

GREECE HIGHLIGHTS

UNHCR ADVOCATES FOR A BAR ON FORCED RETURNS OF AFGHANS

Greece calls for common and coordinated EU stance towards Afghanistan



Children running to take cover as the heavy dust and the wind pierce through the Nawabad Farabi-ha IDP camp. © UNHCR/Edris Lutfi

In view of the events that unfolded in Afghanistan in August, Greece, along with another 97 countries, [committed](#) to ensuring that citizens, nationals and residents, employees, Afghans whom they have worked with and those who are at risk can continue to travel freely to destinations outside Afghanistan.

While UNHCR is deploying all possible humanitarian support inside Afghanistan facing a desperate situation, UNHCR released a [non-return advisory](#), calling for a bar on forced returns of Afghan nationals to their country of origin. In the wake of the rapid deterioration in the situation

of large parts of the country and the unfolding humanitarian emergency, UNHCR calls on States to halt forcible returns of Afghan nationals including those who have previously been determined not to be in need of international protection.

In addition, financial aid, safe pathways, including resettlement, should complement and not substitute the direct access to territory and procedures for persons who apply for asylum in European countries. UNHCR encourages States to show humanity and solidarity should Afghan

nationals arrive at their borders seeking protection.

In light of Greece's recent declaration of Turkey as safe third country for asylum seekers of five nationalities, including Afghans, UNHCR is calling for an inclusive consideration of Afghans' asylum applications in Greece. This is particularly important given the limited return prospects to Turkey currently and the risk for persons in need

of international protection finding themselves in protracted legal limbo.

In Greece, Afghans currently represent the top nationality of asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR estimates that there are 31,000 Afghans in the country, of whom 62% are women and children (as of end July). Among the children who have arrived in Greece alone, the majority is from Afghanistan (32%) according to [EKKA](#) data as of July 2021.

Afghan refugee in Greece achieves secondary school scholarship opportunity in the United States



“We need to think outside the box...because you learn more things outside the box. It's like a cage, you need to be a free bird” says Arezu, an incredibly talented and eloquent Afghan refugee of just 12-years-old, currently living on Lesbos island in Greece. This week is the return to school for many children around the world, including in Greece. For many, it is the first time they will re-enter the classrooms following many months of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Arezu's native Afghanistan, access to education, particularly for girls, is a huge challenge, particularly given the ongoing humanitarian crisis where more than 600,000 people have been internally displaced this year alone.

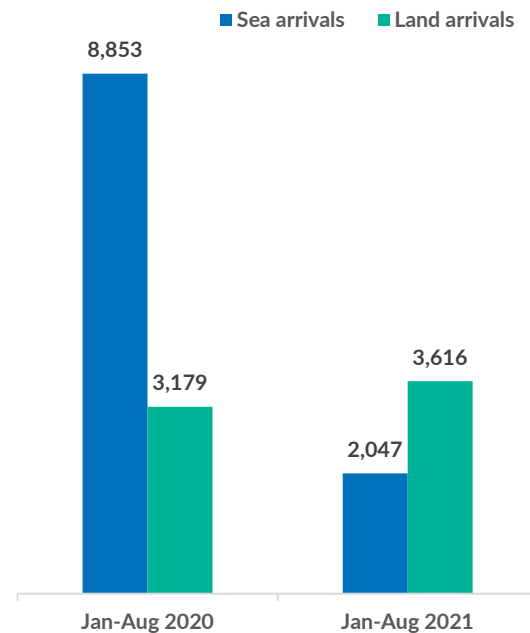
Arezu arrived in Greece in 2019 with her parents and her younger sister. When she was just seven years old and her mother was 8 months pregnant with her younger sister Aylin, her parents came to the conclusion that they could no longer stay in Northern Afghanistan. As the conflict escalated, their lives and that of their daughter and unborn child were at risk. They fled to Turkey and later to Greece.

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

IN BRIEF

- As of August, recorded arrivals of asylum-seekers to Greece were considerably lower than in previous years. As of the end of August there were more arrivals by land (3,600) than by sea (2,050). Most of those arriving by sea are from Afghanistan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Children represent over one-third of sea arrivals in 2021.
- With the events in Afghanistan unfolding quickly, UNHCR issued a non-return advisory calling for the halt of forced returns of Afghan nationals as the humanitarian situation inside the country became desperate.
- UNHCR’s ESTIA cash assistance programme – which has been running since 2017 – is transitioning to the Greek State.
- The Greek Ombudsman highlights in its Special Report the disproportionate number of detained migrants in view of return, compared to those actually returned in their countries of origin.

Total arrivals to Greece 2020/2021



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

UNHCR handing over cash assistance to the Greek State

Cash assistance provided a safety net to 200,000 asylum-seekers and refugees since 2017



Members of an asylum-seeking family are buying goods at a local grocery store in the centre of Tripoli city, Greece. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

In July, UNHCR took the final step towards the handover of the European Union-funded ESTIA cash programme to the Greek State and made the final payment to asylum-seekers and benefiting from cash assistance. This single payment of cash assistance will cover August and September. This will allow for time for the transition to take place, upon the State's request, to better prepare to take on the provision of basic assistance through cash in October 2021.

In August 2021, 34,000 people received cash assistance from UNHCR (6.9 million euros distributed) for the two months of August and September combined. Since April 2017, 205,000 people have received cash assistance from UNHCR at least once.

UNHCR and its partners began implementing the Cash Assistance programme in April 2017, offering vital support to the thousands of asylum-seekers in Greece. By providing cash directly,

asylum-seekers could choose themselves how to prioritize their expenses to best cover their basic needs, helping them regain control of their lives. The daily interaction between refugees and local communities in grocery stores, bakeries, shops, clinics, transport, helped avert stereotypes and enhanced further social cohesion.

You may read more about the handover of the cash assistance programme [here](#).

UNHCR ESTIA cash programme in numbers:

200,000

Total number of Cash Assistance beneficiaries

1,646,031

Total distinct cash loadings

158,570

Total prepaid cards were issued

123

Locations in Greece where families were reached with Cash Assistance

Ombudsman: More people detained than returned to their countries

Overcrowding in detention facilities amid COVID-19 pandemic persisted

In July, the Greek Ombudsman released its [Special Report](#) for the returns of third country nationals in 2020, pointing out the disproportionate number of detained migrants in view of return, compared to the number of those actually returned in their countries of origin. According to the report, this is a valid finding for yet another year. The report provides also recommendations for the implementation of robust hygiene and sanitary measures, the reduction of overcrowding at Pre-removal centres by exhausting all other measures as alternatives to detention and avoiding administrative detention of third-country nationals at police holding cells, which are inadequate for long stay detention due to their limited purpose and poor conditions.

Over the last years, UNHCR has observed that the proportionality and necessity to detain are not

being adequately examined at an individual level. UNHCR shares with the Government recommendations to ensure that alternatives to detention are in place. In December 2020, Greece abolished the practice of holding unaccompanied children in detention facilities for ‘protective custody’ – which lasted for nearly 20 years and affected over 100 children each month since 2017. The practice had led to judgments against Greece by the European Court of Human Rights and had been widely condemned by rights groups. The swift transfer of children to appropriate facilities for minors instead of placing them to detention facilities has been a milestone development for the protection of children with significant benefits to their mental and physical well-being and showcases that alternatives to detention are possible in law and in practice.

Refugee Convention: Commemorating 70 years of a life-saving treaty

By Mireille Girard, UNHCR Representative in Greece

More than 2400 years ago Euripides’ famous tragedy “The Trojan Women” was first performed, recounting the horrors of war and loss suffered by the survivors after Troy’s fall. War, militia killings, violence perpetrated by non-state actors, persecution by States, attacks based on gender identity or religion are among historic scourges for which there are now legal protections for persons forced to flee.

Those protections were enunciated in the [1951 Refugee Convention](#), which turns 70 years old today, 28th July. They were first afforded to Europeans persecuted during the Second World War, but eventually expanded to give all persons worldwide legal rights to safety. This landmark agreement was one of the first treaties to be adopted after the war and the establishment of the United Nations, forming part of the nascent human rights framework, to formalize a minimum set of rights for persons fleeing persecution.

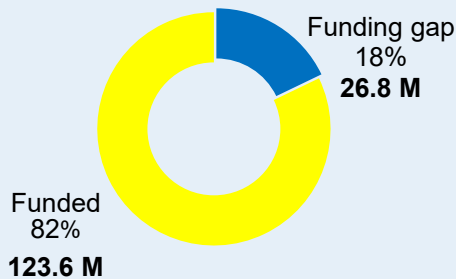
You can read the full op-ed [here](#).

UNHCR is grateful to donors who provide generous and timely support that enables a flexible and swift response to the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece

Funding information

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