

Greece

In March, there was increased tension at the Turkish-Greek land border which was closed. **Most arrivals (2,100)** took place on the Greek Aegean islands before COVID-19 restrictive measures led to **no arrivals in the second half of the month.**

UNHCR **appealed for calm** at the **EU-Turkey borders** and stressed that persons entering into a State irregularly should not be punished, in response to the Government's announcement of suspending access to asylum for March arrivals and resorting to detention.

UNHCR also **scaled up** support to the Greek Government to mitigate **the risk of COVID-19** spreading to overcrowded reception centres where people, including the elderly and immunosuppressed, are staying in squalid conditions.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN GREECE*

120,000

80,300 in the mainland and 39,700 on the islands

Arrivals



*UNHCR estimate as of 31 March 2020 of those who arrived and remained in Greece since the 2015 – 2016 flow.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

96,300

eligible asylum-seekers and refugees this month, and **177,200** since April 2017 received **cash assistance.**

22,000

people this month, and **66,300** since January 2015 have benefitted from UNHCR's **accommodation in apartments.**

PEOPLE IN UNHCR'S ESTIA ACCOMMODATION

73% have access to healthcare (AMKA or PAAYPA)

72% children enrolled in schools

58% have tax identification number (AFM)

24% registered with unemployment agency (OAED)

4% have a bank account

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

309 National Staff

31 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



Afghan asylum-seekers in the Moria reception and identification centre on Lesbos island.

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

COVID-19 Prevention and Response

- UNHCR [helps](#) the Greek Government's prevention and response to COVID-19 in the island reception centres by increasing water and sanitation capacity, providing core relief and hygiene items, installing health units for screening and isolation, distributing additional cash assistance, facilitating access to information through helplines and interpreters and enhancing its coordination role with UN agencies, NGOs and authorities.
- To shield the population at high risk of COVID-19 complications in the island reception centres – where it is difficult to apply social distancing measures – UNHCR moved **193 people** this month to ESTIA apartments.
- On the islands, UNHCR provided **12 medical units** for screening, isolation and quarantine and **three toilet and shower** prefabricated containers.
- UNHCR offered **11,520 hygiene items** such as soap and baby care kits and **24,680 core relief** items such as blankets and sleeping bags to those in the centres.
- UNHCR facilitates access to quality information for asylum-seekers via helplines, interpretation as well as the [HELP](#) website and is mobilising refugee communities to offer help to residents in the island reception centres.
- With the closure of public schools, UNHCR adapted its learning programmes for children who were enrolled in the non-formal educational centres offering self-learning packages with exercises and recreational material which children can do while sheltering in place.

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 agencies 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 and helps the integration of those who will remain in Greece. The host population also benefits from the **4,592 apartments and 8 buildings** that the programme rents in **21 cities and towns** across Greece. UNHCR had **25,500 accommodation places** this month.

- UNHCR gave cash in the form of pre-paid cards to **96,300 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 March, more than **9.3 million euro** in cash assistance will eventually be re-injected into the local economy.

Protection

- Increased movements of people, including asylum-seekers and refugees, were observed at the [EU-Turkey border](#). UNHCR appealed for calm and reminded that neither the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor EU refugee law provides legal basis for the suspension of the reception of asylum applications. All States have a right to control their borders and manage irregular movements, but at the same time should refrain from the use of excessive or disproportionate force and maintain systems for handling asylum requests in an orderly manner.
- Relations between the refugee and host community on the islands became [tenuous](#) with intimidating and even violent acts against refugees and migrants, as well as humanitarian workers, including a UNHCR staff member on Lesbos and the arson of UNHCR's transit site for new arrivals on Lesbos's north shore.
- Housing options and services to cater for the present population remained limited countrywide, while 34,700 people on the islands continued to crowd in spaces for less than 5,400.
- Transfers from the islands to the mainland help liberate much-needed space in the reception centres. This month, UNHCR supported **980 organized transfers**. In total, **4,200 people departed** to the mainland.
- UNHCR's team at the land border in Evros, helps families and unaccompanied children at the Fylakio reception centre to access necessary services, provides information and helps the authorities identify those with specific needs who require special assistance.
- UNHCR helps strengthen the national system and expertise by seconding **68 experts** to the various State agencies to bolster their response and by organizing trainings for Governmental staff.
- UNHCR supports the Asylum Service with experts who advise the caseworkers upon request on how to conduct interviews, draft decisions on asylum applications and provide on-the-job training. UNHCR assisted in **3,935 instances** in 2020, and **52,066** since 2016. This work has multiplying benefits beyond these instances promoting high quality in asylum processing and ensuring the integrity of the procedure.
- From the beginning of 2020, UNHCR and its partners have helped over **3,700 asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection** with counselling and legal representation in order to prepare and support their cases, as for example for family reunification procedures.
- UNHCR [HELP website](#) answers questions in five languages on [how to apply for asylum](#), on [rights and obligations](#), and on accessing services when [living in Greece](#).

Child Protection

- Living conditions for the **5,250 asylum-seeking children** who have arrived alone in Greece are trying. Only **one in four** has a place in an appropriate shelter ([EKKA data](#) as of April).
- 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 is concerned that hundreds of unaccompanied children in Greece – already experiencing hardship – are exposed to greater risks after a guardianship programme, supported by UNHCR with the Ministry of Labour and NGO METAdrasi, ended at the start of this year but has not been replaced yet by a planned Governmental scheme.
- Since January 2020, UNHCR’s partner METAdrasi safely moved **61 unaccompanied children** from reception centres to temporary shelters on the mainland.
- UNHCR provides places in supported independent living apartments for **44 unaccompanied children** over 16 years old, mentoring and empowering them to become self-reliant and to live on their own. For younger children, UNHCR works with foster families to cater to the needs of **30 unaccompanied or separated children**.

Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence

- Lack of privacy, inadequate lighting and long distance to toilets and showers foster risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the sites.
- UNHCR and its partners work to prevent and respond to SGBV in urban areas as well as some field locations and islands to identify [survivors](#), including men and LGBTI persons, as well as people at risk, offering case management, legal information, counselling and psychosocial and medical attention through partners. UNHCR refers those affected to State services and shelters or accommodation in apartments where they can get expert help.
- UNHCR supports the authorities strengthen the national reporting mechanism on trafficking, especially on the islands where the situation is more challenging.

Education

- UNHCR with UNICEF and other actors support the [Ministry of Education](#) to include refugee boys and girls in public education.
- In the current school year, **81% of recognised refugee children in ESTIA** accommodation are enrolled into public schools alongside their Greek peers. UNHCR estimates that **10,600 school-aged children** (4-17) are on the Aegean islands, while only a handful attend public schools.
- UNHCR joins forces with teachers and students to increase awareness on forced displacement and human rights 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](#).
- The issuance of a new temporary health number (PAAYPA), which replaces the older AMKA social security number for asylum-seekers, largely allows asylum-seekers to obtain free healthcare. However, due to technical complications this measure is not implemented in practice; medical care services and free medicine are still largely unavailable to asylum-seekers apart from critical urgent cases.
- UNHCR supports primary healthcare and psychosocial support services in Lesvos and mental health services in Attika and Thessaloniki. UNHCR works with experts to train and build the skills of non-specialist refugees to offer basic psychosocial support and empower vulnerable refugees, including those with mental health conditions.

Durable Solutions

- Since 2013, **54,300** people acquired **refugee or subsidiary protection** in Greece, of which **1,500** in February ([Asylum Service](#) data as of February). In March, **12,450 recognised** refugees benefitted from cash assistance and **6,600 beneficiaries of international protection** were accommodated in UNHCR's apartments.
- 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 recognised refugees living in UNHCR's accommodation, **93% have an AMKA social security number, 75% have an AFM tax number, and 36%** are registered with **OAED unemployment agency**. However, only **7% have a bank account** which is a prerequisite for receiving a salary, among other.
- UNHCR supports the Government promote the national strategy on integration and supports the Municipalities to establish more inclusive services.
- UNHCR also supports refugees navigate the Greek civil, social and economic system and access much needed documents, such as travel papers, and family certificates. This helps refugees become self-reliant, have gainful employment and eventually be included in the Greek society. More language classes and job trainings for adults can further help refugees to integrate.

Returns and Relocation

- UNHCR supports the Greek Government in its efforts to secure relocation places for unaccompanied children, as well as asylum-seekers and recognised refugees more broadly to other European States and offers advice and technical support. Portugal, France, Luxembourg, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Croatia, Serbia and Bulgaria have pledged their support with relocation, including of unaccompanied children.
- This month, **53 people** were [returned](#) from Greece to Turkey in the framework of the E.U. - Turkey Statement, with a total of **2,054 people** since 20 March 2016.

Shelter and Basic Assistance

- UNHCR provided over **14,620 relief items** to the authorities for new arrivals, including blankets, sleeping bags and plastic tarps.

- UNHCR with partners is managing – in coordination with the Municipality of Lesvos – the Kara Tepe accommodation site which provides quality accommodation and protection to **1,100 vulnerable people or families**.
- The transit site in Skala Sikamineas – where until February UNHCR provided basic assistance and a overnight accommodation to people arriving in the northern part of Lesvos – was set on fire by [arson](#) this month. This was one of a number of attacks against humanitarian staff and property on the islands.

Partners

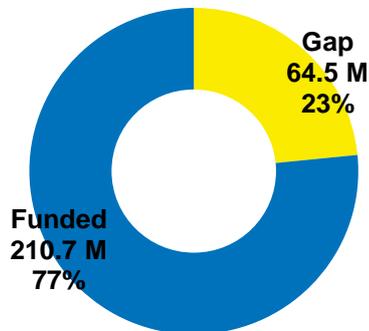
In March, UNHCR worked through **33 partners**: [UNICEF](#), [ARSIS](#), [Iliaktida](#), [INTERSOS](#), [NOSTOS](#), [Praxis](#), [Solidarity Now](#), [Catholic Relief Services](#), the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#), [METAdrasi](#), the [Greek Council for Refugees](#), the [Network for Children's Rights](#), [Doctors of the World](#), the [Association for Regional Development and Mental Health \(EPAPSY\)](#), [Diotima](#), [Faros](#), [International Rescue Committee](#), [International Catholic Migration Commission \(ICMC\)](#), [Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network \(TENet\)](#), [UNOPS](#), [Perichoresis](#), [OMNES](#) 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 29 APRIL 2020)

USD 275.2 M requested for the Greece Operation



Donors

Special thanks to the major donors of unrestricted funds in 2020

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