

Greece

Year 2020 ended with **15,700 arrivals**, of which **500** were recorded in **December**. **Two shipwrecks** off Lesbos claimed the lives of **four people** attempting to reach Greece.

UNHCR called for **comprehensive solutions** and **safe, regulated alternatives** so that refugees are not driven to put their lives **at risk on these dangerous voyages**. Greece officially **abolished the practice of**

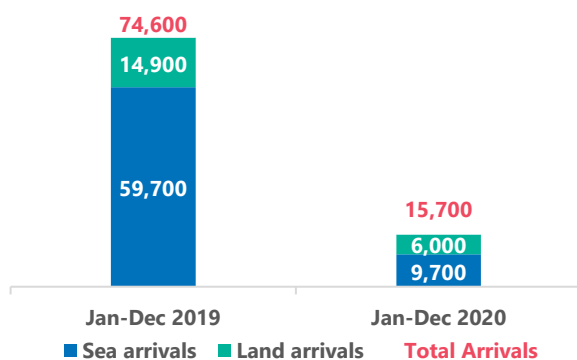
placing unaccompanied children in **protective custody**. UNHCR welcomes the **milestone policy change** and works with the State to establish a protection safety net.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN GREECE*

119,700

100,600 in the mainland and **19,100** on the islands

Arrivals



* UNHCR estimate as of 31 December 2020 of those who arrived and remained in Greece since the 2015 – 2016 flow .

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

70,450

eligible asylum-seekers and refugees received cash assistance this month

11,550

accommodation places by UNHCR

16,600

accommodation places by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum

PEOPLE IN ESTIA ACCOMMODATION

76% children enrolled in schools

33% have tax identification number (AFM)

45% have access to healthcare (AMKA or PAAYPA)

13% registered with unemployment agency (OAED)

3% have a bank account

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

234 National Staff

29 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Athens

2 Sub Offices in Thessaloniki, Lesbos

3 Field Offices in Chios, Samos, Kos

2 Field Units in Evros, Leros



A family of asylum-seekers from Afghanistan wait in a hotel room in Athens for their relocation flight to Germany.

Working with Partners

- UNHCR supports the Government of Greece which leads the refugee response, working closely with other United Nations agencies, State institutions, municipalities, international and national NGOs, grassroots organizations, refugee communities and local communities.

Main Activities

COVID-19 Prevention and Response

- UNHCR assists the Greek Government's prevention and response to COVID-19 in the reception centres by increasing water and sanitation capacity, providing core relief and hygiene items, installing health units for screening and isolation, distributing additional cash assistance, facilitating information dissemination through helplines and interpreters and enhancing its coordination role with authorities, NGOs and UN agencies, including the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).
- Quarantine and isolation spaces are now available in almost all border locations but lack sufficient medical staff to be fully operational. On the islands and in Evros, UNHCR has provided **81 medical units** for screening and isolation as well as **275 portable units** for hygiene and sanitation, including chemical toilets, showers and hand washing stations. In Samos, UNHCR also helped form cleaning committees for waste collection with the participation of refugees.
- UNHCR protects the population at high risk of COVID-19 complications in the island reception centres – where it is difficult to apply social distancing measures – by moving them to safer accommodation. Since mid-March 2020, UNHCR moved to safer locations some **2,180 people**.
- UNHCR facilitates access to quality information for asylum-seekers via helplines, interpretation, the [HELP](#) website, [podcasts](#), radio spots, a YouTube channel and through information disseminated via phone SMS. UNHCR assists refugee communities to offer help to co-residents in the island reception centres.
- UNHCR and partners running non-formal education centres ensure that classrooms are adequately equipped, social distances are observed, and children can learn in a safe environment.

Accommodation and Cash Assistance

- UNHCR runs the EU-funded [ESTIA accommodation](#) and [cash assistance](#) programmes in cooperation with the Government, municipalities and NGOs. At the end of December, the State assumed the great majority of UNHCR operational engagement in running ESTIA accommodation. UNHCR continues to work with staff from State agencies for the transition of the cash assistance programme to the Greek authorities.
- Following the transition of accommodation places to the Greek State, UNHCR in December managed **11,550 places** and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum **16,600**.

- UNHCR gave cash in the form of pre-paid cards to **70,450 asylum-seekers and refugees** in apartments and sites and provided a top-up to cover increased needs resulting from winter. In December, approximately **7.4 million euros** in cash assistance was re-injected into the local economy.

Protection

- The news of four people perishing in two [shipwrecks](#) off Lesbos reiterated the need for safe and regulated alternatives to seek asylum. UNHCR continues to advocate for a comprehensive response, including transfers of asylum-seekers to sustainable accommodation and continuous European support, such as through relocation to other European states.
- UNHCR's team on the islands and land border in Evros helped new arrivals, such as families and unaccompanied children, to access necessary services, provided them with information on procedures, rights and obligations and helped the authorities identify those with specific needs who require special assistance.
- A total of **13,800 persons** were transferred from the islands to accommodations on mainland Greece since the beginning of the year. Of those, 4,300 were transferred jointly by UNHCR and the Government and an additional 4,400 were moved by UNHCR to ESTIA accommodation.
- UNHCR helped strengthen the national asylum and reception systems and expertise by seconding **64 experts** to various State agencies to bolster their response and by organizing trainings for Governmental staff.
- UNHCR supported the Asylum Service with experts who advised the caseworkers, upon request, on how to conduct interviews, draft decisions on asylum applications and other on-the-job training. UNHCR assisted in **13,702 instances in 2020 and 61,833 since 2016**. This support improved the quality of asylum processing while supporting continued integrity of the procedure.
- From the beginning of 2020, UNHCR and its partners have helped over **9,900 asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection** with counselling and legal representation in order to prepare and support their cases, for example with family reunification procedures.
- UNHCR [HELP website](#) answers questions in seven languages on [how to apply for asylum](#), on [rights and obligations](#) and on available services when [living in Greece](#).

Child Protection

- After 21 years, Greece officially abolished the practice of detaining unaccompanied children at police stations as a means of protective custody. UNHCR is working with the State for the development and establishment of a national tracing and protection mechanism as an alternative to protective custody, aiming at establishing a safety net in the absence of care arrangements. In 2020, UNHCR and its partner supported the transfer of **800 unaccompanied children** out of detention facilities.
- By December, UNHCR supported **2,300 homeless and vulnerable children** by offering psychosocial support, legal aid and cultural mediation, while also facilitating their safe removal accompaniment out of precarious conditions.

- UNHCR also boosts the response of the Government with expertise, trainings and research. In one year, **974 staff** of State agencies and organizations were trained in the protection of children.
- Along with partners, UNHCR works with the authorities to diversify alternative care arrangements, such as family-based foster care for younger children.

Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence

- Lack of privacy, inadequate lighting and long distance to toilets and showers fosters risks of gender-based violence (GBV) in the sites, while the situation is also worrying for survivors who are recognized refugees and have limited means of self-reliance. Allegations of an assault on a child surfaced in Lesbos. UNHCR moved the family to safer accommodation and offered psychosocial and medical care through its partners.
- UNHCR and its partners continued efforts to prevent and respond to GBV in urban areas as well as some field locations and islands to identify [survivors](#), including men and LGBTI persons, as well as people at-risk, offering case management, legal information, counselling, psychosocial and medical attention through partners. UNHCR refers those affected to State services and shelters or accommodation in apartments where they can get expert help.
- UNHCR supported the authorities to strengthen the national reporting mechanism on trafficking, especially on the islands where the situation is more challenging.

Education

- UNHCR, with UNICEF and other actors, supports the [Ministry of Education](#) to include refugee boys and girls in public education.
- In the current school year, **83% of recognized refugee children** in ESTIA accommodation are enrolled into public schools alongside their Greek peers. Several hurdles continue hindering education opportunities on the islands, where out of **3,800 school-aged children** (4-17), only a handful attend public schools. In addition, quarantine and restriction of movement measures significantly affect the transportation of students, physical presence in schools has been closed during the month, while special reception classes on the islands remain idle.
- For the first time, an interactive performance based on forum theatre techniques was launched in December as part of UNHCR's programme that fosters open dialogue on issues related to xenophobia and co-existence.

Health

- UNHCR continued to work with the [Ministry of Health](#), the [National Public Health Organization](#) (EODY) and partners to help refugees and asylum-seekers gain entry into the health care system, in coordination with WHO.
- Access to health care for asylum-seekers and refugees continued to be limited at several locations across Greece, in particular on the islands, mainly due to the limited public sector medical staff and difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation.
- UNHCR supported primary healthcare and psychosocial support services in Lesbos and mental health services in Attika and Thessaloniki. UNHCR continued to work with experts towards refugee skills building and training, in order to provide essential

psychosocial support and to empower vulnerable refugees, including those with mental health conditions.

Durable Solutions

- In 2020, **34,325** persons were recognised as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Greece ([Ministry of Migration and Asylum](#)). In December, **6,059** refugees benefitted from cash assistance and **6,199** beneficiaries of international protection were accommodated in UNHCR's apartments. Support and engagement from the authorities is crucial to increase prospects of efficient integration for these individuals.
- UNHCR's partners support those living in the accommodation scheme with job matching or referrals to develop skills, vocational trainings and language courses. Of the recognised refugees living in UNHCR's accommodation, **69% have an AMKA social security number, 43% have an AFM tax number, and 20%** are registered with **OAED unemployment agency**. However, only **6% have a bank account** which is a prerequisite for receiving a salary.
- This month, a new Government system took effect simplifying the issuance of tax numbers for asylum-seekers. This is a positive development expected to facilitate transactions for both private and public services.
- UNHCR helps refugees navigate the Greek civil, social and economic system and complete administrative procedures such as submitting an income declaration. These are necessary for refugees to find gainful employment and eventually be included in the Greek society. More language classes and job trainings for adults can accelerate refugees' integration.
- Cooperation between UNHCR and Municipalities in the area of integration further intensified. UNHCR signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Municipalities of [Thessaloniki](#) and [Heraklion](#).

Relocation

- December saw **566** persons depart from Greece to other European countries. So far, **2,209 asylum-seekers and refugees** have been relocated from Greece to Germany, Finland, Portugal, Belgium, Luxemburg, Ireland, France, Bulgaria and Lithuania with European States' having pledged to accept **5,143** persons in total so far. Of these, **573** are **unaccompanied children** and **1,292 vulnerable families and adults**.
- UNHCR and its partners, in coordination with IOM, UNICEF and EASO, supported the authorities, in the identification and selection of children based on their best interests. UNHCR also supported the whole spectrum of the relocation of homeless children, providing operational and expert assistance. Since January, UNHCR and partners have supported with provision of guardians and in assessing the best interest of **479 children**, while leading, at the operational level, the best interest process for homeless children and children living in precarious conditions, including coordination, assessments and practical arrangements.

Returns

- In December, **no people** were returned from Greece to Turkey in the framework of the E.U. - Turkey Statement, with a total of **2,140 people** [returned](#) since 20 March 2016.

Shelter and Basic Assistance

- UNHCR has provided to authorities and actors operational in the refugee situation, close to a million core relief items, such as tents, blankets, sleeping bags and mats for roughly 50,000 asylum-seekers and refugees. This includes material assistance related to COVID-19 and the emergency in Lesbos after the Moria fires.
- UNHCR undertakes targeted, rapid interventions that can help improve the lives of asylum-seekers and refugees on the islands. This month, UNHCR donated 19 solar-powered heaters for containers and installed five units for the food distribution area in Samos, installed one industrial-size tent for accommodation and upgraded a road with drainage features in Chios, while supporting continued site improvement works in [Lesvos](#).
- UNHCR with partners is managing – in coordination with the Municipality of Mytilene on Lesbos island – the Kara Tepe accommodation site.

Partners

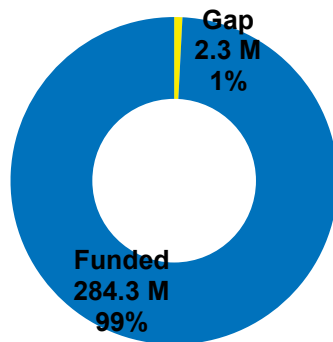
In December, UNHCR worked through **30 partners**: [ARSIS](#), [INTERSOS](#), [Praxis](#), [Solidarity Now](#), [Catholic Relief Services](#), the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#), [METAdrasi](#), the [Greek Council for Refugees](#), the [Network for Children's Rights](#), [Doctors of the World](#), the [Association for Regional Development and Mental Health \(EPAPSY\)](#), [Diotima](#), [Faros](#), [International Rescue Committee](#), [International Catholic Migration Commission \(ICMC\)](#), [Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network \(TENet\)](#), [UNOPS](#), [Perichoresis](#), [OMNES](#) and the Local Authorities of Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Livadia, Herakleion, Trikala, Nea Filadelfia – Nea Chalkidona, Karditsa, Larissa, Tripoli and Tilos.

LINKS

[Mediterranean Situation](#) – [UNHCR Greece](#) – [Twitter](#) – [Facebook](#) - [YouTube](#)

FUNDING (AS OF 5 JANUARY 2021)

USD 286.6 M requested for the Greece Operation



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