

GREECE UPDATE #12

LESVOS

18 December 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) on 8-10 September.

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

BACKGROUND

More than three months after fires swept through the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, nearly 7,400 asylum-seekers and refugees are sheltered in the Mavrovouni site, which was set up to host those affected. The fires had left some 12,000 people homeless, of which many were transferred to other accommodations.

The Greek authorities lead the response with support of UN agencies, including UNHCR, as well as international and national NGOs and volunteer groups.

In addition to implementing technical interventions to improve living conditions in Mavrovouni, UNHCR continues to call for comprehensive solutions and European support and responsibility-sharing.

LATEST IN BRIEF

Adverse weather conditions hit Lesvos with heavy rainfall and strong winds on 12-13 December. Some 55 accommodation tents hosting roughly 275 people sustained minor damages. Under the coordination of the Greek authorities, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations were able to immediately repair or replace the affected tents and provide items to protect tents against further rain, wind and cold weather.

A few days later, on 18 December, a boat capsized off the southern coast of Lesvos, claiming the life of at least one person. The Hellenic Coast Guard was still searching for other persons who may have been on the vessel at the time of writing. Twenty-four people reached the shore and were transferred to the Municipal Kara Tepe site for quarantine. UNHCR is in contact with the authorities to support the survivors as necessary, all the while reiterating its [call](#) for a comprehensive response that includes transfers of asylum-seekers from Mavrovouni and, in general, from overcrowded reception centres on the Greek Aegean Islands to sustainable accommodation on the mainland and relocation to other European states.

[Relocation from Greece](#) is a mechanism through which volunteering EU member states and associated countries have committed to relocate unaccompanied children and vulnerable families, including asylum-seekers and international protection holders, who may have medical conditions or other vulnerabilities. With the relocation of 86 people to Germany on 17 December, [more than 2,000 individuals](#) have been able to travel safely from Greece to other European states so far in 2020, including over 550 unaccompanied children.



12,000
asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

some **7,400**
asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Site planning and shelter

In support of the Government-led response, UNHCR and shelter partners are preparing the Mavrovouni site for the planned drainage, electricity provision and water supply projects intended to bring durable improvements to the lives of site residents.

These large-scale interventions entail the progressive, temporary relocation of the 7,400 people living in Mavrovouni from their residential tents to six Rubb Halls. UNHCR is providing technical and coordination support in this multi-sectoral project.

The rains and winds of 12-13 December damaged 55 tents, affecting 275 residents. UNHCR and partners replaced 12 of these tents and repaired the rest. The fire brigade and NGOs managed to pump out most of the water that had stagnated in common areas. To further prepare for the next rains, UNHCR distributed some 300 plastic tarpaulins and additional rope that helps stabilize tents and protect them against the elements. UNHCR also made available to the authorities a large tent to be used for emergency shelter, if needed.

In anticipation of the bad weather, the Greek authorities with support from shelter actors had temporarily moved 25 people residing in areas most prone to flooding to accommodation Rubb Halls.

In support of general site planning, UNHCR completed the relocation of four guard posts to the site's entrance, which are now fully utilized by the authorities.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

UNHCR completed all groundwork, including gravelling and levelling, in one of the areas designated for showers, as requested by the Greek authorities. In addition, as of 17 December, WASH actors have completed the placement of 36 hot water showers, which are to be connected to utilities in the coming weeks.

In the site's dedicated COVID-19 isolation area, UNHCR is also completing ground levelling to allow for the installation by partners of additional toilets and showers.

More WASH facilities are needed for Mavrovouni residents, especially in view of the winter weather.

COVID-19 prevention and response

At the Mavrovouni Medical Hub, UNHCR is helping the authorities design the medical and isolation area, including by organizing a triage

section where patients can be quickly and safely examined. UNHCR started preparatory works for the installation of a field hospital, donated by the Netherlands, which remains outside the former Moria Reception and Identification Centre. The field hospital will serve as a primary health unit by the national health agency EODY and other health actors.

To prevent and mitigate the spread of the pandemic, asylum-seekers have undergone rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the emergency site. Based on health protocols, all persons testing positive have been directed to the isolation area, alongside family members. As of 16 December, 18 people remained in the area, of whom 14 tested positive for COVID-19.

Beyond Mavrovouni, UNHCR fulfilled the first round of major interventions to enhance the quarantine capacity for new arrivals to Western Lesvos municipality. This included works to provide water to four of the ten planned WASH facilities, fencing for the perimeter of the quarantine area, solar streetlights, electricity, as well as installing insulated flooring in 14 tents of the 50 that are planned to be set up.

Protection of children and vulnerable people

There was a horrendous attack on a three-year-old Afghan child on 14 December in Mavrovouni. The child was taken to the hospital for treatment and is recovering. The Greek police and public prosecutor are conducting an investigation. UNHCR has made available its partner PRAKSIS to provide psycho-social support to the victim and the family, who have been transferred to another facility.

UNHCR is working with the site management authority to create a system for vulnerable asylum-seekers, particularly survivors of gender-based violence, to help ensure more effective case management and prevent duplication of efforts or fragmented service delivery.

In addition, UNHCR, in collaboration with UNICEF, delivered a targeted training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse as well as sexual harassment to 20 staff members of organizations working in Lesvos. Such trainings boost the ability of involved staff to identify and prevent risks related to sexual violence as well as to assist men, women and children who have experienced sexual violence.

UNHCR worked with legal aid actors to update a mapping of organizations active in Lesvos that lists available services, including related to access to civil and social rights, cases of hate crime, human



900
tents (700 provided by UNHCR) were set up

The **700** UNHCR tents have insulation and wood flooring



Gaps remain in water, sanitation, hygiene and health services



As of 16 December, **18** people remained in quarantine in the Mavrovouni site, of whom 14 have tested positive for COVID-19

trafficking and interpretation. The mapping is accessible to all asylum-seekers and refugees and aims to facilitate their access to legal aid. This is particularly important under current circumstances when the COVID-19 pandemic complicates communication between legal aid providers and the asylum-seekers. The mapping will also be translated by UNHCR partner METAdrasi into ten of the most widely spoken languages in Lesvos (Arabic, Farsi, French, English, Kurmanji, Lingala, Pashto, Somali, Sorani and Urdu).

Education

UNHCR and its partner METAdrasi resumed non-formal education activities through mobile teams that offer Math, English and Greek language classes to some adolescents living in the site, most of whom previously attended a learning centre in the town of Lesvos. Although a temporary solution, the mobile teams offer much-needed learning opportunities and respite for children in anticipation of more permanent educational structures planned in coordination with UNICEF.

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

UNHCR's operation in Greece is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Moria fires emergency in addition to regular programmes.

Donors who contributed to support UNHCR activities in Greece in 2020

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SITUATION IN GREECE

There are approximately 119,500 asylum-seekers and migrants in Greece, including 4,200 children who arrived alone in the country or were separated from their families along the journey. While the situation on mainland Greece is better overall, most of the roughly 19,500 asylum-seekers at the reception and identification centres on the Greek Aegean Islands as of the end of October must cope with difficult living conditions and are exposed to various security risks including sexual and gender-based violence.

UNHCR has long [warned](#) of the urgent need to address the situation and conditions for asylum-seekers on the Aegean Islands. More support is also needed from European countries and European Union institutions in providing immediate protection to those most at-risk through continued resources, ensuring capacity in the country and responsibility-sharing through expedited 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 UNHCR's [Operational Portal](#).

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