



NORTHERN AND WESTERN GREECE

FACTSHEET

1 – 31 January 2017

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

4,565

Accommodation places with services for relocation candidates/other asylum-seekers established by UNHCR in northern and western Greece by the end of January

190

Accommodation places for unaccompanied children established by UNHCR in northern and western Greece by the end of January

6,084

Asylum-seekers transported by UNHCR from northern, central and western Greece to Regional Asylum offices, embassies, medical facilities and cultural events in January

5,466

Non-food items (clothes, footwear, blankets, etc.) distributed by UNHCR in northern and western Greece as part of the winterization plans in January

576

Prefab houses provided/installed in northern and western Greece sites by UNHCR as part of the winterization plans by the end of January

48

Water and Sanitation facilities (shower and toilet containers or chemical units) installed/maintained by UNHCR in northern and western Greece in January

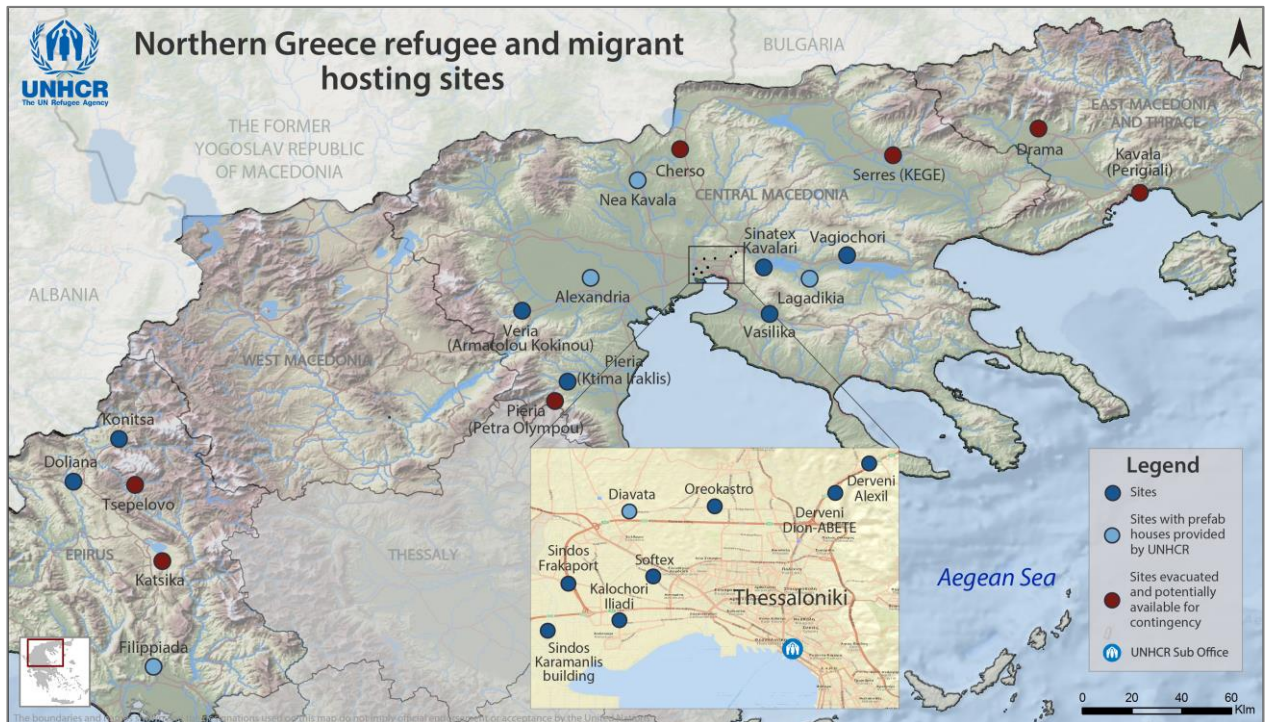
17

Inter-agency coordination sectoral working groups established and chaired/co-chaired by UNHCR in northern and western Greece

125

National (107) and international (18) staff deployed to UNHCR Sub-Office Thessaloniki area of operations (including Field Office Ioannina)

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OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

- UNHCR provides support to the Greek Government in **18 state-run open accommodation sites** in Northern and Western Greece (Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus regions). The Greek authorities **estimated 6,400 asylum-seekers** were accommodated in the North sites at the end of January. UNHCR in coordination with the Greek authorities provides **Site Management Support in six sites**: Nea Kavala, Alexandria, and Lagadikia in Northern and Konitsa, Doliana, and Filipiada in Western Greece. UNHCR also provides **protection services and monitoring in all sites**. In the region, UNHCR provides **over 4,500 accommodation places for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers in apartments, renovated buildings, with host families, and in hotels**. Furthermore, UNHCR facilitates transportation of asylum-seekers for appointments with the Regional Asylum Offices on the mainland, for full registration on their claims.
- Refugees and migrants braved severe cold and heavy snowfall in all sites in Northern and Western Greece, in January. Humanitarian operations were disrupted as authorities, UNHCR, and partners worked to mitigate the effects of the exceptional winter conditions, strengthening joint humanitarian response to winter, distributing winter items, such as thermal blankets, winter clothing, fuel for heaters, and salt to be dispersed in the ground. UNHCR carried out emergency interventions in WASH and increased efforts to move people, particularly those with specific needs to improved accommodation and shelter. Greek authorities, under coordination of the Ministry of Migration Policy, with UNHCR support partially or fully evacuated warehouse sites unsuitable for winter. From the start of the evacuation process on 21 December by the end of January, UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) had moved **1,544 asylum-seekers to more dignified accommodation in apartments and hotels**.



Frozen water blocks due to extreme cold in Nea Kavala © UNHCR / 9 January 2017



Empty tents in Vagiochori, after a UNHCR evacuation to improved shelter © UNHCR / 12 January 2017

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **northern Greece**, the **inter-agency coordination structure** is led by the Ministry of Migration Policy (MoMP) and includes the following sectoral Working Groups (WG) meeting on a bi-weekly basis: **WASH WG** chaired by UNHCR; **Hygiene Promotion WG** chaired on rotation by different NGOs; **Protection WG** and its sub-working groups on **Legal Aid**, **Child Protection**, and **Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV)**, **Communication with Communities (CwC) WG**, and **Urban Response WG**, all chaired by UNHCR; **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) WG** co-chaired by UNHCR and the International Rescue Committee (IRC); **Health WG** chaired by the Ministry of Health (EKEPI) and co-chaired by UNHCR; **Site Management Support (SMS) WG** chaired by NRC; **Shelter/Non-food Items (NFI) WG** chaired by the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and **Education WG** chaired by Save the Children. In **western Greece**, the following WG meetings are held on a weekly basis: **Protection, Education, Urban Response, and General Coordination** (including inter-sectoral Coordination).

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Protection

- Blue Dots – Child and Family Support Hubs.** In Northern and Western Greece, UNHCR and partners operate **eight “Blue Dots” Child and Family Support Hubs¹** in **Lagadikia, Diavata, Nea Kavala, and Alexandria sites in Macedonia region, as well as in Doliana and Filipiada sites, and Lakkas and Amfithea hotels in Epirus region**. UNHCR’s partner Solidarity Now manages the four Hubs in Epirus region. The same partner also continued to operate the **urban Blue Dot in Thessaloniki city, named “Blue Refugee Centre”**. The Centre, inaugurated in December 2016, provides a wide range of services to asylum-seekers and refugees living in urban settings, including: social and legal info point, info help line, gender focal point, informal educational activities, recreational activities, facilitation of seminars and focus group discussions, medical corner with support to SGBV cases, breastfeeding area, Internet corner/ tea corner/reading area, vocational and language courses.
- Child protection.** Under the framework of the Blue Dots, UNHCR continues to actively promote and develop alternatives for care arrangements and alternatives to detention for unaccompanied or separated children (UASC). An interim solution was identified in the establishment of Safe Spaces for UASC at adequate sites. Minimum standards for the Safe Spaces were developed by UNHCR and NGO partners at the national Child Protection Sub-Working Group, and were endorsed by the Greek authorities. Those minimum standards include the need to set up the space in the proximity of the site management, to provide continuous guardianship and services, etc. In

January, the **Safe Space in Diavata, Northern Greece, remained active**. While pursuing immediate and mid-term solutions for unaccompanied children, UNHCR continued to further strengthen efforts to identify shelters as a longer-term solution. Through its partners Arsis and Praksis, as of the end of January, UNHCR provides **in Northern and Western Greece 190 places for unaccompanied children in six transit or longer-term shelters**, currently accommodating 153 boys and girls between five and 18 years old.

- Support to accommodation capacity for asylum-seekers.** In support of the Greek authorities' efforts to expand the reception capacity and in line with its policy avoiding camps as the situation improves, UNHCR continues to identify new accommodation places for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers, thanks to funding by the [European Commission](#). In Northern and Western Greece, UNHCR established **4,565 accommodation places** by the end of January in **flats, hotels, apartment buildings, and host families**, located throughout **18 different municipalities** (Thessaloniki, Kilkis, Katerini, Volvi, Grevena, Kastoria, Ampelokipoi-Menemeni, Kalamaria, Sykies-Neapoli, Chalkidona, Gaiannitsa, Thermaikos, Kordelio-Evosmos, Pagani, Konitsa, Ziros, Ioannina and Igoumenitsa). The project is implemented by UNHCR in partnership with the Municipality of Thessaloniki, and NGOs Praksis, Arsis, Solidarity Now, Intersos, Iliaktida, and Catholic Relief Service (CRS). Continuing and further strengthening its fruitful collaboration with local authorities, on 17 January, UNHCR signed the [extension of the agreement with the Municipality of Thessaloniki](#) for the creation and maintenance of 700 accommodation places for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers. The UNHCR Representative, Mr. Philippe Leclerc, attended the event, praising the continuation of the good partnership that started in May 2016 and expressing hope that all refugees currently living in sites will be gradually transferred to other accommodation places, where they will enjoy better conditions. Representatives of the Municipalities of Kalamaria and Sykies-Neapoli, to which the program will be extended, also participated. Thanks to the expanded accommodation capacity, progress was also recorded in the **evacuation/decongestion of sites**. On 12 January, **UNHCR fully evacuated Vagiochori**, the only remaining tented site where conditions were unbearable, and moved the whole population of 44 persons to hotels. **UNHCR also evacuated the Vasilika warehouse site** on 17 January, transferring a total of 189 persons to hotels and apartments. The site is currently being used by the Greek authorities for temporary accommodation of newly arrived refugees and migrants, or transfers from the islands. Given the difficult living conditions at the site, UNHCR proposed alternative sites to the Ministry of Migration Policy. UNHCR also supported the **decongestion of Oreokastro, Sindos/Karamanlis and Kalochori/Iliadi warehouse sites**, which would be fully evacuated in **February 2017**. UNHCR supported site evacuation also in western Greece. By early January, UNHCR moved some **110 asylum-seekers from Faneromeni site into hotels** in Ioannina area first, and into flats in Athens soon afterwards. Following the aforementioned transfer, the said Faneromeni site was completely evacuated and closed.
- Communication with Communities (CwC).** In January, UNHCR, in collaboration with partners working in Alexandria, developed two information products aimed to inform asylum-seekers about who is providing which services at the site: a **Site Map** and a **Site Info Sheet poster**. Similar tools will be developed for other sites where UNHCR has a Site Management Support role.



UNHCR and Thessaloniki Municipality renew agreement on accommodation for relocation candidates and other vulnerable asylum-seekers © UNHCR / 17 January 2017

Education



Second day of school for 150 refugee children from Nea Kavala site. Four schools receive the children: one in Polykastro, two in Axioupoli and one in Platania © UNHCR / 31 January 2017

- Formal education.** UNHCR continued to support the Education Program implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE). As of the end of January, according to IOM, which is providing transport from sites to schools, **876 refugee children attend local schools from Lagadikia, Derveni Dion-ABETE, Sinatex/Kavalari, Nea Kavala, Kalochori/Iliadi, and Softex sites in northern Greece, and Konitsa, Doliana and Katsikas sites in western Greece** (the latter are now accommodated in Ioannina hotels and the site is empty and being renovated). This includes 373 children going to primary schools, and 130 to secondary schools. In **Nea Kavala**, 99 children started to attend daily classes from 14:00 to 18:00 at three primary schools (two in Axioupoli and one in Polykastro), and 33 children the secondary school in Platania. Similarly, 35 children from **Kalochori/Iliadi** started to attend classes at the primary school of Kalochori and secondary school of Kordelio, and 44 children from **Softex** started to attend primary and secondary school in the Municipality of Chalkidona. At the same time, preparations for the implementation of the formal education program progressed at **Alexandria**, where

teachers in the host schools were trained and parental agreement for children's transportation was acquired. In **Lagadikia**, where the formal education program was launched in October 2016, the school authorities have recorded an increased unwillingness by refugee parents to send their children to school, due to their transitional situation, as they are expecting to leave for other EU countries through the relocation program in the next months. UNHCR, in collaboration with the MoE, held consultations with the refugee families in order to encourage them to send their children to school, and met with teachers to discuss the school program and children's progress. To promote peaceful co-existence and interaction between refugee and local communities, on 18 January, [UNHCR donated 12 personal computers, six laptops, five projectors, 10 audio recorders, one interactive whiteboard and several sports material](#) to the **Primary and Elementary School of Lagadikia, the Primary School of Profitis and the 67th Primary School of Thessaloniki**. All of these are schools

that are attended by refugee children. During their discussions with the Head of UNHCR Office in Thessaloniki, the Principals of Primary and High Schools of Lagadikia, Profitis and 67th Primary School of Thessaloniki expressed both their gratitude to UNHCR for the donations of information technology and sports equipment, as well as their strong will to continue the successful cooperation. In western Greece, UNHCR donated **30 schoolbags and 30 school kits** to 30 refugee children attending **secondary schools in Ioannina** and residing in Exohi and Egnatia hotels.



UNHCR donates IT equipment and sports educational material to schools in Thessaloniki, Lagadikia and Profitis © UNHCR / 18 January 2017

- Informal education.** To complement efforts to integrate refugee children into the public school system, UNHCR and partners continued to conduct informal education activities (**community-based schools, language classes, etc.**) within the framework of the Blue Dots. At Filipiada site in western Greece, a community library continued to be operational, since its construction in November 2016. Refugees helped volunteers and UNHCR staff to assemble the bookshelves, chairs and tables and neatly arranged the children's books, novels and poetry in Arabic, Persian and English. On 24 January, UNHCR signed an agreement with the Minister of Education to provide **50 prefab units for kindergarten use** in 30 sites throughout Greece. Sites in northern and western Greece will be identified in coordination with the authorities.



Syrian refugee siblings, Zeinab and Tabarak, read books at the community library at Filipiada site © UNHCR / 15 November 2017

Health

- On 17 January, **UNHCR, its partner Médecins du Monde (Mdm) and Ippokrateio Hospital in Thessaloniki signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**. In the framework of this MoU, refugee women can participate in the hospital's family planning program, and obtain free gynaecological tests and contraceptives, important to exercise their right to self-determination. As part of this agreement, **UNHCR donated an ultrasound machine** to the hospital's family planning centre. The UNHCR Representative in Greece attended the event. In January, Mdm, Red Cross and the Greek authorities conducted an **immunization campaign against influenza** for refugees and asylum-seekers at high risk, including elderly and children.

Food Security and Nutrition

- In western Greece, Oxfam installed **six kitchen containers in Filipiada site and three more in Konitsa site**. The communal kitchens will become operational in both sites as soon as the electrical network is upgraded.

Shelter and Non-Food Items

- Shelter, heating and infrastructure upgrading.** As of 31 January, **UNHCR set up a total of 576 prefabricated houses** in Alexandria (106), Lagadikia (60), Nea Kavala (174) and Diavata (96) sites **in northern Greece, and Filipiada (70) and Katsikas (70) sites in western Greece**. With an average of five persons per unit, some **3,000 persons** are accommodated in these prefab houses. In response to the cold wave registered in early January, UNHCR conducted infrastructure interventions in several sites in northern Greece. In **Nea Kavala**, in collaboration with its partner Samaritan's Purse, UNHCR provided tarps to avoid ice and snow infiltrations in some prefab houses. In **Vasilika**, before the evacuation of the site, UNHCR completed the permanent fencing and installed 27 UNHCR family tents equipped with wooden floor plus 13 extra floors. Electrical cabling and generators were also installed by UNHCR, through its partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Lagadikia, Alexandria and Nea Kavala, and its partner Arbeiter-Samariten-Bund Deutschland (ASB) in Vasilika. Two extra generators were provided by UNHCR in Filipiada, western Greece. In Epirus region, western Greece, UNHCR has been working for rehabilitation of a new site in **Agia Eleni**, as requested by the Greek authorities. Four separate buildings are due to be finalized by the beginning of February 2017, in order to accommodate asylum-seekers who will be transferred from unsuitable sites or other locations countrywide. In spite of the harsh weather conditions befalling the Epirus region in wintertime, any efforts will be put in place to comply with the agreed deadline.



A boy plays football outside his prefab house in Katsikas site © UNHCR / 22 November 2017



UNHCR distributing thermal blankets in preparation of the cold wave at Diavata site © UNHCR / 5 January 2017

- Non-food items.** In January, in response to the needs arising from the plummeting temperatures, UNHCR complemented the winter non-food items (NFIs) distribution that had been conducted in all sites since October 2016. **In total, 5,466 NFIs were provided to asylum-seekers in northern and western Greece sites during January**, including winter clothing (2,235), high thermal blankets (1,500), sleeping mats and plastic tarpaulins (1,014), among others. On 31 January, **UNHCR donated also more than 1,000 items (clothing, health and hygiene) to the Municipality of Thessaloniki** in order to support

their social services for the homeless locals and refugees around the city. During the handover ceremony, the Deputy Mayor of Thessaloniki expressed gratitude, highlighting the longstanding good cooperation between the Municipality and UNHCR.

Water and Sanitation

- In January, UNHCR continued to provide **WASH improvements and maintenance** directly and through its partners in northern Greece and western Greece. To respond to the deterioration of WASH conditions caused by the breaking of water pipes due to the extremely cold temperatures, in **Nea Kavala** UNHCR delivered **10 extra chemical toilets** to alleviate the urgent needs. In total, UNHCR continued to cover the cost of rental and cleaning of **30 chemical toilets** at the site. In **Vasilika**, UNHCR covered the cost of rental and cleaning of **12 chemical toilets and 6 portable showers**.

Site Management Support (SMS)

- As part of a comprehensive capacity building package for authorities and partners in northern Greece, UNHCR's Site Management Support Capacity Building Officer conducted **on the job training session in Alexandria**, on 17 January. Representatives of the Army, as well as humanitarian actors working at the site, such as IRC, participated. This training gathered nine participants from the Army and the Ministry of Migration Policy, as well as NGO partners. The main objective of the training was to build technical capacity regarding Site Management Support by learning site management holistic approach in order to improve site coordination.



Authorities and partners attend a Site Management Support training provided by UNHCR at Alexandria site © UNHCR / 17 January 2017

Cash Assistance

- In January, the **cash assistance programme progressed** in several sites in northern and western Greece, despite some delays caused by the harsh weather conditions. In **Nea Kavala** – so far the only site without cash assistance in northern Greece – IFRC conducted community info sessions and stakeholders meetings, completed registration and issued cash cards on 16 January to 645 asylum-seekers. On 13 January, UNHCR's partner CRS/Caritas conducted an information session about cash programme to asylum-seekers living at Vrasna Beach hotels (previously residing at Serres), registered them and distributed cards the following week. In January, **over 5,000 asylum-seekers living in Lagadikia, Alexandria, Vasilika, Softex, Oreokastro, Sindos/Frakaport, Sinatex-Kavalari, Kalochori, Derveni and Nea Kavala sites in northern Greece, and in Konitsa, Doliana and Filipiada sites, have been verified and provided with debit cards by all cash actors**, for cash withdrawal at ATM machines or direct payment at shops. Out of those, through its partner CRS/Caritas, **UNHCR provides cash assistance to 1,667 asylum-seekers**, hosted in Lagadikia (182), Sinatex-Kavalari (151), Derveni-Alexil (287) and Derveni/Dion-ABETE (114), and previously living in Vasilika (378), Serres (85), Drama (45) and Kavala (425). The cash assistance programme will progressively be expanded, to cover **all asylum-seekers living in apartments, hotels and other buildings under UNHCR's accommodation scheme in northern and western Greece from February 2017**. During January, UNHCR and partners have been harmonizing the registration of people in the sites and UNHCR's accommodation scheme. To avoid double-registration at different sites, card owners' names are crosschecked on the common data spread sheet in which the registration numbers of persons registered for cash appear. This coordination exercise is essential, as different distribution systems (POS, vouchers, cash) still co-exist in the field. Ad hoc messages have been shared with UNHCR staff, site managers and NGOs in order to avoid people being registered twice for cash based assistance. By the end of the month, **UNHCR team completed the verification exercise of all asylum-seekers residing in flats, hotels and apartment buildings under UNHCR's scheme in northern Greece**, in preparation of the urban cash programme launch. A total of 3,210 persons have been registered, and vulnerabilities were recorded thoroughly during the process. The exercise confirmed that the percentage of vulnerable and extremely vulnerable individuals among the persons of concern in flats, hotels and apartment buildings is extremely high: 70 per cent are considered to be vulnerable in terms of medical, social, protection-related vulnerabilities. The high percentage did not come unexpected as vulnerable persons are prioritized in the allocation of out-of-camp accommodation. The verification exercise in western Greece will be completed in early February 2017.



An Afghan asylum-seeker musician shows happiness when receiving drums and other musical instruments from UNHCR, as part of a community-based intervention in Diavata site © UNHCR / January 2017

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

- Community-based interventions.** UNHCR continued to support community-based interventions in several sites in northern and western Greece, aimed at encouraging refugees and asylum-seekers' participation in the day-to-day activities at each site, for empowering them and reducing the level of frustration in the population, through mobilizing communities living in sites and urban settings. With more refugees and asylum-seekers moving out from sites and continuous change of needs, UNHCR conducted **participatory assessments** to enhance partnerships with refugees of all ages and backgrounds by promoting meaningful participation through structured dialogue, in which stakeholders played a big role in undertaking the exercise. **UNHCR staff conducted discussions with refugees and host community in eight sites and various urban settings** under UNHCR's accommodation scheme and other operational actors' schemes (flats, hotels and apartment buildings). A number of discussions in urban settings were

conducted in the two Refugee Centres operated by UNHCR's partner Solidarity Now in Thessaloniki. In hotels, the community expressed the need to have regular activities for different age groups, especially youth and men. More consultations, both in sites and urban settings, will take place in February and will inform the planning of more community-based interventions and prioritization of needed services, aiming at placing refugees and asylum-seekers the centre of decision-making concerning their protection and well-being. In January, UNHCR and partners organized **16 community-based interventions in northern Greece, many of them aimed to celebrate the season's festivities, benefiting some 3,000 asylum-seekers**. In **Diavata**, UNHCR purchased music instruments (guitar, drums, electric piano) for a group of 10 musicians of the Afghan community. The group will organize music lessons for other refugees at the site. In **Nea Kavala**, a party for New Year was organised in collaboration with the catering company and the local Municipality. In **Oreokastro**, Intervolve organized a trip to the Christmas village of Thessaloniki for refugee children. In **Sindos/Karamanlis**, UNHCR organized a mobile Christmas market, where the asylum-seekers living at the site could choose among various gift bags (beauty and hair products for male and female, scarfs and gloves, toys for children, adult board games, etc.). On 4 January, UNHCR facilitated the participation of some 200 children and adults living under **UNHCR's accommodation scheme** to a Christmas fairy-tale theatrical act organized by YMCA. The performance was greatly appreciated by the refugees. In cooperation with the NGO Perichorisis, UNHCR initiated community engagement activities in two hotels in the area of Katerini. Skilled female community members will run knitting classes for their peers aiming at strengthening the protection network. Additionally, UNHCR's partner will be arranging a weekly community meeting with a specific age group to discuss about particular topics proposed by the refugees. In four hotels in Grevena and one in Kastoria, all under UNHCR's accommodation scheme, UNHCR is implementing several activities through its partner Praksis, which are highly appreciated by the community: English classes for both adults and children; handicraft workshop (paper modelling and origami) conducted by a male refugee for children and youth; "women's night" dedicated to activities such as hairdressing, makeup and waxing; sportive activities, including football, tennis and basketball; provision and distribution of various board games for adults like chess, backgammon, jenga, etc.



The colorful results of a knitting community-based project realized by asylum-seekers hosted under UNHCR's accommodation scheme in Thessaloniki © UNHCR / January 2017

Logistics

- UNHCR continued to **support the process of full registration of asylum-seekers** conducted by the Asylum Service through provision of countrywide transportation from sites to the Asylum Service offices and back. In January 2017, **UNHCR Thessaloniki Transportation Team** has facilitated **transportation of 4,792 asylum-seekers from the sites in northern, central and western Greece to the Regional Asylum Office** in Thessaloniki (1472), Alexandroupoli (664) and Athens (1578), and of **117 asylum-seekers to different embassies** for interviews related to family reunification and relocation. UNHCR also continued to provide transport for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers entering **UNHCR accommodation scheme assisting 953 people in January to move from the sites to more dignified accommodation in apartments, hotels or other buildings**. In January, UNHCR Thessaloniki Transportation Team also provided transportation for **189 non-emergency medical cases** from sites and accommodation facilities to hospitals and medical clinics. Transportation was likewise ensured for **150 asylum-seekers to attend events and cultural initiatives**, organized in collaboration with local authorities and partners. Cumulatively, UNHCR Thessaloniki Transportation Team **between September 2016 and January 2017 has provided a total of 27,565 asylum-seekers with transportation**.

GAPS, CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

- Due to the harsh weather conditions and road inaccessibility, the Regional Asylum Office (RAO) in Thessaloniki remained closed between 9 and 13 January, causing the cancellation of many appointments for the full lodging of asylum claims, relocation or family reunification cases. The rescheduling of lost appointments is still pending, raising concerns and frustrations among the concerned asylum-seekers. At the same time, the RAO has announced the earlier rescheduling of full registration appointments that were initially arranged for March 2017. UNHCR field teams and legal aid partners have informed and supported asylum-seekers accordingly, to check the date of their new appointments through the online application by the Greek Asylum Service.
- Both relocation and family reunification applicants complain about the delayed procedures. In some cases, the former have been waiting for more than six months for being relocated to another EU country, while the latter express disappointment linked to lack of support with the travel expenses, especially for transportation from the sites/accommodation to the assigned airport. As individuals who are part of polygamous marriages are not included in the relocation cases, UNHCR is receiving reports of asylum-seekers considering divorcing so as to benefit from the program. UNHCR is advocating with the Asylum Service to establish clear and transparent rules to ensure persons are well informed before taking such decisions. At the same time, asylum-seekers and recognized refugees in Greece who wish to gradually integrate into the Greek society emphasize the obstacles, such as limited access to educational/vocational opportunities, the labour market as well as cash assistance.
- Due to strengthened efforts to evacuate unsuitable sites and move asylum-seekers to accommodation facilities, the population residing in sites in northern and western Greece has significantly decreased. Nevertheless, a backward movement to the sites has been noticed,

of asylum-seekers accommodated by volunteers or by their own means, attempting to re-register, in order to receive cash assistance. It is expected that the progressive expansion of the cash program to asylum-seekers living in urban settings will solve the issue.

- In a number of sites where few people remain following the decongestion efforts coordinated by the authorities, UNHCR and partners, anxiety and tensions rise, due to unclear government's evacuation timelines. UNHCR and partners are advocating with the authorities to confirm the future of the sites that are being evacuated, so that humanitarian actors may plan their assistance accordingly.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- UNHCR Sub-Office Thessaloniki and Field Office Ioannina provide protection and assistance to persons of concern directly and through **14 implementing partners**: Arsis, Catholic Relief Service (CRS), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Iliaktida, International Medical Corps (IMC), International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Intersos, Médecins du Monde (Mdm), METAdrasi, Praksis, Samaritan's Purse, Save the Children, and Solidarity Now. UNHCR also has a **successful partnership with the Municipality of Thessaloniki** and regularly liaises with the other local municipalities and operational partners, including volunteer groups.



Tareq, a young and talented judo athlete who fled from Syria, is interviewed by ERT3 TV channel before participating and winning a tournament in Thessaloniki, with the support of UNHCR © UNHCR / 29 January 2017

MISSIONS AND EVENTS

- On 29 January, with the support of UNHCR, a judo athlete who is hosted in the area of Ioannina, Epirus region, participated in an international judo tournament which took place in Thessaloniki and won the bronze medal. On the same day, UNHCR alongside with members of the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network presented the special-edition book "[Monologues across the Aegean Sea: the journey and dreams of unaccompanied refugee children](#)", at an event organized in Prigkipos Café, Thessaloniki. The book, published in Greek and in English in October 2016 by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network and UNHCR, is a collection of 28 testimonies of unaccompanied refugee children from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Morocco and Egypt, who were forced to leave their homeland and arrived alone in Greece, crossing the Aegean Sea.



Thessaloniki public was moved by the testimonies of unaccompanied children in Greece collected by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network and UNHCR in the book "Monologues across the Aegean Sea" © UNHCR / 29 January 2017

ⁱ The [Blue Dot project](#) was launched in February 2016 by UNHCR, UNICEF and ICRC, aiming to step up protection for the growing number of refugee children and women in Europe. The first Hubs were set up along the Balkan route with a view to provide safe spaces for vulnerable families on the move towards north Europe, and in particular for children, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their families. After the closure of the Balkan route, the Blue Dot Hubs address the refugee population remaining in countries that once were mainly transit points. The Hubs provide safe areas for children and their families, mother and baby spaces, playgrounds, protection, counselling and other vital services, all in a single and easily identifiable location.

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