on the mainland, coverage of exceptional accommodation and food.
- On Lesvos, to address the challenge faced by arrivals having to walk up to 70 km to registration sites, UNHCR advocated to change the law so the transportation of undocumented people, under certain circumstances, is no longer criminalised. UNHCR also provided 3 buses to the Coast Guard to transport new arrivals to registration points.
- During the particularly challenging situation on Kos, UNHCR supported the coordination of registration processes for pending cases, including on the cruise ship. UNHCR played a substantial role in crowd control, information provision and identification of vulnerable groups during the changing registration processes.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The reception infrastructure, services and registration procedures are falling far short of needs. On all main entry points, there is a lack of adequate reception conditions resulting in serious hygiene, health and protection risks.

- Changing registration procedures, non-standardised assistance compounded by limited crowd management capacity continue to cause increased tensions and to raise security concerns.
- There is a need to set up systems to identify persons with specific needs particularly SGBV cases and traumatised individuals, during the registration process, as well as a need to develop an adequate referral process for such cases. Similarly, safety and security around reception centres and informal settlements should be strengthened to prevent violence, including SGBV incidents.
- Urgent decongestion of the islands is a priority to defuse tension at local level and pressure on limited services.

Site Planning, Shelter and Basic Relief Items

Achievements and Impact

- As of late July, UNHCR provided Basic Relief Items including 2,700 sleeping mats, 6,890 sleeping bags and 2,250 hygiene kits, for distribution at arrival points. 7,400 units of bottled water and 5,040 energy bars were made available to municipalities, local NGOs and volunteers.
- The UNHCR Site Planner rendered daily expert advice to the Greek authorities in the construction of the Eleonas/Votanikos site. Also, tent settings in the impromptu site of Cara Tepe on Lesvos have been improved in line with his recommendations. Site planning advice is ongoing in the police-run identification centre in Moria on Lesvos.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- On Lesvos, there is a need to improve and rehabilitate existing registration and reception facilities. Discussions with authorities are ongoing.
- On other islands, notably Kos, Leros, Kalymnos, Simi and Tilos, there is an urgent need to identify suitable sites for registration and reception facilities.
- The police-run identification centres of Mersinidi on Chios and Vathy on Samos need urgent refurbishment and technical improvements to meet minimum standards.
- Mainland reception capacity for refugees and asylum seekers remains at 1,100 places, which is far from meeting the needs.
- Current combined stocks of all actors of Basis Relief Items, fall short to address the needs of new arrivals.

Working in partnership

- UNHCR's emergency assistance and protection services in Greece in the context of the Special Mediterranean Initiative, are delivered through implementing partners, including the Greek NGO METAction, which provides interpretation services and facilitates escorts of unaccompanied children from arrival points to specialised facilities on the mainland. Existing partnerships with two local NGOs, the Greek Council for Refugees and the Ecumenical Refugee Program of the Church of Greece, have recently been amended to include increased support for integration of recognized refugees and additional caseloads for family reunification under the Dublin procedures.
- On the islands and in the park in Athens, much of the response has been provided thanks to the solidarity of volunteers, community based organisations, and local NGOs, and in Athens, refugee communities play a key role.
- Additionally, UNHCR supports the government's coordination efforts by facilitation of an information sharing forum at Athens level. The forum brings together various NGOs and other organisations - reference is made to the 3W in the annex. In the last meeting, participants agreed to initiate sectorial and thematic, smaller working groups, in particular on information management and distribution of Basic Relief Items. On Lesvos, a local coordination groups is active, led by local authorities.

Annex: 3W

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

Who's Doing What Where? (Greek-Turkish borders, as of 16 August 2015)

