

GREECE UPDATE

MORIA FIRE EMERGENCY

25 September 2020



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).

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



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BACKGROUND

The fires on 8-10 September destroyed all accommodations in Moria's Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) and the adjacent "Olive Grove" area on Lesvos island. Some 12,000 asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight.

Greek authorities are leading and coordinating the immediate response. An emergency site close to Mytilene, in the area of Kara Tepe, was set up within days to temporarily house affected asylum-seekers. From 17 to 24 September, Greek authorities moved some 9,400 asylum-seekers to the new emergency site, while several hundred vulnerable asylum-seekers have been transferred to safe accommodations on the island or relocated to the mainland. Authorities have indicated that residents of the emergency site will be able to access asylum and other procedures at a date yet to be confirmed.

UNHCR teams and partners are providing asylum-seekers with emergency shelter and core relief items. The Office is also

supporting authorities with technical advice and expertise regarding site set-up and planning.

On 24 September, [UNHCR called for urgent action to improve conditions](#) and ensure humane solutions for asylum-seekers in the new emergency site and in reception centres on the other Aegean Islands. UNHCR continues advocating for comprehensive solutions, calling for continuous European support and responsibility-sharing.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Site planning and shelter

UNHCR is supporting the Government in setting up the emergency site as a temporary measure to provide immediate shelter and protection to asylum-seekers who were affected by the fires. As of 24 September, 1,100 family tents (900 provided by UNHCR) as well as four UNHCR Rubb Halls and eight IOM Rubb Halls had been set up.

UNHCR continues advocating for shelter



1,100 family tents (900 provided by UNHCR) were set up

12

Rubb Halls (4 provided by UNHCR) were installed

allocation that takes into consideration the needs of women, children and vulnerable groups.

The Government has asked UNHCR to assist in making improvements to the emergency site, in particular to prepare for the winter. Given its location near the seashore, the site is exposed to challenging weather conditions and safety hazards. UNHCR has delivered so far 555 m³ of gravel to protect tents and common areas from rain and flooding. The Office is also delivering tent insulation kits and has begun construction and installation of custom flooring with pallets, plywood sheets, and insulation mats to improve the UNHCR family tents for the winter. UNHCR and other actors have highlighted to authorities that large-scale efforts are required to ensure proper drainage throughout the site ahead of the winter.

UNHCR continues to advocate with authorities at the central and local levels for more durable post-emergency shelter solutions.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Adequate WASH capacity is essential for a safe environment and critical to prevent the spread of COVID-19. UNHCR has installed over 40 water, hygiene and sanitation facilities so far, including chemical toilets and 8 handwashing stations; a total of 376 latrines have been installed with the support of other actors. Despite these efforts, sanitation facilities remain worryingly inadequate. Priority must be given to improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Meanwhile, UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and the IRC have worked on common hygiene-related messaging for site residents.

COVID-19 prevention and response

To prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, asylum-seekers are undergoing rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the emergency facility. Based on health protocols, any person testing positive is being directed to one of the two designated isolation areas.

According to authorities, as of 24 September, 245 people had tested

positive for COVID-19 and were moved to the isolation area together with their family members. With a total of 560 people in the isolation areas, these are now at capacity, while works on these areas are still ongoing, including on sanitation facilities. To ensure a safe and effective isolation period, UNHCR has started fencing works in the initial isolation area.

To support the existing COVID-19 related infrastructure, in coordination with the authorities and WHO, UNHCR transferred two containers from the triage area outside the Moria RIC to be used by the national health agency. Medical organizations, including UNHCR partner Médecins du Monde, are working alongside the authorities to provide medical support in the site and alleviate pressure on the local public hospital.

Material Assistance

Electricity is not yet available in all parts of the site. Where it is, the network is often overloaded. To address the safety concerns as well as lighting and power needs, UNHCR began distributing 6,000 portable solar lamps on 23 September. These lamps also allow for charging of mobile phones and other small devices. UNHCR has also facilitated the transportation and installation of six power generators to provide electricity in the site for lighting and other uses.

Protection of unaccompanied children and other vulnerable people

UNHCR teams and partners continue their efforts to identify and assist vulnerable asylum-seekers to prioritize them for safer accommodation. Single women and female-headed families have been allocated a dedicated tented area, but more measures are necessary to mitigate security risks. UNHCR and its partner Diotima are supporting site management in the identification of at-risk women and their transfer to safe, informal shelters on the island. Moreover, UNHCR continues supporting national authorities and other actors in implementing gender-based violence prevention measures.

UNHCR is also working on-site with child protection actors, including partner



Almost **200** WASH facilities have been installed by UNHCR and other actors. However, inadequacy of WASH remains a serious concern



245 people have tested positive for COVID-19 upon entry to the site and are in the isolation areas with their family members



As of 23 September, UNHCR had distributed core relief items to cover the needs of some **8,560** people

PRAKSIS, to identify unaccompanied children on the island, refer them to authorities and offer support as necessary.

Communication with communities

In coordination with authorities, UNHCR re-opened its “protection desk,” which previously operated at the Moria centre, and which allows for identification of individual concerns and specific needs, and support with referrals and transfers to suitable accommodation. UNHCR and its partner METAdrasi are working with authorities to support dissemination of information on procedures, both through text messages and verbally via community representatives during the distribution of material assistance and outreach in the site.

Asylum-seekers remain concerned over the inadequate shelter and hygiene conditions,

particularly as winter is fast approaching. A group of asylum-seekers will reach out to their respective communities to identify queries and solutions that can be taken forward directly by the refugees. UNHCR underlined the need for community-led solutions in cleaning and waste management, referral of vulnerable persons to the protection desk and support with child care, until safe areas are established.

Coordination

UNHCR continues to support authorities, at their request, with service mapping and inter-agency coordination. This includes adjusting existing coordination mechanisms to the emergency situation. UNHCR is chairing working groups on protection, legal aid, sexual and gender-based violence and child protection, and has hosted a WASH coordination meeting.

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

SITUATION IN GREECE

There are approximately 121,400 asylum-seekers and migrants in Greece, including 4,400 children who arrived alone or were separated from their families along the journey. While the situation on mainland Greece is better overall, overcrowding remains prevalent on the Aegean Islands where, by the end of August, around 27,200 people were crammed into spaces with a combined capacity of 5,500. Most of these asylum-seekers cope with dire living conditions and are exposed to various security risks, including sexual and gender-based violence.

The situation had been persistently difficult in the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Lesbos prior to the devastating fire. At the end of August, the Moria RIC and the adjacent informal area of the Olive Grove housed around 12,000 asylum-seekers, including some 4,000 children.

UNHCR has long [called](#) for action to urgently address the situation of asylum-seekers on the Aegean Islands. More support is needed from European countries and European Union institutions in providing immediate protection to those most at-risk through alleviating reception conditions on the islands and expediting 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 the [Factsheet](#).

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