

# GREECE FLASH UPDATE

## MORIA FIRE EMERGENCY

11 September 2020

**UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is supporting the Government of Greece in its response after a fire destroyed the Reception and Identification Centre in Moria, Lesbos.**

### SITUATION BACKGROUND

- After the initial fire which broke out on the evening of Tuesday 8 September causing extensive damage to thousands of asylum-seekers' shelters and common areas, more fires were reported on the evening of 9 September and on 10 September. The latest fires have affected the adjacent fields next to the Moria Reception and Identification Center (RIC), in what is known as "Olive Grove", destroying what remaining accommodation was still available. The situation remains fluid and volatile.
- All 12,000 residents of Moria, including some 4,000 children, managed to evacuate the Centre in time. No casualties have been reported among the residents and the people working at the site, but there was extensive damage to assets.
- UNHCR offered immediate support and [called](#) for restraint amid reported tensions between local communities and asylum-seekers.
- On 9 September, the Government announced a four-month state of emergency on Lesbos, followed by several coordination meetings aimed at mobilizing all available resources to support both asylum-seekers and the general population of the island as a whole.

### NEEDS

The fires have now left 11,500 asylum seekers, including 2,200 women and 4,000 children, without adequate shelter, sleeping out in the open for several consecutive nights on the streets, in fields and on beaches. Those affected include vulnerable people, very young children, pregnant women, older persons and people with disabilities.

The coronavirus pandemic is also adding to an already desperate situation. People who tested positive for COVID-19 the week before must be provided with immediate special care, isolation and treatment arrangements, as well as medical support. Basic sanitation and hygiene are essential conditions to create a minimum safe environment. UNHCR has advised all those previously staying in the RIC to restrict their movements until temporary solutions are found.

### UNHCR'S RESPONSE

UNHCR is supporting the Greek Government-led response by helping authorities identify immediate and long-term solutions, as well as mitigating COVID-19-related risks. UNHCR is offering concrete support to Greek authorities to help protect and assist asylum seekers affected by the fires, mobilizing resources and emergency aid, and providing technical expertise and advice.



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## Shelter and Material Assistance

UNHCR is delivering family tents and essential core relief items, such as blankets, sleeping bags and hygiene items, for all 11,500 people affected by the fire.

## Site planning and water, sanitation and hygiene

UNHCR has also offered to provide site set-up and support, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, such as chemical toilets and shower and water tanks. These are particularly crucial amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Protection of unaccompanied children and other vulnerable people

In cooperation with authorities and local partners, UNHCR led the tracing and relocation of all 406 unaccompanied and separated children to a UNICEF safe space before they were transferred to Thessaloniki,

northern Greece on 9 and 10 September by IOM.

UNHCR is also working to identify persons with specific needs, such as single women, people with medical conditions, people with disabilities, pregnant women, older persons and families. These groups will be prioritized for shelter and support.

## Communication with communities

In coordination with the authorities, UNHCR and its partners facilitated the dissemination of information to the refugee population on the ongoing situation and basic assistance available.

## Cash-based assistance

At the Government's request, and with support from the European Commission, UNHCR is providing, as of 11 September, an emergency, one-off cash top-up to some 4,470 households affected by the fire.

*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 Moria fire.*

## 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 has been persistently difficult in the Moria RIC in Lesvos. 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 [highlighted](#) 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, please refer to the [Factsheet](#).

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406

unaccompanied children have been relocated to a safe location