



## GREECE UPDATE No.15

### LESVOS

16 February 2021

**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) in September 2020.**

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

#### BACKGROUND



**12,000**

asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

nearly **6,900**

asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site

In September 2020, a series of fires ravaged the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, leaving 12,000 people homeless. The authorities have set up the Mavrovouni site to host those affected and, as of 7 February 2021, nearly 6,900 asylum-seekers and refugees, the majority women and children, are sheltered in the site. Many others, including unaccompanied children, were in the meantime transferred to alternative accommodation.

The Greek authorities lead the response with the support of UN agencies, including UNHCR, as well as international and national NGOs and volunteer groups.

#### LATEST IN BRIEF

The Government has been preparing the Mavrovouni site for winds, rain and cold temperatures expected in mid-February. UNHCR and humanitarian partners are assisting authorities in identifying tents that need reinforcement, replacement or plastic tarpaulins to help protect against the severe weather. The authorities have cleared space in prefabricated structures should camp residents need emergency shelter.

UNHCR continues to advocate with authorities to make more spaces available for protective, temporary accommodation, and for further

transfers to the mainland where conditions are better overall, as well as relocation to other EU States. In a positive development, some 400 asylum-seekers and refugees were transferred from Lesvos to the mainland in the past fortnight, including some to accommodation provided through the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation programme (ESTIA) and others for relocation. On 10 February, 59 vulnerable asylum-seekers and unaccompanied children were relocated from Greece to France through the concerted efforts of UNHCR and IOM, under the leadership of the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum and with the support of the European Commission. As of 10 February, 2,376 recognized refugees and vulnerable asylum-seekers have been relocated from Greece since the Moria fires.

In a tragedy at sea, a child went missing on 6 February when a boat carrying 30 people overturned near the coast of Lesvos. The authorities launched a search and rescue operation and transferred the survivors to the quarantine area of the Municipal Accommodation Centre of Kara Tepe. UNHCR liaised with on-site partners for the provision of accommodation and psychosocial care to the mother of the child. Such incidents tragically illustrate the risks that refugees are willing to take to reach safety. In January 2021, authorities recorded 138

new arrivals in Lesvos, down from some 180 in December 2020.

An earthquake of magnitude 5 on the Richter scale and several aftershocks rattled Lesvos on 1 February with no damages or injuries reported on the island.

## UNHCR'S RESPONSE

### Site planning and shelter

Harsh winter weather affected the Aegean Islands into early February, with most asylum-seekers and refugees experiencing extremely difficult conditions. In Mavrovouni, the majority of the nearly 6,900 people are accommodated in the 570 UNHCR insulated tents, but gaps in electricity and heating provision persist (see paragraph on basic assistance).

Efforts to upgrade the site's infrastructure continued under the leadership of the Greek authorities. UNHCR completed levelling, gravelling and drainage works on two main roads that had been particularly prone to flooding and used to remain muddy for days after rainfall. These works significantly improved access of site residents, particularly older people and children, to accommodation, water and hygiene facilities.

In addition, at the request of the authorities, UNHCR transferred four prefabricated containers that had remained unused in the Kara Tepe accommodation centre to the office area in Mavrovouni. Two will be used by the European Asylum Support Office and the other two by site management for administration.

On 23 January, the Government announced findings of lead contamination outside the site's residential area as well as precautionary measures to mitigate risks for residents and workers, such as fencing off the contaminated zone, raising soil levels and gravel in adjacent areas, and installing a cement cap at ground level in the administrative, reception and registration zones. UNHCR notes the assurances given by the authorities but remains concerned about delays in the implementation of the announced measures and reiterates that no effort should be spared to ensure that all people who reside and work in the site are safe.

### Basic assistance

UNHCR has made available to the Greek authorities 950 heaters to cover the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in the Mavrovouni site and in the quarantine area for new arrivals in Western Lesvos Municipality. However, in Mavrovouni, the heaters can only be operational once the authorities upgrade the electrical network. As a pilot, and until a more sustainable

solution is found, as of 10 February, UNHCR distributed portable heaters to 50 households with access to a generator.

## COVID-19 prevention and response

UNHCR transported the medical equipment from the former field hospital in the Moria Reception and Identification Centre to the Mavrovouni site on 29 January 2021. The equipment had been donated by the Dutch Government for the COVID-19 response in 2020 and will be used in Mavrovouni's medical hub, which was created with the support of UNHCR and health actors.

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 site. Based on health protocols, all persons testing positive have been directed to the isolation area, alongside family members. According to the authorities, there are no people in quarantine and no confirmed active COVID-19 cases in the site as of 7 February.

## Protection of vulnerable people

UNHCR organized focus group discussions with families living in an area of the site prone to flooding, as well as with female-headed households living in Rubb Halls. Many shared their overall positive impression of the medical services available in Mavrovouni and the availability of essential items, and welcomed the installation of shower units by the German Red Cross near accommodation areas. Discussions evidenced the need for more security patrols close to latrines during night hours. UNHCR informed participants of available services related to gender-based violence, including referrals to services and transfers of at-risk women and children to safe, informal shelters, in addition to the reporting mechanisms offered by the Hellenic Police. Asylum-seekers from Somalia expressed the need for more Somali-speaking interpreters. UNHCR is working with partner METAdrasi to help address this issue through regular missions of interpreters to Lesvos.



**700**

tents (570 provided by UNHCR) were set up

The **570** UNHCR tents have insulation and wood flooring



Gaps remain in water, sanitation, hygiene and health services

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.

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 contribute to support UNHCR's activities in Greece in 2021

European Union | Austria | Private sector Germany | Private sector United Kingdom | Education Cannot Wait | Norway

#### Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2021 global programme



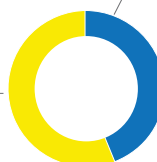
**119,300**  
Population in Greece

**101,200** in the mainland and **18,100** in the islands

#### Financial requirements 2021\*

**150.5 M USD**

funding amount (\$67,972,996) 45%  
indicative funding gap of \$82,555,587 representing 55% of the financial requirements.



**Funded 68 M**  
**45%**

**Gap 82.5M**  
**55%**

\*The financial requirements for Greece include requirements for the operation's regular programme and the Central Mediterranean Route Situation

### Situation in Greece

Arrivals of refugees have dropped exponentially since the 2015–2016 emergency when close to a million people reached Greece. However, with a steady number of people arriving across Greece's sea and land borders, and with limited legal pathways out of the country, the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees remain pressing.

Today, there are approximately 119,300 asylum-seekers in Greece (as of end December). While the situation on mainland Greece is better overall, most of the roughly 14,000 asylum-seekers at the reception and identification centres on the Greek Aegean Islands are exposed to various risks, including gender-based violence.

UNHCR will continue to assist Greek authorities in responding to both short-term and long-term challenges. 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.

For more information on the refugee situation and UNHCR interventions in Greece, you may refer to UNHCR's [Operational Portal](#).



### Compassion creates a new home for a refugee child

Story introducing UNHCR's partner METAdrasi's foster care programme for unaccompanied minors, through which 89 families were able to host 106 children since 2016.

*Iro and Nahal enjoy reading together. The little girl has completed two years in the arms of Iro and together, they have built a new family.*

[Link to the story](#)

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