

# GREECE UPDATE No.13

## LESVOS

8 January 2021



© UNHCR/Natalia Prokopchuk

**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

In September 2020, a series of fires ravaged the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, leaving 12,000 people homeless. Nearly 7,300 asylum-seekers and refugees, the majority women and children, are currently sheltered in the Mavrovouni site, which was set up by the authorities to host those affected. Many others, including unaccompanied children, were transferred to alternative accommodations.

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

### LATEST IN BRIEF

Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis travelled to Lesbos and visited the Mavrovouni site on 31 December 2020, where [UNHCR staff](#) briefed him on the progress made to improve the site. UNHCR continues to advocate for a comprehensive response,

including transfers of asylum-seekers to sustainable accommodation and continuous European support, such as through relocation of asylum-seekers to other European states.

With tragic incidents at sea in December claiming the lives of at least four persons attempting to reach Greece, UNHCR [reiterated](#) the need for safe and regulated alternatives for people to avoid risking their lives on dangerous journeys. In December, Lesbos recorded 180 new arrivals, down from 3,460 in the same period last year. Some 4,680 sea arrivals in Lesbos have been recorded in 2020 compared to 27,050 in 2019.

### UNHCR'S RESPONSE

#### Site planning and shelter

Stormy weather continued into January, but an assessment established that accommodation tents largely withstood the strong wind and rain with only minor damages. UNHCR and shelter actors



**12,000**

asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

nearly **7,300**

asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site



**700**  
tents (570 provided  
by UNHCR)  
were set up

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

provided rapid repairs and introduced a system whereby site residents can report damage on tents and request additional materials as necessary. Further shelter upgrades are needed to protect against winter weather.

While large-scale site improvement works are underway, living conditions remain challenging for the nearly 7,300 people in Mavrovouni (as of 6 January). UNHCR and partners continued technical interventions for the planned drainage, electricity provision and water supply projects. UNHCR also installed 18 additional tents with insulated wood flooring, and UNHCR and IOM provided two Rubb Halls to temporarily shelter people who are relocated from low-lying areas prone to flooding while construction work is ongoing.

In support of broader site planning, UNHCR began the necessary groundwork to improve the main roads inside Mavrovouni. This will increase vehicle access and safety, including for much-needed water and food trucks.

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

The authorities, UN agencies and NGOs continued efforts to meet WASH needs. To supplement existing shower capacity, partners completed the installation of 36 container showers supplied with hot water thanks to trucking by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Other partners are in the process of procuring additional WASH facilities that will help increase overall WASH capacity.

With 271 operational toilets, there is currently one functioning toilet for every 27 residents, while cleaning, maintenance or repairs are pending for 82 toilets, as of 29 December.

WASH partners launched several activities to expand environmental and hygiene awareness, including on hand washing etiquette; proper use, disposal and cleaning of masks, and other guidance on protection against COVID-19; scabies awareness; menstrual hygiene

management; and garbage disposal and recycling.

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

At the Mavrovouni Medical Hub, UNHCR is in the process of replacing 22 tents with 20 weather resistant Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) to expand the capacity of the quarantine area and provide more effective isolation.

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 have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the site from 25 December to 4 January.

UNHCR's support against COVID-19 spread extends beyond Mavrovouni. In the quarantine area for new arrivals in Western Lesvos Municipality, UNHCR completed electrical works and the entire site is currently powered by a generator. All 50 tents have been set up and insulated, all WASH facilities are connected to water supply, and UNHCR has set up an additional tent to ensure that medical actors are able to maintain patient privacy.

### **Protection**

UNHCR teams supported the local Asylum Office in identifying individuals arrived in Lesvos after the Moria fires in September, who have undergone reception and identification procedures but not yet filed asylum claims.

With technical works and shelter re-arrangements ongoing, UNHCR worked with the authorities to reach out to the communities concerned, explain next steps and solicit the communities' views on this large-scale exercise. The Office continues to advocate for shelter allocation that takes into consideration the distinct needs of asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly children and young single adults who may be at risk of violence and exploitation.



Gaps remain in  
water, sanitation,  
hygiene and  
health services



There have been  
no confirmed cases  
of COVID-19 in  
the site since 25  
December (as of 4  
January)

## Coordination

As of early January, UNICEF and the authorities are co-chairing the Education Sector Working Group, which brings together educational institutions, UN agencies, NGOs and other partners under the shared goal of ensuring predictable and well-coordinated provision of non-formal education services, as well as promoting equitable access to formal education for refugees and migrants in Greece.

The humanitarian response in Lesbos is organized and coordinated through eight thematic working groups (on basic assistance, WASH/shelter, protection, gender-based violence, legal aid, child protection, education, public health and mental health). In addition, site coordination meetings take place in Mavrovouni. The UNHCR-chaired Inter-Agency Consultation Forum continues to bring together all actors involved in the Lesbos-wide response.

**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's activities in Greece in 2020

United States of America | European Union | Education Cannot Wait | Europe Economic Area | Austria | Czechia | Iceland | Norway | Private donors Austria | Private donors Belgium | Private donors Brazil | Private donors Canada | Private donors Denmark | Private donors France | Private donors Germany | Private donors Italy | Private donors Liechtenstein | Private donors Mexico | Private donors Netherlands | Private donors Singapore | Private donors Spain | Private donors Sweden | Private donors United Kingdom | Private donors Switzerland | Private donors USA | Spain | Switzerland

### 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 120,000 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 in mainland Greece is better overall, most of the roughly 19,100 asylum-seekers at the reception and identification centres and the Mavrovouni site on the Greek Aegean Islands as of 3 January must cope with difficult living conditions and are exposed to various security risks, including 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](#).

### Contacts:

#### In Geneva:

##### Nicolas Brass

Senior External Engagement Coordinator  
UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe  
Email: [brass@unhcr.org](mailto:brass@unhcr.org)

#### In Greece:

##### Elena Marda

Government Liaison Associate  
UNHCR Country Office in Greece  
Email: [marda@unhcr.org](mailto:marda@unhcr.org)