

Aegean Islands

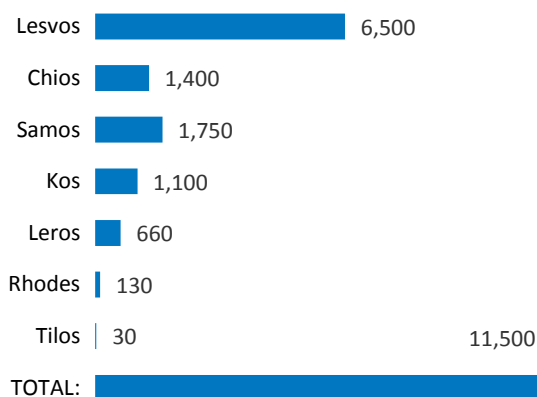
Arrivals nearly **doubled to 2,400 in March** mostly to Lesbos and Samos while **mainland transfers slowed to 699** from some 2,100 in January.

Higher numbers put strain on already overcrowded reception centres and aggravated tension and frustration amongst asylum-seekers and refugees.

Sixteen people died and two went missing in **a shipwreck** off Agathonisi Island. Only three people survived.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

Host Islands

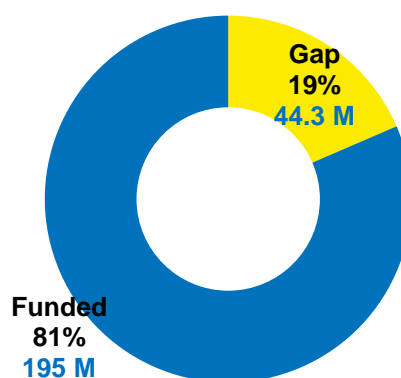


** UNHCR Greece estimate as of 27 March 2018 of those who remained on the Aegean islands since the 2015-2016 mass flow.*

FUNDING (AS OF 10 APRIL 2018)

USD 239.3 M

requested for the Greece operation



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

55 National Staff

6 International Staff

Offices:

1 Islands Unit in Athens

1 Sub Office on Lesbos

3 Field Offices on Chios, Samos, Kos

2 Field Units on Leros and Rhodes



Vathy reception centre on Samos.

Working with Partners

UNHCR supports the Government of Greece who coordinates the refugee response. The Office works with other UN agencies, international and national NGOs, state institutions, community-based organisations, refugees, and host communities through sectoral working groups on **Lesvos**, **Chios**, **Samos**, **Kos** and **Leros**.

Main Activities

Protection

- UNHCR provides information on rights and obligations, asylum procedures and offers legal counselling and representation to asylum-seekers directly and through partners. UNHCR identifies and refers people with specific needs to responsible authorities and service providers for targeted assistance.
- A shipwreck off Agathonisi island, south of **Samos**, occurred this month resulting in the death of 16 people, including several children. Three people survived and two others went missing. The incident was the first deadly [shipwreck](#) in the Aegean this year, but some 500 refugees and migrants lost their lives or went missing in the Greek Aegean Sea over the past two years.

Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

- UNHCR works to identify people at risk and SGBV survivors, provides legal information and refers them to appropriate services where they can receive specialized support.
- Sexual harassment and violence in the reception centres, including against men, continued to be a major risk, particularly in Moria on **Lesvos** and Vathy on **Samos**. [UNHCR called](#) for further measures to mitigate the risk of SGBV on the islands and to improve response.

Child Protection

- UNHCR supports the identification of children at risk and assists in building the expertise of national and local actors. UNHCR coordinates with humanitarian actors and stakeholders to enhance the protection of children through legal aid, psychosocial support and case management.
- Living conditions for unaccompanied children remained alarming, particularly on **Lesvos** and **Samos**. This month, UNHCR supported the authorities in transferring 58 unaccompanied children from the reception centres to temporary facilities on the mainland until their referral to appropriate shelters. Since January 2017, 320 children have been transferred to improved accommodation on the mainland.

Education

- UNHCR runs educational and recreational centres to ensure that the development and well-being of refugee children and youth, including unaccompanied minors, is

supported in a conducive learning environment as access to formal education on the islands is not fully rolled-out and access to public schools remains a constraint.

- In Kara Tepe on **Lesvos**, Vial RIC on **Chios**, and Vathy RIC on **Samos**, UNHCR provides space to host the on-site kindergartens.

Health

- UNHCR offers primary health services to the residents of Kara Tepe on **Lesvos**.
- Access to medical and psychosocial services is limited in the reception centres and hospitals on the islands, especially on **Kos** and **Leros**, due to the low number of national service staff under the Ministry of Health, in particular doctors and cultural mediators. This situation further delays the conduction of vulnerability assessment which is an integral part of the asylum procedure.

Food Security

- UNHCR provides food for the specific needs of the population in Kara Tepe on **Lesvos**.

Shelter, Water and Sanitation

- The recent increase of new arrivals coupled with reduced movements to the mainland this month exacerbated the already difficult living conditions in the reception centres, especially on **Lesvos**, **Chios** and **Samos**.
- In Moria on **Lesvos**, tensions mounted over overcrowding and unhygienic conditions with some 4,200 people staying in the reception centre, the adjacent Olive Grove and a nearby land field. On **Samos**, insecurity and overcrowding persists in the Vathy reception centre where some 1,500 people do not have access to safe shelter, appropriate hygiene facilities and gender-separated areas. Some 400 people, including vulnerable, women and children, live in tents or makeshift shelters.
- The reception centre on **Kos** is operating at capacity, while additional pressure is put to the site on **Leros** as new arrivals significantly increased this month. On **Rhodes**, new arrivals, including children, continued to stay in a derelict building.

Communication with Communities

- UNHCR, in coordination with site management authorities, convenes regular community discussions on the islands. These platforms serve as a dual channel of communication amongst asylum-seekers, humanitarian actors and authorities.
- UNHCR provides leaflets in different languages about the asylum procedures and access to key services.
- Some 220 lexicons in six languages, ten children's' books in Arabic and 50 newspapers in English and Farsi were donated to the lending library of Samos Volunteers' educational centre in Vathy town.

Support to local community

- UNHCR organizes events and implements projects that bring closer the refugee and local population and help build bridges of trust and mutual understanding.

- Educational material and stationary items were donated by UNHCR to the University of Aegean on **Rhodes** which has been running language classes for asylum-seekers and refugees with the help of volunteer professors.
- UNHCR donated to public institutions and charities on **Chios** over 4,600 items ranging from clothing and hygiene items to wheelchairs and crutches to cover specific needs of the local population.

Accommodation and Cash assistance

- Cash assistance and accommodation help provide people with a sense of normalcy and contribute directly to the economy of the host community through the purchase of services and goods, and the renting of apartments.
- In March, some 1,260 people were accommodated by UNHCR in apartments on the islands and an additional 385 in hotels on **Lesvos** and **Chios** under a temporary emergency scheme for the winter.
- UNHCR works with the Government, local authorities and NGOs to provide urban accommodation and cash assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees through the ECHO-funded Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation ([ESTIA](#)).

Logistics

- In March, UNHCR assisted the transfer of 622 asylum-seekers from the islands to rented accommodation and Government-run sites on the mainland. Since January 2017, UNHCR has coordinated and covered the cost of over 24,500 such transfers which help alleviate the overcrowded conditions in the sites of the islands.
- UNHCR offers local transportation from remote sites to key facilities and the Regional Asylum Offices on the islands in order to ensure that asylum-seekers have access to the asylum procedure and the necessary services.

Returns

- Within the framework of the E.U. - Turkey Statement In March, 29 people were [returned](#) from Greece to Turkey. Since 20 March 2016, 1,583 people have been returned to Turkey.

Partners

- UNHCR on the islands works with international and national implementing partners in supporting the Government to manage the refugee situation: [International Rescue Committee](#), [Mercy Corps](#), [Doctors of the World](#), [Solidarity Now](#), [METAdrasi](#), [Arsis](#), [PRAKSIS](#) and [Iliaktida](#).

Donors

Special thanks to the major donors of unrestricted and regional funds

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Thanks to the donors for the Greece Operation

European Union (195 M)

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