

# Greece

Living conditions for asylum-seekers in the reception centres remain alarming as sea arrivals continued this month. **9,000** reached the islands, mostly from **Syria and Afghanistan** and **2,000** crossed the

Evros land border. UNHCR supports **fast and fair asylum procedures** and appreciates Greece's efforts to overhaul its strained asylum system, but is **concerned that the asylum law** voted in Parliament **reduces**

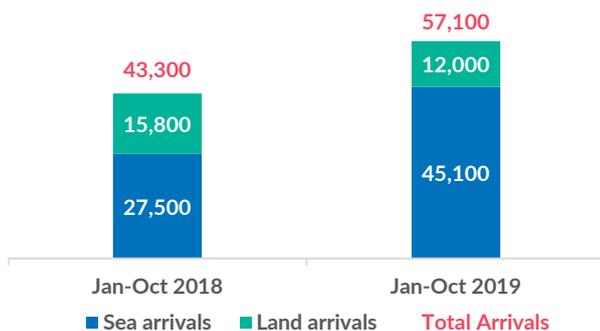
**safeguards for people seeking international protection** and introduces extensive provisions for applicants to be detained.

## REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN GREECE\*

**103,500**

**68,100** in the mainland and **35,400** on the islands

### Arrivals



\*UNHCR estimate as of 31 October 2019 of those who arrived and remained in Greece since the 2015 – 2016 flow.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

**76,600**

eligible asylum-seekers and refugees this month, and **138,300** since April 2017 received **cash assistance**.

**21,600**

people this month, and **61,900** since November 2015 have benefitted from UNHCR's **accommodation in apartments**.

## REFUGEES IN UNHCR'S ESTIA ACCOMMODATION

- 95%** have social security number (AMKA)
- 76%** have tax identification number (AFM)
- 88%** children enrolled in schools
- 36%** registered with unemployment agency (OAED)
- 6%** have a bank account

## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

- 283 National Staff
- 30 International Staff

### Offices:

- 1 Country Office in Athens
- 2 Sub Offices in Thessaloniki, Lesbos
- 3 Field Offices in Chios, Samos, Kos
- 4 Field Units in Evros, Ioannina, Leros, Rhodes



An asylum-seeker from Syria holds his young daughter outside an abandoned building near the Lepida reception centre on Leros.

## Working with Partners

- UNHCR supports the Government of Greece who leads the refugee response, working closely with other United Nations agencies, international and national NGOs, regional and State institutions, municipalities, grassroots organizations, refugee communities and the local society.

## Main Activities

### Accommodation and Cash Assistance

- UNHCR runs the EU-funded [ESTIA accommodation](#) and [cash assistance](#) programmes in cooperation with the Government, municipalities and NGOs.
- UNHCR works closely with staff from State organizations to prepare for the transition of these programmes to the Greek authorities.
- Apartments in cities and towns offer asylum-seekers and refugees greater dignity and independence. Children can go to school, while access to healthcare and other services is facilitated. It also helps the integration of those who will remain in Greece. The host population benefits from the **4,480 apartments and 14 buildings** that the programme rents in **21 cities and towns** across Greece. UNHCR had **25,550 accommodation places** in October.
- UNHCR gave cash in the form of pre-paid cards to **76,600 asylum-seekers and refugees** in apartments and sites. Cash allows refugees to choose what they need most. It is spent on food, goods and services, and contributes to the local community. In October, almost **7.8 million euro** in cash assistance will eventually be re-injected into the local economy.

### Protection

- UNHCR is concerned that the Government's proposed legislative amendments to the [asylum law](#) – voted before the Greek Parliament on 1 November and expected to enter in force as of 1 January 2020 – endangers those in need of international protection, including by putting an excessive burden on asylum-seekers and focusing on punitive measures.
- Current reception places country-wide are full, as a result of continuous arrivals as well as limited legal movement out of Greece for asylum-seekers and refugees. The **30,700 people**, mostly women and children, in and around the reception centres often have few options but to stay under precarious conditions putting at risk their well-being. The situation in mainland sites is overall better, but the expedited transfers have tested the ability of certain camps to receive more people. Tensions between asylum-seekers and also locals have become more apparent fuelled by exasperation and harsh living conditions.
- On 23 October, a Hellenic Coast Guard patrol vessel collided at night with a boat carrying **34 people** off Kos, as a result of which one three-year-old Syrian boy died and a Palestinian man is missing. UNHCR offered interpretation and psychosocial

support to the survivors and accommodated the mother of the deceased boy in ESTIA apartments on the island where she reunited with her brother, following his transfer from Chios. In 2019, **70 people** lost their lives or are considered missing at sea in their attempt to reach Greece.

- Some **4,800** people left the islands this month. Organized transfers to the mainland reached a total of **2,800 people – 1,700** with the support of UNHCR.
- All reception centres are heavily overpopulated, especially **Samos (6,000 vs 700) and Lesbos (14,400 vs 2,150)**. In smaller islands, such as Kastelorizo, Kalymnos and Symi there are no reception structures leaving asylum-seekers exposed to risks. In Evros, two thirds of the population in the reception centre (**300**) are unaccompanied children (**200**).
- UNHCR's team in Evros, at the Greek - Turkish land border helps people who have recently arrived at the Fylakio reception centre. They ensure they are informed and identified properly and that people with specific needs are directed to appropriate services.
- UNHCR supports the Asylum Service with experts who advise the Asylum Service caseworkers upon request on how to conduct interviews, draft decisions on asylum applications and provide on-the-job training. UNHCR assisted in at least **10,400 instances** in 2019, and **45,700 instances** since 2016. This work has multiplying benefits in the processing of asylum applications beyond these instances.
- UNHCR helps strengthen the national system and expertise by seconding **68 experts** to the various State agencies to bolster their response and organizing trainings for Governmental staff.
- As of October 2019, UNHCR and its partners have helped over **10,400 asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection** with counselling and legal representation on asylum procedures and further administrative treatment as well as other issues related to accessing rights.
- UNHCR [HELP website](#) answers refugees and asylum-seekers questions on [how to apply for asylum](#), on their [rights and obligations](#), and on accessing services when [living in Greece](#). In 2019, **44,100 people** searched for information in five languages.

### Child Protection

- There are **5,000 unaccompanied children** in Greece, of which **1,250** in shelters and supported independent living appropriate for their age ([EKKA data](#)). However, the **1,600 boys and girls** in the reception centres face woefully inadequate conditions and often have to share their space with adults or sleep out in the open risking exploitation and abuse. Their transfer to a shelter suitable for their needs is lengthy adding to the hardship of fleeing conflict and prosecution. Since January 2019, over **2,600 unaccompanied boys and girls** have made the journey to Greece, an 82 per cent increase since 2018.
- UNHCR identifies vulnerable children and supports them with legal aid and psychosocial support through partners and boosts the response of the Government with expertise, trainings and advice.
- UNHCR, its partner METAdrasi and the Ministry of Labour cooperate through a tripartite agreement for the implementation of the guardianship law. UNHCR deploys

**45 guardians** assisting up to **1,300 unaccompanied children** and **14 coordination staff** to support the Ministry of Labour.

- In 2019, UNHCR's partner METAdrasi has accompanied and helped over **500 unaccompanied children** from reception centres to temporary shelters on the mainland.
- UNHCR works with EKKA guardians to provide places in supported independent living apartments for some **35 unaccompanied children** over 16 years old, mentoring and empowering them to become self-reliant and live on their own. For younger children, UNHCR works with foster families to cater to the needs of **30 unaccompanied or separated children**.
- Since the beginning of the Dubs' scheme in 2017, **80 children** departed to the United Kingdom following review by EKKA, UNHCR and IOM, while 38 await their transfer. UNHCR advocates for the continuation of the program and for additional solidarity measures by other European states.

#### Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence

- Prevention and response to incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including domestic violence, is increasingly challenging. With overfilled reception centres and many unlit areas around them, risks are prevalent, especially for single parents as well as boys and girls who are unaccompanied. In the urban centres, there is a notable increase of survivors who are homeless risking further abuse and exploitation.
- UNHCR works to respond to SGBV in urban areas as well as some field locations and islands to identify survivors and people at risk, offering case management, legal information, counselling and psychosocial and medical attention through partners. UNHCR refers survivors and those at high risk of sexual exploitation to State services and shelters or accommodation in apartments where they can get expert help.

#### Education

- UNHCR with UNICEF and other actors support the [Ministry of Education](#) (MoE) to include and prepare refugee boys and girls for public school.
- This month, the Ministerial Decision for the establishment of preparatory classes for refugee children in reception centres and accommodation sites was issued; a positive step for the inclusion of refugee children in schools. Nonetheless, not all have [access to education](#), especially the **5,000 school-aged** children who live at the moment in the reception centres on the islands. In the current school year, **88 per cent of refugee children in ESTIA** accommodation were enrolled into public schools alongside their Greek peers.
- UNHCR's bridging education centres on the islands and Athens offer opportunities for learning, skills-building as well as legal and psychosocial support to children at risk.
- UNHCR also works with teachers and students to foster coexistence, increase awareness about forced displacement and human rights and support the inclusion of refugee students in school through [experiential learning](#) techniques.

## Health

- UNHCR works with the [Ministry of Health](#), the [National Public Health Organization](#) (EODY) and partners to help refugees and asylum-seekers access healthcare, also in coordination with the [World Health Organization](#).
- While hiring of new staff is ongoing, staffing shortages have created a large waiting list and long delays in medical and psychosocial screening in the reception centres which subsequently overburdens the timely completion of the vulnerability screening – an integral part of the asylum procedure. This may pose a risk for the submission of applications for family reunification under Dublin Regulation. It also renders difficult to detect and care for asylum-seekers who suffer from non-obvious vulnerabilities, as for instance people who have survived torture. UNHCR assists in certifying victims of torture, an essential process for their rehabilitation.
- People requiring regular medical treatment, including those with chronic diseases, face challenges accessing public healthcare due to the suspension of AMKA social security number issuance. UNHCR is covering medical expenses for asylum-seekers without AMKA hosted in ESTIA accommodation, including for those with disabilities.
- UNHCR funds primary healthcare and psychosocial support services in Lesvos and mental health services in Attika and Thessaloniki.

## Durable Solutions

- In 2019, **12,800** people acquired **refugee or subsidiary protection** in Greece, and **45,000** people since 2015 ([Asylum Service](#) data as of September). In October, **14,900 recognized** refugees benefitted from cash assistance and **7,300 beneficiaries of international protection status** were accommodated in UNHCR's apartments.
- UNHCR supports the Government in promoting the national strategy on integration. Initiatives, such as this month's establishment of a Migrant Integration Council by the Municipality of Ioannina help promote the inclusion of refugees in the local societies and their successful integration.
- The new guidance on the issuance of AMKA social security number which was issued this month addresses, among other categories, beneficiaries of international protection facilitating access to much needed services.
- UNHCR's partners support those living in the accommodation scheme with job matching or referral to develop skills, vocational trainings and language courses. Of the recognized refugees living in UNHCR's accommodation, **95% have an AMKA number, 76% have an AFM tax number, 36%** are registered with **OAED unemployment agency**. However, only **6% have a bank account** which is a prerequisite for receiving a salary, among other.

## Returns and Relocation

- UNHCR is supporting the national authorities in relocating **1,000 applicants and beneficiaries of international protection** from Greece to Portugal.
- This month, **36 people returned** from Greece to Turkey in the framework of the E.U. - Turkey Statement, with a total of **1,950 people** since 20 March 2016.

### Shelter

- This month, UNHCR provided to the authorities **5,000 core relief items**, including family-size tents, blankets, sleeping bags and hygiene items for new arrivals.
- UNHCR with partners is managing – in coordination with the Municipality of Lesbos – the Kara Tepe accommodation site which provides quality accommodation and protection to vulnerable people or families.
- UNHCR also helps people who arrive in the northern part of Lesbos, providing basic assistance and a place to stay overnight in the transit site in Skala Sikamineas until the authorities are ready to receive them in the reception and identification centre.

### Partners

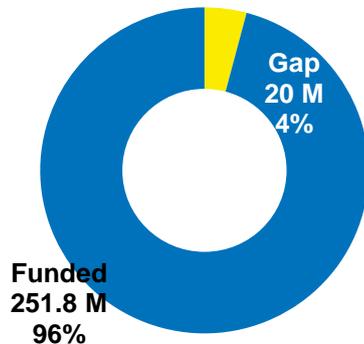
In October, UNHCR worked through **35 partners**: [UNICEF](#), [ARSIS](#), [Iliaktida](#), [INTEROS](#), [NOSTOS](#), [Praxis](#), [Solidarity Now](#), [Catholic Relief Services](#), the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#), [METAdrasi](#), the [Greek Council for Refugees](#), the [Network for Children's Rights](#), [Doctors of the World](#), the [Association for Regional Development and Mental Health \(EPAPSY\)](#), [Diotima](#), [Faros](#), [KEAN - Cell Of Alternative Youth Activities](#), [International Rescue Committee](#), [International Catholic Migration Commission \(ICMC\)](#), [Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network \(TENet\)](#), [UNOPS](#), [Perichoresis](#), [OMNES](#), [Kyclos](#) and the Local Authorities of Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Livadia, Herakleion, Trikala, Nea Filadelfia – Nea Chalkidona, Karditsa, Larissa, Tripoli and Tilos.

### LINKS

[Mediterranean Situation](#) – [UNHCR Greece](#) – [Twitter](#) – [Facebook](#) - [YouTube](#)

**FUNDING (AS OF 11 NOVEMBER 2019)**

**USD 271.8 M** requested for the Greece Operation



## Donors

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### Thanks to the donors of the Greece Operation in 2019

European Union 252 M | Education Cannot Wait 1.4 M | United States of America 1.2 M | Republic of Korea 500 K | The World We Want Foundation 250 K | Fondation BNP Paribas 112 K

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