

# GREECE UPDATE #11

## LESVOS

4 December 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.**

### BACKGROUND

Two months after fires swept through the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, nearly 7,300 asylum-seekers and refugees are sheltered in the Mavrovouni site, which was swiftly set up to host those affected. The fires had left some 12,000 people homeless, of which many were transferred to other accommodations.

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

In addition to the planned technical interventions to improve living conditions in Mavrovouni, UNHCR continues to call for comprehensive solutions and European support and responsibility-sharing.

### LATEST IN BRIEF

According to the Hellenic Coastguard, a boat carrying 34 Somalians capsized off the coast of northeastern Lesvos in the early hours of 2 December. Thirty-two people were rescued but two women perished. UNHCR assisted in the reception of the survivors, facilitated

the provision of core relief items and helped identify people who are at increased risk due to their particular situation. UNHCR's partner Médecins du Monde offered healthcare and psychosocial support. The tragic incident is evidence of the perilous journeys that men, women and children make to reach safety. Recently, the body of another person was recovered after a boat partially sank while attempting to reach the island of Rhodes on 23 November. Thirteen people survived.

Greek authorities have recorded 101 new arrivals to Lesvos in November and 4,495 since the beginning of 2020, far fewer compared to the same period last year. In 2019, 4,088 persons arrived to Lesvos in November alone and 23,591 between January and the end of November.

### UNHCR'S RESPONSE

#### Site planning and shelter

Preparatory work in the Mavrovouni site is ongoing for the planned drainage, electricity provision and water supply projects under the leadership of the Greek Government with the support of partners, including UN agencies and NGOs.



**12,000**

asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

some **7,300** asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site



**900**  
tents (700 provided  
by UNHCR)  
were set up

The **700** UNHCR  
tents have insulation  
and wood flooring



Gaps remain in  
water, sanitation,  
hygiene and  
health services



As of 2 December,  
**17** people  
remained in  
quarantine in the  
Mavrovouni site,  
of whom 12 have  
tested positive for  
COVID-19

For these large-scale upgrades, the 7,300 people living in Mavrovouni will need to be progressively and temporarily relocated to designated, partitioned Rubb Halls within the site to allow for groundwork to take place. Five more Rubb Halls were set up to be used as temporary accommodation for families, including four provided by IOM and one by UNHCR. In addition, UNHCR is providing a Rubb Hall to cover increased storage needs.

UNHCR supported the authorities in preparing social media messaging to inform site residents about the construction work and shelter rearrangements. UNHCR also presented the plan to representatives of the site's refugee communities, inviting them to share concerns and ideas.

By now, all tents in the site are reinforced with wood flooring and insulation. This will help in the short-term against worsening weather, while more durable site improvements are underway. UNHCR complements the efforts of the authorities and other actors by systematically replacing core relief items, such as tarpaulins and blankets, monitoring tents for damage and identifying asylum-seekers' needs.

Meanwhile, organized transfers from Lesvos to the mainland continue, freeing up much-needed space in the site. Since the fires, some 3,000 people have been moved out of the island (as of 4 December). Of those, 509 moved into ESTIA apartments with UNHCR support.

### **Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)**

WASH actors have begun construction works for 36 showers with hot water. This will offer welcome relief to the population, particularly families with young children.

A total of 301 toilets were operational in the site as of 30 November, one for every 24 persons. Continuous maintenance and further expansion of WASH facilities is important to improve living conditions and can also help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

### **COVID-19 prevention and response**

Major technical works were completed for the creation of the medical hub, which will bring together healthcare providers and services under one roof, including for COVID-19 testing, quarantine and isolation. UNHCR also replaced ten tents used for quarantine

and isolation that had been damaged by recent heavy rain.

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. As of 2 December, 17 people remained in the quarantine area, of whom 12 have tested positive for COVID-19.

UNHCR also continues work to enhance the quarantine capacity for new arrivals to Western Lesvos municipality. Groundwork, such as levelling, was completed and other preparations are underway for the installation of temporary shelter and hygiene facilities as well as the installation of shading and solar streetlights. As of 3 December, eight latrines and eight showers had been installed.

### **Protection of children and vulnerable people**

To mark the beginning of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, UNHCR shared material with other involved actors to amplify awareness and understanding of the risks of gender-based violence. In coordination with IOM, UNHCR is organizing trainings for humanitarian workers on the protection of refugees against sexual exploitation and abuse.

UNHCR, along with other actors working on child protection and in coordination with the authorities, finalized the referral pathway for case management. The pathway outlines necessary steps to be followed and available services and helps ensure that at-risk children, including with serious medical conditions, have access to legal, psychosocial and medical support.

In addition, UNHCR provided space to NGOs to facilitate the distribution of essential items, such as hygiene parcels and family care kits, to single women and families.

**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 contributed to support UNHCR activities in Greece in 2020**

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#### **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

## **SITUATION IN GREECE**

There are approximately 119,500 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, most of the roughly 19,500 asylum-seekers at the reception and identification centres on the Greek Aegean Islands as of the end of October must cope with difficult 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 UNHCR's [Operational Portal](#).

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