



GREECE UPDATE

MORIA FIRE EMERGENCY

23 October 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.



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 to temporarily shelter affected asylum-seekers and refugees.

Despite efforts of the Greek Government, living conditions in the Mavrovouni emergency site near Kara Tepe remain sub-standard, particularly for the most vulnerable residents, including persons with disabilities.

As winter approaches, UNHCR remains concerned that the site is not adequately prepared for more severe weather.

In addition to calling for sustainable interventions to guarantee dignified living conditions in the emergency site, UNHCR continues to advocate for comprehensive solutions, continuous European support and responsibility-sharing.

LATEST IN BRIEF

Efforts to prepare the emergency site for winter are ongoing, but further improvements are required to create appropriate living conditions for the asylum-seekers currently hosted there. According to authorities, the camp hosts approximately 7,700 residents.

Transfers of people from the islands to the mainland continued and became more crucial in the aftermath of the fires, moving some 2,440 of the most vulnerable people out of Lesvos. Among these, as of 19 October, 325 persons were accommodated in UNHCR ESTIA apartments, and 406 unaccompanied children were placed in IOM temporary shelters.

As of 22 October, 1,362 recognized refugees and asylum-seekers, including 321 unaccompanied children, had been relocated from Greece to other European countries.

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900
tents (700 provided
by UNHCR)
were set up

376
tents have wood
flooring

Such initiatives should be significantly increased, as they offer much-needed safe and orderly means of guaranteeing the protection of those most at-risk. UNHCR is supporting the relocation process with identification, assessment and practical arrangements in coordination with the Greek Asylum Service, EASO, IOM and UNICEF.

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 for asylum-seekers affected by the fires.

At the request of the Government, UNHCR continued targeted technical interventions to help prepare the site for the winter. As of 22 October, 296 UNHCR tents have been equipped with insulation and 376 tents with wood flooring.

Large-scale technical works, including to improve drainage, are being planned by the Government and are essential to ensure proper living conditions for site residents.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

The authorities are planning to increase the site's WASH capacity, as the existing infrastructure remains inadequate for the size of the population. Showers, for instance, are lacking.

A sustainable water supply is being pursued, as the emergency site is not currently connected to the municipal water supply system. The population presently relies on the distribution of water bottles and provision of water through water bladders donated by the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit, which supply the site's eight UNHCR-donated handwashing stations.

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 isolation area. UNHCR has provided one Rubb Hall for COVID-19

testing and is installing partitions to help ensure patient privacy.

According to the authorities, as of 22 October, 33 people were in quarantine in the emergency site, of whom 27 have tested positive for COVID-19.

Some 48,500 protective masks provided by the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit have been handed out to site residents at the UNHCR Rubb Hall distribution point.

Material Assistance

Pending larger-scale works, electricity remains intermittent and the generators currently available do not suffice to cover the site's overall power needs. As a minimum measure, each household has been provided a UNHCR portable solar-powered lamp, which helps mitigate risks in unlit areas, and allows for the charging of mobile phones and other small devices.

As of 22 October, UNHCR had distributed over 34,700 core relief items, including blankets, mats, jerrycans and sleeping bags. At the distribution point, UNHCR staff also distribute essential items provided by other actors, such as diapers, sanitary napkins, hygiene kits and water bottles.

Partitioning of the aid distribution Rubb Hall is ongoing. This will allow for more efficiency in the delivery of relief items and cash assistance.

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.

So far, since 21 September, 600 people have approached the protection desk, which provides site residents with information about services, referrals and procedures. In addition, UNHCR completed protection outreach to site residents to identify and refer persons with specific needs to available services.

UNHCR and expert partners PRAKSIS and Diotima continue to support the site management in identifying at-risk women and children and transferring them to safe, informal shelters.



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



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Coordination

UNHCR has been working closely with the authorities to enhance capacity in coordination, including through workshops and the development of tools that help identify gaps and duplications in the emergency response.

Alongside the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, UNHCR continues to co-chair the inter-agency Consultation Forum, which brings together UN agencies, NGOs and volunteer groups active on the island. In addition, UNHCR

chairs the protection working group, co-chairs working groups on basic assistance, WASH and education, and participates in thematic working group meetings on health. UNHCR also supports authorities by facilitating regular site planning meetings and organizing inter-sectoral meetings to identify solutions to address cross-sectoral gaps.

UNHCR is working with protection actors to enhance the dissemination of information to site residents about the various active organizations and available services in the site.

[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.](#)

SITUATION IN GREECE

There are approximately 121,100 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, overcrowding remains prevalent on the Greek Aegean Islands where, by the end of September, around 21,400 people were crammed into spaces with an estimated combined capacity of 6,200. Most asylum-seekers there must cope with dire 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 the [Factsheet](#).

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.

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