

GREECE UPDATE

MORIA FIRE EMERGENCY

2 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.



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BACKGROUND

Further to the fires that completely destroyed 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 close to Mytilene, in the area of Kara Tepe, was set up within days to temporarily house affected asylum-seekers. According to the authorities, by 2 October, some 8,500 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.

Organised transfers of some 881 recognised refugees and vulnerable asylum-seekers from Lesvos to temporary accommodation on the mainland helped reduce the population in the emergency site, which had reached some 10,000 residents at its peak. UNHCR supported this effort by facilitating departure and

arrival at the port and providing targeted information sessions along with IOM and EASO.

UNHCR teams and partners are providing asylum-seekers with emergency shelter and core relief items, prioritizing vulnerable persons and people with specific needs. UNHCR continues advocating for comprehensive solutions, calling for continuous European support and responsibility-sharing.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Site planning and shelter

UNHCR has been supporting 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. As of 1 October, 1,100 family tents – 900 of which were provided by UNHCR – four UNHCR Rubb Halls and eight IOM Rubb Halls had been set up. UNHCR continues advocating for better shelter arrangements that take into consideration the needs of



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12

Rubb Halls (4 provided by UNHCR) were installed

women, children and vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities.

The Government has asked UNHCR to assist in making improvements to the emergency site, in particular to prepare for winter. Given its location near the seashore, the site is exposed to challenging weather conditions and safety hazards. With support from community representatives who helped facilitate the process and communicate with other site residents, UNHCR has placed flooring under 150 tents, providing stability and protection. As of 1 October, UNHCR had delivered 1,230 m³ of gravel to protect tents and common areas from rain and flooding and started delivering kits for insulation. UNHCR and other actors have highlighted to authorities that large-scale efforts are required to ensure proper drainage throughout the site ahead of winter.

UNHCR continues to advocate with authorities at the central and local levels for more durable post-emergency shelter solutions.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene capacity (WASH) are essential for a safe environment and critical to prevent the spread of COVID-19. UNHCR has installed 45 WASH facilities so far, including chemical toilets and handwashing stations, and a total of 386 latrines have been installed by the Hellenic Army, IOM, and NGO partners, as of 2 October. The Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency is offering technical expertise to establish clean water distribution and purification mechanisms. Despite these efforts, hygiene and sanitation facilities remain largely inadequate for the population. The lack of showers leaves asylum-seekers, including families and young children, with few options but to wash themselves in the sea. Meanwhile, UNHCR, UNICEF, IFRC and the IRC have worked on common hygiene-related messaging for site residents.

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.

According to the authorities, as of 1 October, 60 people remained in quarantine in the emergency site, 12 of whom have tested positive for COVID-19. To help ensure a safe and effective isolation procedure, UNHCR completed fencing works in the initial isolation area.

To support the existing COVID-19-related infrastructure in coordination with the authorities and WHO, UNHCR has transferred two containers from the triage area outside the Moria RIC 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. In support of efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, UNHCR made available 18,000 protective face masks for distribution, as of 30 September.

Material Assistance

Electricity is not yet available in all parts of the site, while extended electricity outages have been observed recently. To address safety concerns as well as lighting and power needs, UNHCR began distributing 6,000 portable solar lamps, prioritizing those staying in women-only areas. These lamps also allow for charging of mobile phones and other small devices. In addition, UNHCR has facilitated the transportation and installation of six power generators to provide electricity in the site for lighting and other uses.

As of 1 October, UNHCR had distributed over 30,000 core relief items, including blankets, mats, jerrycans and sleeping bags.

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. As of 1 October, a total of 418 unaccompanied children had been



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evacuated from Lesvos by the authorities and the joint efforts of UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and partners. 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 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.

In addition, UNHCR is working on-site with child protection actors, including partner PRAKSIS, to identify unaccompanied children on the island, refer them to authorities, and offer support as necessary.

Coordination

UNHCR has been actively supporting the authorities, at their request, with service mapping and inter-agency coordination. This includes adjusting existing coordination mechanisms to the emergency situation. UNHCR co-chairs with the authorities the Interagency Consultation Forum which brings together actors active on the island ranging from other UN agencies to NGOs and volunteer groups. UNHCR also chairs the protection working group, while co-chairing 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 water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as 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 Lesvos 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 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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