



GREECE UPDATE #9

LESVOS

6 November 2020

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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.



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asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

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asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site

BACKGROUND

The September fires that ravaged the Moria Reception and Identification Centre left 12,000 people homeless overnight. The Greek authorities swiftly set up an emergency site to temporarily shelter affected asylum-seekers and refugees.

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

LATEST IN BRIEF

Large-scale transfers out of Lesvos and other islands to the mainland, including to UNHCR ESTIA accommodations, helped reduce the number of people

currently in the Mavrovouni site. A government-chartered boat moved over 1,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from the islands on 31 October, including 313 from Lesvos. UNHCR facilitated the transfer with local transportation to the port. Since the fires, at least 2,800 people have been moved out of the island, as of 3 November. Of those, 396 moved into ESTIA apartments.

As of 4 November, 7,300 people are living in the site, according to authorities.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Site planning and shelter

The Greek authorities are progressing with their plans to ensure proper drainage, water supply and electricity provision.



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 4 November,
24 people
remained in
quarantine in the
emergency site,
of whom 21 have
tested positive for
COVID-19

To prevent water stagnation in the site, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is planning to place concrete slabs with drainage pipes under seven water points.

Larger-scale drainage works such as sustainable systems to prevent flooding are necessary for further interventions by partners to ready the site for winter conditions. In the meantime, actors are preparing and coordinating for further crucial and much needed improvements.

All 700 UNHCR tents are now insulated, including with insulated wood flooring, to protect against the cold and rain. Other shelter partners are working to reinforce the 195 tents provided by the German Red Cross Society with pallets and flooring.

UNHCR also facilitated this week the transportation of a container that authorities will use for administration.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

WASH capacity in the emergency site was expanded, but more improvements will be essential to address the needs of the population. The provision of hot water remains an unmet need, particularly for young children.

Partners working on WASH are developing hygiene promotion activities to be rolled-out with participation of the refugee community, including on handwashing etiquette, mask wearing, social distancing, scabies prevention and proper water usage.

COVID-19 prevention and response

Under the coordination of the authorities, progress was made by several agencies towards establishing the medical hub. UNHCR began additional technical works, such as ground levelling, gravelling and fencing. The medical hub will provide a range of health care services, and will include a dental clinic, pharmacy as well as spaces for offices and mental health and psychosocial services. WHO has also established a laboratory and a warehouse for medical supplies and equipment, while an emergency clinic will be operated by a medical NGO.

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. As of 4 November, 24 people remain in quarantine in the emergency site, of which 21 have tested positive for COVID-19 and are isolated alongside their family members.

Protection of children and vulnerable people

Since the opening of the Protection Desk in the emergency site on 21 September, some 1,900 people have approached UNHCR seeking information on available services, for legal queries and support, as well as to express concerns and identify solutions.

UNHCR relays issues to authorities and works with them to identify solutions. The protection team also refers asylum-seekers and refugees to specialized partners who can provide support.

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.

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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 living in 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 UNHCR's [Operational Portal](#).

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