

# GREECE HIGHLIGHTS

## RELOCATION TO OTHER EUROPEAN STATES

# Final direct flight from Lesbos brings in total 855 refugees to Germany

In March, the relocation of refugees from the island of Lesbos to Germany concluded with a total of 855 recognized refugees relocated.

Since April 2020, 3,654 asylum-seekers and refugees have found a new home in other European States in the context of the current Europe-wide relocation scheme – a concrete gesture of solidarity to Greece. Amongst them are unaccompanied children, and children with medical needs and their family members. The European Commission-funded programme is implemented by UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and EASO in cooperation with the Greek Government. Sixteen European States have committed to receiving 5,200 asylum-seekers and refugees, including 1,600 children who are on their own in Greece.



*A family of Afghan refugees walk towards their boarding gate at the Mytilene airport, travelling from Lesbos to Germany, as part of the European relocation scheme. February 2021. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis*

### UNHCR PRESENCE

#### Staff:

- 234 National Staff
- 29 International Staff

#### Offices:

- 1 Country Office in Athens
- 2 Sub Offices in Thessaloniki, Lesbos
- 2 Field Offices in Samos, Kos
- 3 Field Units in Evros, Leros, Chios

### COMMISSIONER JOHANNSON ON LESVOS

During her visit to Greece and the islands of Samos and Lesbos on 29 – 30 March, European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson **emphasized** the need for island reception centres to be equipped and ready for next winter.

The Commissioner also voiced concerns with reports of pushbacks raised by UNHCR and other actors and urged Greece to investigate, as well as to consider establishing an independent monitoring mechanism. UNHCR is deeply concerned over credible reports of pushbacks it has recorded. The Office has requested an investigation from the authorities, and to ensure access to asylum for those seeking protection. UNHCR is also encouraged by the Government's recent indication that an Independent Monitoring Mechanism would be established. UNHCR will provide suggestions in this regard as invited by the Government.

**IN BRIEF: ISLANDS**

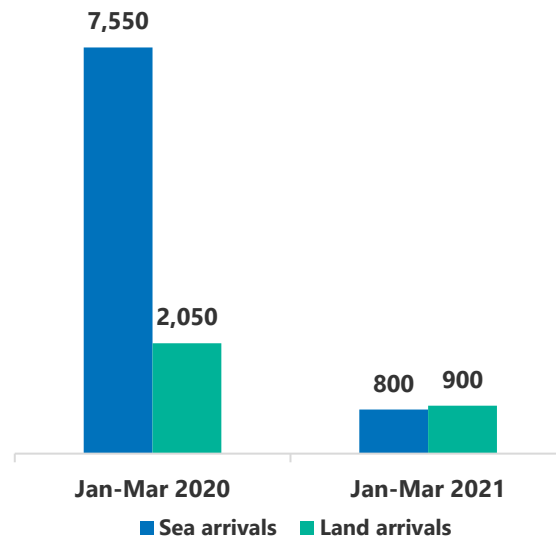
**The population of asylum-seekers and refugees on the Greek Aegean islands has decreased significantly in the past year from almost 40,000 in March 2020 to 15,300 in March 2021.**

Thanks to concerted efforts under the leadership of the Government, only 91 unaccompanied children remained in the reception and identification centres at the end of March ([EKKA data](#)). Other unaccompanied children had been evacuated from the islands in 2020 and moved to shelters on mainland Greece.

Nevertheless, at least 2,500 people in the reception centres of Samos and Chios remain outside appropriate housing, and in makeshift dwellings which leaves them vulnerable to the weather and security threats.

This month, UNHCR and its partners helped refugee children between 12- and 14-years old living on the islands to set up discussion groups with their peers. Such safe and structured sessions empower children to share their views, to voice concerns and ambitions, and eventually identify the very solutions that can help them, and their families overcome everyday hurdles.

Total arrivals to Greece 2021/2020



*Source: Hellenic Police. Figures are subject to future adjustment and should not be considered final.*

**LESVOS**
**Post-Moria fires aid**

Following the fires that ravaged the Moria reception centre in September 2020, authorities with the support of UN agencies, NGOs, and volunteers swiftly set-up a temporary camp to house those left homeless. **Now, the camp hosts approximately 6,300 people, almost half of whom are women and children (UNHCR estimate).**

**Site planning**

Alongside large-scale technical works by the authorities, **UNHCR, with European Union support, gravelled main roads and part of the area of the camp reserved for accommodation.** This helped with proper drainage during March's rains and in reinforcing the terrain for the placement of prefabricated containers to shelter those now in tents.

**Basic assistance**

Hygiene and sanitation facilities are not enough to cover the entire camp population. At the end of March there was only one hot shower available for 41 people. Adequate heating provisions for all is also an issue. As of this month, **UNHCR had delivered 138 portable heaters** – a temporary, but potentially life-saving solution against the cold.

## UNHCR hands ESTIA housing to the Government

**Over 70,000 people** assisted by UNHCR's ESTIA since 2015 emergency

The Ministry of Migration and Asylum is now fully managing the ESTIA accommodation programme. **Since 2015, over 70,000 asylum-seekers and refugees found a home thanks to ESTIA**, which was implemented by UNHCR in cooperation with the Greek Government and co-financed by the European Union. ESTIA helped asylum-seekers restore their dignity, access essential services, education and the labour market. It also contributed to local economies through the rental of apartments. You can watch the refugees' journey to ESTIA [here](#).

### CASH ASSISTANCE

UNHCR continues to work with the State for the transition of the ESTIA cash assistance programme to the Greek authorities in 2021. **In March, 64,600 asylum-seekers and refugees received cash assistance from UNHCR, and 199,300 in total since April 2017.** Assistance in cash helps displaced people meet their basic needs giving them the flexibility to choose how to

spend it in what they need most, such as food or medicine. Cash assistance also contributes to the local markets. This month, 7.1 million euros were eventually channelled into the Greek economy.



*At the urban cash centre, asylum-seekers can apply and receive cash assistance as part of UNHCR's programme co-funded by the European Union. March 2021. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis*

## More effort is needed to help refugees integrate

**Simplified tax ID – a positive step** for asylum-seekers, is also needed for refugees

As an increasing number of people have been recognized as refugees in Greece, work is needed to help them integrate effectively in the country. UNHCR supports the Government's efforts towards crafting a national strategy for integration. In addition, UNHCR promotes the inclusion of recognized refugees in Greece through a number of initiatives:

- identifies practical obstacles in administration and legislation and proposes solutions.
- empowers refugees to help themselves and their communities.
- works with Municipalities to cross-fertilize good practices.

- supports seed projects with potential for big integration impact.
- engages the corporate world and private sector for refugee inclusion.

**This month, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, in cooperation with other involved Ministries, digitized the issuance of a tax identification number (ΑΦΜ) for asylum-seekers.** This is a welcome development, which intends to facilitate asylum-seekers' access to a tax ID number by reducing administrative barriers. This may also, in turn, help them enter the labour market and become self-reliant. Similar efforts are also necessary for recognized refugees to accelerate their integration prospects.

## Refugee students in Kos and Leros win Meet and Code 2020 award

**600 children** have attended UNHCR-supported learning centres since January



*Refugee students of learning centres in Kos and Leros run by NGO ARSIS with UNHCR support were among the winners of the 2020 "Meet and Code Awards".*

Refugee students from Palestine, Congo, Afghanistan, and Syria attending non-formal learning centres in Kos and Leros presented their stories to the public using the Scratch platform with the help of teachers, social workers and interpreters. Many had little to no computer literacy. The learning centres run by NGO Arsis, with the support of UNHCR aim to bridge the gap in the education of refugee children living on the Greek Aegean islands.

In February, only 113 of the 2,000 school-age children on the islands had access to formal education, UNHCR estimates. This was mainly due to difficulties in getting vaccinated, which hinders enrolment, but also the lack of internet or devices to access distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Since January, UNHCR and partners' education programmes have reached over 600 school-age boys and girls.**

### REFUGEE CHILDREN AND MENTAL HEALTH

Refugee children must often cope with difficult living conditions which affects their already burdened mental health. For this reason, **UNHCR is piloting a project to bolster the mental health of refugee children and youth.** UNHCR and its expert partner teach refugee children and youth how to better understand their own behaviour and needs, and train them to help their peers overcome mental health issues through psychosocial support techniques.

## Ayat's poems: Speaking to those who see but cannot listen

"Four years ago, armed men knocked on our school door and told us that girls were not allowed to attend school while boys had to be recruited." 14-year-old Ayat had been living for years in violence and faced with danger in Syria before her family decided to flee the country.

Life in the reception centre of Samos island in Greece, where the family has sought asylum, is not easy. Ayat has been living in a tent for over a year with her seven siblings and parents. "During the winter we suffer from cold and in the summer, we cannot even eat due to the heat", the Syrian girl says.

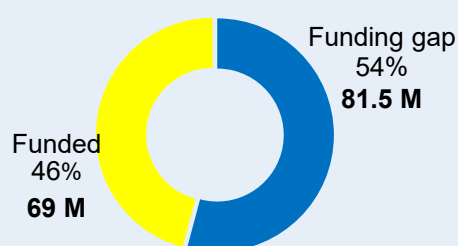
Despite the difficulties she draws strength from the non-formal education classes she recently started attending as well as from writing. Her love for writing was inspired by a story read by her teacher at the non-formal education centre run by NGO Praksis on Samos island, with the support of UNHCR.

Ayat's dream is to become an engineer and to give voice to the people of Syria who still struggle. *You can read Ayat's poetry at [unhcr.org/gr](https://unhcr.org/gr)*

## UNHCR is grateful to donors who provide generous and timely support that enables a flexible and swift response to the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece

### Funding information 6 April 2021

**USD 150.5 M**



Major donors of unearmarked contributions to the 2021 global programmes

**Norway** 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Germany** 22.1 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Spain** 13.3 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million

Donors who contributed to support UNHCR's activities in Greece in 2021

**European Union** | **Austria** | **United States** | **UNO-Fluechtlingshilfe** | **SAP (UK) Ltd.** | **Education Cannot Wait**

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