



GREECE UPDATE

MORIA FIRE EMERGENCY

18 September 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).

UNHCR is scaling up immediate support for all asylum-seekers affected and urges for long-term solutions to address overcrowding on Greek islands

BACKGROUND

- The fires on 8-10 September destroyed all accommodations in Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) and the adjacent “Olive Grove” area on Lesvos island. Some 12,000 asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight.
- Greek authorities are leading and coordinating the immediate response. An emergency site close to Mytilene town, in the area of Kara Tepe, is being established to temporarily house affected asylum-seekers. On 17 September, Greek authorities started moving asylum-seekers to the new emergency site, from where they will be able to access asylum and other procedures, and gradually move to accommodations on mainland.
- UNHCR teams and partners are providing asylum-seekers with emergency shelter and core relief

items. The Office is also supporting authorities with technical advice and expertise regarding site set-up and planning. At the same time, UNHCR is advocating for long-term solutions, calling for continuous European support and responsibility-sharing.

- In the wake of a number of arrests of suspects in connection to the fires in Moria, UNHCR urges all to refrain from speculation and allow legal processes to be duly followed. Communities and groups should not be stigmatized on the account of alleged actions of certain individuals.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Site planning and water, sanitation and hygiene

UNHCR is supporting the Government in setting up the emergency site as a temporary measure to provide immediate shelter and protection to



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asylum-seekers who were otherwise sleeping rough in makeshift shelters or out in the open in fields, groves and parking lots. UNHCR is providing technical assistance with graveling and other preparatory works. As of 18 September, the emergency site had an estimated capacity for 8,000 persons, while works are still ongoing.

Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene capacity are essential conditions for a safe environment. UNHCR has installed over 40 water, hygiene and sanitation facilities so far, including chemical toilets and handwashing stations. These are particularly crucial to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Some 20 chemical toilets have also been provided by the International Rescue Committee. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation delivered four water tanks and protective masks to the population. Despite these efforts, access to sanitation remains limited in the emergency site and priority must be given to improving water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

Shelter and Material Assistance

UNHCR's emergency response to critical and immediate needs includes providing temporary shelter at the new emergency site. As of 18 September, some 1,000 family tents had been set up and the site had received over 6,100 asylum-seekers. In addition, IOM has provided eight Rubbhalls and UNHCR is planning to set up an additional two for accommodation purposes.

UNHCR made available 65,700 essential core relief items to meet the needs of the 12,000 asylum-seekers impacted by the fires. Alongside partners, UNHCR is distributing these items to all people entering the emergency site, such as blankets, sleeping bags and hygiene items,

including to vulnerable women and children. To that end, UNHCR has set up one Rubbhall as a warehouse and a distribution point, in coordination with the authorities and other actors delivering assistance.

UNHCR and its partners also support the authorities in establishing queuing and crowd control management systems and information provision for organized shelter allocation.

COVID-19 Prevention and Response

To prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, asylum-seekers are undergoing rapid COVID-19 testing by the national health authorities before entering the new emergency facility. Based on health protocols, any person testing positive is being directed to the designated isolation area. According to the authorities, as of 17 September, of the 3,332 test results received, 150 people had tested positive for COVID-19 and were moved to the isolation area.

UNHCR is supporting national health authorities in establishing a medical area in line with WHO guidance, by providing tents and installing a RubbHall. The Hellenic Red Cross and Médecins du Monde have established presence in the emergency site, providing first aid services and primary healthcare, respectively.

Protection of unaccompanied children and other vulnerable people

UNHCR teams and partners in Lesvos continue their efforts to identify and assist vulnerable asylum-seekers affected by the recent fires. Some 48 single women and children at-risk have been temporarily transferred to a safe space on the island provided by UNHCR and an additional 183 in a UNICEF space.



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UNHCR is also working with the responsible state agencies to identify appropriate and sustainable accommodation options for the most vulnerable, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and persons with disabilities.

Communication with communities

UNHCR teams continue to conduct outreach and information provision activities inside and outside the new site informing asylum-seekers of their shelter options, services and new processes at the new emergency site.

For more information, please consult [UNHCR's briefing note](#) of 18 September and the [Greece Update](#) issued on 11 September.

Cash-based assistance

At the Government's request, and with support from the European Commission, UNHCR provided an emergency, one-off cash top-up between to 4,470 households affected by the fires. This has helped them cover immediate needs until they can access further assistance.

Access to procedures

UNHCR and other actors are engaging with authorities and advocate for adequate access and safeguards in

UNHCR will continue its rapid response to this urgent crisis and welcomes much-needed support through flexible funding that would allow it to address the emerging needs of all asylum-seekers affected by the fires in Moria. Please visit [UNHCR's donation page](#) to learn more about how you can support those most affected by the Moria fires.

SITUATION IN GREECE

There are approximately 121,400 asylum-seekers and migrants in Greece, including 4,400 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 August, around 27,200 people were crammed into spaces with a combined capacity of 5,500. Most asylum-seekers there must cope with dire living conditions and are exposed to various security risks including sexual and gender-based violence.

The situation had been persistently difficult in the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Lesbos prior to the devastating fire. At the end August, the Moria RIC and the adjacent informal area of the Olive Grove housed around 12,000 asylum-seekers, including some 4,000 children.

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 by 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 the [Factsheet](#).

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