



GREECE UPDATE

MORIA FIRE EMERGENCY

9 October 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 has scaled up its support for all asylum-seekers affected and urges for comprehensive and humane solutions to address overcrowding on Greek islands.



12,000

asylum-seekers were left homeless overnight

some **7,800**

asylum-seekers are hosted in the new emergency site

BACKGROUND

After fires completely destroyed the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), the Greek authorities have been leading and coordinating the response to assist some 12,000 asylum-seekers who were left homeless overnight. An emergency site was set up within days in Kara Tepe, an area close to Mytilene, to temporarily shelter affected asylum-seekers and refugees. According to the authorities, by 8 October, some 7,800 asylum-seekers were hosted in the new emergency site while several hundred vulnerable asylum-seekers had been transferred to safe accommodations on the island or relocated to the mainland.

UNHCR is concerned that the emergency site is not apt yet for the upcoming winter, despite efforts by authorities, UN agencies and other actors. To avoid deterioration of living conditions, improvements are needed without delay in terms of shelter and drainage, hygiene and sanitation, health and other concrete measures for those with specific needs. The initial emergency

response should quickly give way to more sustainable interventions that can guarantee dignified living conditions for the nearly 8,000 residents.

Organized transfers to the mainland and alternative accommodations help ease the situation by reducing the population in the emergency site, which had reached some 10,000 residents at its peak. This week, some 950 recognised refugees and vulnerable asylum-seekers from Lesvos were transferred to accommodations on mainland Greece. Since the aftermath of the fires, some 2,300 people have been transferred out of Lesvos, including 231 to UNHCR ESTIA accommodation apartments on the mainland. UNHCR supported this effort with logistics, preparation arrangements and providing targeted information sessions along with IOM and EASO.

UNHCR continues to advocate for comprehensive solutions, calling for continuous European support and responsibility-sharing.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Site planning and shelter

UNHCR has supported the Government in setting up the emergency site as a temporary measure to provide immediate shelter and protection to asylum-seekers who were affected by the fires. 1,100 family tents – 900 of which were provided by UNHCR – four UNHCR Rubb Halls and eight IOM Rubb Halls are sheltering the site residents. UNHCR also has made available an additional 1,300 family tents and continues advocating for better shelter arrangements that take into consideration the needs of women, children and vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities.

At the request of the Government, UNHCR continues to support with targeted technical interventions in the site. Given its location near the seashore, the site is exposed to challenging weather conditions and safety hazards, compounded by the approaching winter season. As of 8 October, UNHCR had placed flooring under 216 tents, providing more stability and protection, and had delivered 1,600 m³ of gravel to help protect tents and common areas from rain and flooding. UNHCR also started delivering kits to insulate the family tents. UNHCR and other actors have highlighted to authorities that large-scale efforts are required to ensure proper drainage throughout the site ahead of winter.

During the night from 8 to 9 October, heavy rains have tested the installations and exacerbated the situation for residents in the emergency site. Some have seen their tents flooded. UNHCR conducted protection monitoring visits to assess the situation following the rainfalls and prioritised tarpaulins for people whose tents were affected. Site residents have resorted to interim solutions by digging water channels and trenches around tents to prevent flooding, in substitution of the proper drainage that is still lacking.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene capacity (WASH) is essential for a safe environment and critical to prevent the spread of COVID-19. UNHCR has installed 45 WASH facilities, including chemical toilets and handwashing stations, and 386 latrines have been installed by the Hellenic Army, IOM, and NGO partners. Despite these efforts, sanitation and hygiene facilities remain

largely inadequate for the population, and, in the absence of showers, families and young children resort to washing their clothes and themselves in the sea. Further, the area of the site accommodating single men is not equipped with sufficient latrines, resulting in regular toilet clogging. Running water is only available for a few hours during the day.

COVID-19 prevention and response

To prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, asylum-seekers have undergone rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the emergency facility. Based on health protocols, any person testing positive has been directed to one of the two designated isolation areas. UNHCR has provided and installed one Rubb Hall for COVID-19 testing. Works are ongoing to partition the Rubb Hall to help ensure patient privacy.

According to the authorities, as of 8 October, 19 people remained in quarantine in the emergency site, 15 of whom have tested positive for COVID-19. To help ensure a safe and effective isolation procedure, UNHCR is working on temporary fencing for the isolation area.

To support the existing COVID-19-related infrastructure in coordination with the authorities and WHO, UNHCR has transferred two intact containers from the triage area outside the Moria RIC to the emergency site, to be used by the national health agency. Medical organizations, including UNHCR partner Médecins du Monde, are working alongside the authorities to provide medical support in the site and alleviate pressure on the local public hospital.

Material Assistance

Electricity in the new emergency site is currently intermittent and not available at night, exacerbating safety concerns. UNHCR had facilitated the transportation and installation of six generators, but these lack the fuel to provide electricity 24/7. To address safety concerns as well as lighting and power needs, UNHCR has distributed over 3,000 solar lamps out of 6,000 available as of 7 October, prioritizing distribution in women-only areas of the site. These lamps also allow for the charging of mobile phones and other small devices.

As of 7 October, UNHCR had distributed over 33,000 core relief items, including blankets, mats, jerrycans and sleeping bags.



1,100 family tents (900 provided by UNHCR) were set up. Additional 1,300 family tents were made available by UNHCR

216 tents have flooring



Critical gaps remain in water, sanitation, hygiene and health services



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Protection of children and vulnerable people

UNHCR teams and partners continue their efforts to identify and assist vulnerable asylum-seekers to prioritize them for safer accommodation. 418 unaccompanied children had been evacuated from Lesbos by the authorities and the joint efforts of UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and partners as of 7 October. Single women and female-headed families have been allocated a dedicated tented area, but more measures are necessary to mitigate security risks. UNHCR and its partner Diotima are supporting the site management in the identification of at-risk women and their transfer to safe, informal shelters on the island. UNHCR also continues supporting national authorities and other actors in implementing gender-based violence prevention measures.

Since the re-establishment of the protection desk, UNHCR and its partner PRAKSIS have identified and offered support to over 100 children facing heightened risks. Medical and psychosocial services will need to be

strengthened to cater to the needs of all children in the site.

Coordination

UNHCR has been working closely with the authorities to strengthen their capacity in coordination, including through workshops and the development of tools that help identify gaps and duplications in the emergency response.

At the same time, UNHCR continues to co-chair the Interagency Consultation Forum which brings together UN agencies, NGOs and volunteer groups active on the island. UNHCR also chairs the protection working group, and co-chairs sub-working groups on basic assistance, sexual and gender-based violence, legal aid and child protection. In addition, UNHCR participates in thematic working group meetings on WASH and health, and supports authorities by facilitating regular site planning meetings at the emergency site.

UNHCR will continue its rapid response and welcomes much-needed support through flexible funding that would allow it to address the emerging 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 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 of 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 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](#) and the [UNHCR Briefing Note](#) of 9 October 2020.

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