



GREECE UPDATE

MORIA FIRE EMERGENCY

16 October 2020



© UNHCR/ Natalia P. kokopchuk

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).

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



12,000

asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

some **7,700**

asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site

BACKGROUND

Leading the response to address the needs of the 12,000 people left homeless overnight after the Moria fires, Greek authorities set up an emergency site within days in Kara Tepe to temporarily shelter affected asylum-seekers and refugees. As of 16 October, some 7,700 asylum-seekers remain in the emergency site, while thousands of others have been transferred to the mainland or alternative accommodations based on their special needs.

Although some progress has been made, the emergency response should continue to give way to more sustainable interventions that guarantee dignified living conditions, particularly for those most vulnerable.

UNHCR is especially concerned that the emergency site is not adequately prepared for severe weather, as demonstrated by the recent rains. This is all the more urgent as winter approaches.

UNHCR continues to advocate for comprehensive solutions, calling for

continuous European support and responsibility-sharing.

LATEST IN BRIEF

Heavy rains on 8 October exacerbated the situation for residents in the Kara Tepe emergency site. As drainage works were in progress but not yet completed, some tents were flooded. UNHCR conducted protection monitoring visits to assess the situation following the rainfall and prioritised tarpaulins for people whose tents were affected.

Organized transfers to the mainland and alternative accommodations help ease the situation by further reducing the population in the emergency site. Since the aftermath of the fires, some 2,390 people have been transferred out of Lesvos, including 288 to UNHCR ESTIA accommodation apartments on the mainland (as of 12 October). UNHCR has supported this effort with logistics, preparation arrangements and by providing targeted information sessions along with IOM and EASO.

In a positive development, asylum interviews resumed on 8 October.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Site planning and shelter

UNHCR has supported the Government in setting up the emergency site as a temporary measure to provide immediate shelter and protection to asylum-seekers who were affected by the fires. Currently, 1,000 tents are set-up, 700 of which were provided by UNHCR. In addition, four UNHCR Rubb Halls and eight IOM Rubb Halls are used for shelter, NFI storage and distribution, as well as for COVID-19 testing.

At the request of the Government, UNHCR continues to support with targeted technical interventions in the site. Given its location at the seaside, the site is exposed to challenging weather conditions and safety hazards, compounded by the approaching winter season. The effect of recent heavy rainfalls in Lesvos is evidence of the urgent need for proper drainage and site planning. To help protect and stabilize the tents, UNHCR continued to gravel parts of the site most prone to flooding and place flooring under 231 tents so far. In addition, UNHCR distributed some 1,400 plastic tarpaulins to help protect tents from the elements, and made available 10,000 meters of rope to hold them in place. UNHCR also began installing kits for insulation and enhancement of family tents.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

The rains also rendered some hygiene facilities unusable as water flooded several of the 386 latrines on the site. The 37 chemical toilets and 8 handwashing stations installed by UNHCR remained intact. The authorities are planning to increase the WASH capacity with an additional 180 toilets and the installation of an initial 40 shower units. However, more are required to cover the needs of site residents.

COVID-19 prevention and response

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 facility. Based on health protocols, all persons testing positive have been directed to the designated isolation area. UNHCR

has provided one Rubb Hall for COVID-19 testing and is currently installing partitions to help ensure patient privacy.

According to the authorities, as of 16 October, 24 people were in quarantine in the emergency site, 19 of whom have tested positive for COVID-19. UNHCR has completed works to help authorities ensure safe and effective procedures in the isolation area.

Material Assistance

Electricity remains intermittent, and the generators currently available do not suffice to cover the site's power needs. To address safety concerns as well as lighting and power needs, UNHCR has distributed over 3,300 solar lamps, out of 6,000 made available as of 14 October, prioritizing distribution in women-only areas of the site. These lamps also allow for the charging of mobile phones and other small devices.

As of 15 October, UNHCR had distributed over 34,700 core relief items, including blankets, mats, jerrycans and sleeping bags.

Protection of children and vulnerable people

UNHCR teams and partners continue their efforts to identify and assist vulnerable asylum-seekers to prioritize them for safer accommodation.

In addition to the protection desk, which site residents have used continuously since 21 September to obtain information about services, referrals and procedures, UNHCR has started, on 12 October, protection outreach to site residents to identify and refer persons with special needs to available services. So far, 700 families have been approached. Initial observations suggest that many vulnerable persons struggle with serious medical conditions, while many older people and persons with disabilities have no alternative but to sleep on the floor. Specialized medical, nutritional and psychosocial support must be strengthened to meet the needs of families with children. Many do not have sufficient essential items for their babies, including clothing.

UNHCR and its partners PRAKSIS and Diotima are supporting the site management in identifying at-risk women and children and transferring them to safe, informal shelters.



1,000 family tents were set up

231 tents have flooring



Critical gaps remain in water, sanitation, hygiene and health services



As of 16 October, **24** people remained in quarantine in the emergency site, 19 of whom have tested positive for COVID-19



As of 15 October, UNHCR had distributed over **34,700** core relief items, including blankets, mats, jerrycans and sleeping bags

Coordination

UNHCR has been working closely with the authorities to enhance their capacity in coordination, including through workshops and the development of tools that help identify gaps and duplications in the emergency response. This week, UNHCR assisted the authorities in organizing the first inter-sector working group to prioritize follow-up actions after the floods.

UNHCR continues to co-chair the Interagency

Consultation Forum which brings together UN agencies, NGOs and volunteer groups active on the island. UNHCR also chairs the Protection Working Group, and co-chairs sub-working groups on basic assistance, sexual and gender-based violence, legal aid and child protection. In addition, UNHCR participates in thematic working group meetings on WASH and health, and supports authorities by facilitating regular site planning meetings at the emergency site

UNHCR will continue its rapid response and welcomes much-needed support through flexible funding that would allow it to address the emerging 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 by the Moria fires.

SITUATION IN GREECE

There are approximately 121,400 asylum-seekers and migrants in Greece, including 4,400 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, overcrowding remains prevalent on the Greek Aegean Islands where, by the end of August, around 27,200 people were crammed into spaces with a combined capacity of 5,500. Most asylum-seekers there must cope with dire living conditions and are exposed to various security risks including sexual and gender-based violence.

The situation had been persistently difficult in the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Lesbos prior to the devastating fire. At the end of August, the Moria RIC and the adjacent informal area of the Olive Grove housed around 12,000 asylum-seekers including some 4,000 children.

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 the [Factsheet](#) and the [UNHCR Briefing Note](#) of 9 October 2020.

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

United States of America | European Union | Education Cannot Wait | Europe Economic Area | Austria | Czechia | Iceland | Norway | Private donors Austria | Private donors Germany | Private donors Italy | Private donors Liechtenstein | Private donors Spain | Private donors Sweden | Private donors United Kingdom | Private donors Switzerland | Switzerland

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden | Private donors Spain | Norway | Netherlands | Denmark | United Kingdom | Private donors Republic of Korea | Germany | Private Donors Japan | Switzerland | France | Private Donors Italy | Italy

Contacts:

In Geneva:

Nicolas Brass

Senior External Engagement Coordinator
UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe

Email: brass@unhcr.org

In Greece:

Elena Marda

Government Liaison Associate
UNHCR Country Office in Greece

Email: marda@unhcr.org