

# GREECE HIGHLIGHTS

**FASTER ROLL-OUT CAN HELP PREVENT NEW SPIKE OF COVID-19 INFECTIONS**

## Vaccinations against COVID-19 in islands refugee camps kick off



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*Ambdoulaye Amadou works as local coordinator at Crisis Management Association (CMA), one of the medical NGOs supporting Greece's health service (EODY).*

The vaccination of asylum-seekers on the islands started on 3 June on Lesbos, Samos and Chios. In Leros and Kos, vaccinations have yet to start mainly due to the low number of registered, eligible people. UNHCR, along with IOM and other organizations, supported the Ministry of Health in raising awareness about and coordinating the vaccination process. UNHCR worked with members of the refugee communities living in the reception and identification centres on the Greek Aegean islands, particularly those with a medical or

paramedical background, to circulate information about COVID-19 and the vaccination and disseminate messages through various online platforms and meetings.

On mainland camps, the authorities have started a dedicated vaccination campaign until the temporary number for vaccination (PAMKA) becomes available to all those who do not have a social or health security number. UNHCR provides technical advice to the Government to ensure that all categories of asylum-seekers or

refugees can have access to vaccines through this number.

Confinement as a result of movement restriction due to COVID-19 can exacerbate vulnerable refugees' already burdened mental health. In Athens, UNHCR and its partners train refugees and asylum-seekers as paraprofessionals to address psychosocial needs. They operate helplines in Arabic, English, Farsi and Greek, offer psychosocial support and information about COVID-19, liaise with protection services, and provide referrals to psychological or psychiatric specialists.

Stronger efforts are needed to ensure that refugee inclusion in the national vaccination plan is tangible. UNHCR advocates for the equitable and timely inclusion of all third country nationals in the vaccination scheme, regardless of their legal status, including undocumented people as many of them are homeless or living in precarious conditions where physical distancing is impossible to observe. Tele-interpretation in vaccination centres may also help increase refugees' confidence in the process and lead to higher enrolment and vaccination.

## Giving back kindness: Abdoulaye supports medical services for refugees on Lesbos



Growing up in Cameroon, Abdoulaye Amadou was a mover and shaker, studying business management at university, earning a bachelor's degree and then opening a rice import business. As his business prospered, he moved to the western part of the country, but then, he says, he and his family landed in the sights of a militant group.

Abdoulaye fled to Nigeria in 2018 and after being on the move for more than a year, he reached Lesbos in November 2019. He lived in a tent at the crowded Moria camp for many months, feeling lost and depressed after what he had experienced.

Most of the time he kept to himself inside the tent, but as he reached out to the NGOs in the camp, a psychologist with the International Rescue Committee helped Abdoulaye overcome his trauma. As Abdoulaye came around to feeling like he could re-engage in society, he felt the need to do something to improve the services in the camp.

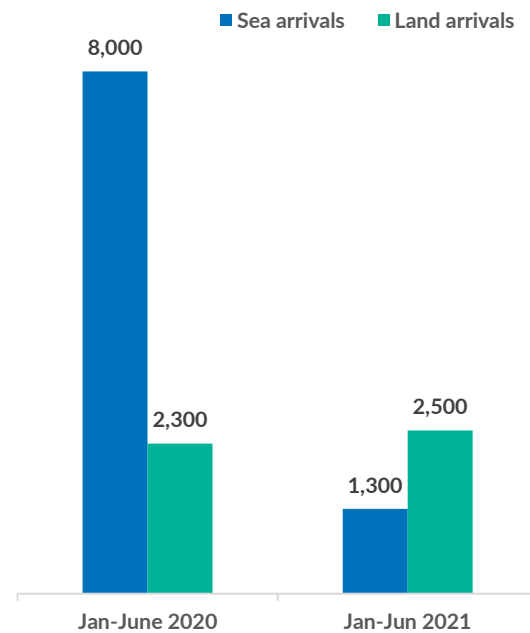
"In Africa we say that you have to give back the kindness that you receive, so I decided to put my skills to work to help improve the dire conditions in Moria," Abdoulaye says.

You can read the rest of Abdoulaye's story [here](#).

**IN BRIEF**

- In the first half of the year, recorded arrivals of asylum-seekers to Greece were considerably lower than in previous years. As of the end of June there were more arrivals by land (2,500) than by sea (1,300). Most of those arriving by sea are from Afghanistan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Children represent over one-third of arrivals in 2021.
- The Government started vaccinations on the islands refugee camps marking a critical step to protect camp residents from the spread of COVID-19.
- Greece declared Turkey as safe third country for people from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia. UNHCR highlighted the need for individualized case-by-case examination.
- Alia Issa and Ibrahim Al Hussein, Syrian refugees living in Greece, will compete in the Paralympic Games organized in Tokyo as members of the Paralympic Refugee Team.
- While summer has approached, the low number of asylum-seekers and refugees on the islands is an opportunity to speed up works and improve living conditions in the reception and identification centres on time before the winter season.
- World Refugee Day on 20 June was a reminder of the fortitude of refugees in Greece who have fled violence and conflicts in the world.

Total arrivals to Greece 2020/2021



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

## Greece declares Turkey as safe third country

**UNHCR is concerned** over possibility of asylum-seekers left in limbo, without assistance

On 7 June, Greece declared Turkey a safe third country for all but specific profiles of people from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Somalia through a joint decision of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Migration and Asylum. Greece is the second country in the European Union to have officially declared Turkey as a safe third country, following a similar decision of Hungary in 2016.

UNHCR supports the examination of asylum claims in-merit, while it has asked from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to clarify as per the Greek and EU law the methodology used and the analysis resulting in the safe third country declaration. While international refugee law and European asylum legislation foresee the possibility of returning persons seeking and/or in

need of international protection to a safe third country, UNHCR stresses that application of the “safe third country” concept requires a careful and case-by-case examination, regulated by strict substantive criteria and procedural safeguards. UNHCR is in favour of in-merit fair and fast asylum procedures and has called the Migration and Asylum Ministry to reconsider this extensive use of inadmissible procedures. Without safeguards in place, UNHCR is concerned that this decision may result in a large population in limbo, out of the asylum process, and possibly in protracted detention pending their potential return to Turkey.

UNHCR’s discussion paper on accelerated and simplified procedures in the European Union can be found [here](#).

## Two Syrian athletes from Greece join Paralympic Refugee Team

**Refugees with disabilities** represent their communities despite adversities



*Alia Issa is competing in para athletics (club throw) as a member of the Paralympic Refugee Team.*

In June, Alia Issa and Ibrahim Al Hussein, Syrian refugees living in Greece joined the Paralympic Refugee Team. They will compete in para athletics (club throw) and para swimming

respectively in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games on 24 August – 5 September. You can find out more about the Paralympic Games and the participating refugee athletes [here](#).

Asylum-seekers and refugees with disabilities in Greece come from different background and bring with them a wealth of skills and will. Also, they may be at heightened risk of exploitation and violence, while facing barriers to access services, such as healthcare, and shelter. This may deprive them of the opportunity to demonstrate and maximize their contribution to their families and the societies they live in.

To this end, on 18 June, the Ministries of Migration and Asylum and of Labor and Social

Affairs joined forces to create the first Supported Independent Living facility for people with disabilities and beneficiaries of international protection. The Ministries will work to upgrade the planned and existing policies to the benefit of refugees. In addition, they will support the establishment and operation of mixed Supported Independent Living facilities for people with disabilities, over 18 years of age, who are either refugees or locals.

UNHCR welcomes this initiative which is expected to lift some of the burden off people with disabilities lacking a family support network and in need of greater protection. Such schemes can help refugees with disabilities get back on their feet and eventually be integrated in the Greek society.

Like Ibrahim and Alia, asylum-seekers and refugees need a chance to show who they are. Between April and May 2021, UNHCR collected data and recorded the education level, work experience and skills of asylum-seekers and recognized refugees on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, Leros, Rhodes and Tilos. Although the findings present only a segment of the valuable potential of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece, it is testament to the wide spectrum and diversity of their skills.

Most commonly, refugees mastered skilled trades (19%), worked in manufacturing and

mining (16%), agriculture and the food sector, and were engaged in business and sales (10%). Amongst them, were also doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, and ICT professionals.

UNHCR supports the Government implement its national strategy on integration by providing data on the educational and skills background of refugees to guide policy decisions and Government support. In addition, UNHCR monitors the progress in integration and records the protection risks that refugees are facing, including gender-based violence. This can strengthen the support provided and the communities' ability to address those challenges.

You can find out more about the talent of refugees on the islands [here](#).



*Ibrahim Al Hussein is competing in para swimming as a member of the Paralympic Refugee Team.*

## With summer at the door, winter preparations for refugee camps should not stall

**Low population on the islands** is opportunity to speed up works

On 9 June, in a [meeting](#) between Minister of Migration and Asylum Notis Mitarachi and the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs and Migration Ylva Johansson, discussions focused on the progress report and the ongoing negotiations on the new European Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Minister Mitarachi stated that the new camps in Samos, Kos and Leros are expected to operate in the summer of 2021, while Commissioner Johansson stressed that ensuring good reception conditions in camps ahead of winter season is of utmost importance.



According to the Ministry of Migration of Asylum approximately 6,700 people lived on the islands' reception and identification centres in June. The manageable size of the population and the summer season are an opportunity to speed up the necessary works and technical interventions that can improve living conditions for the women, men and children living in the centers. It is important to ensure that preventative measures, such as insulating and repairing shelters, improving drainage, prepositioning blankets and sleeping bags etc., are in place before the, often harsh and challenging, winter season starts.

In Lesbos, the Greek Government is working to prepare Mavrovouni site for the winter. UNHCR assists the Government's efforts by transporting accommodation containers to Mavrovouni to house former Kara Tepe residents or provide improved accommodation to others. As of end of June, 57 containers had been transported to Mavrovouni. This helps enhance housing conditions and families' privacy until authorities,

with support by the European Union, complete the new reception and identification centre on the island.

In Samos, the Greek authorities have announced that the Vathy reception and identification centre will close in the summer and that a new site in Zervou area will be inaugurated. UNHCR has been supporting the Reception and Identification Service to communicate with the different communities in this regard and shared advice on reception conditions, including safe shelter allocation, taking into consideration the needs and possible vulnerabilities of the site's residents.

The reception and identification centres on Chios, Kos and Leros combined house slightly over 500 people. Conditions there are overall more adequate than in other locations. However, a number of families and individuals are still accommodated in tents, while many shelters and hygiene facilities require repairs and regular maintenance.

## From Lesbos to Germany: A new life for Ruqiya and her child

For the past two years, Ruqiya, the 40-year-old refugee from Somalia has been in Greece, mainly on Lesbos, thousands of miles away from her homeland. She only has one of her nine children next to her, 12-year-old Abdirahman, who is restless, constantly tracing circles and rectangles with his fingers on the wooden table.

"My son suffers from a severe form of epilepsy. We have no money and in Somalia my child had no hope. I hope that the doctors in Germany will help him. He may not be cured, but his condition can improve and he can have a better quality of life" said Ruqiya, who with her son is preparing to depart for Germany as part of the relocation programme for vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees from Greece to other European countries.

"Poverty and lack of perspective are one side of the coin," she says of her homeland. "The other, even darker side is terrorism and fear." she adds. You can read the rest of Ruqiya's story [here](#).

# “Together we can achieve anything”

## Refugees in Greece advocates of inclusion on World Refugee Day



**Stories from Thessaloniki showcasing refugee’s resilience and potential.**

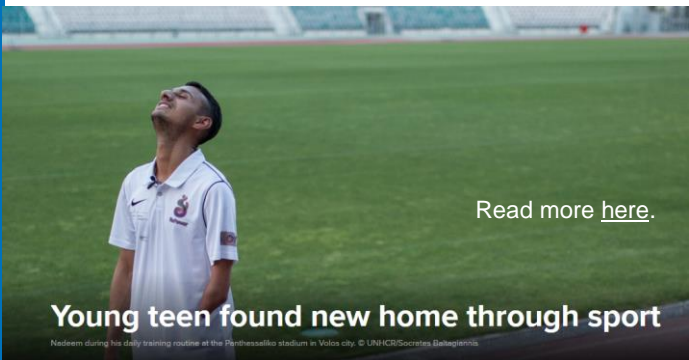


### Kos island

- [Marathon](#)
- [Exhibition](#)



Read more [here](#).



**Samos’ Fire Brigade hosts refugee children from the informal learning centre.**

See more [here](#).

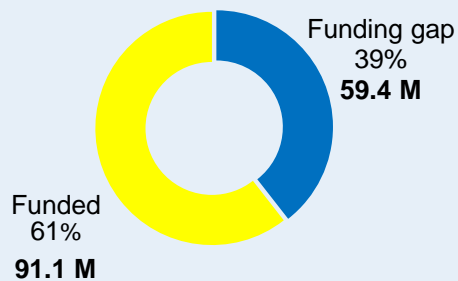


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**Funding information**

22 June 2021

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