

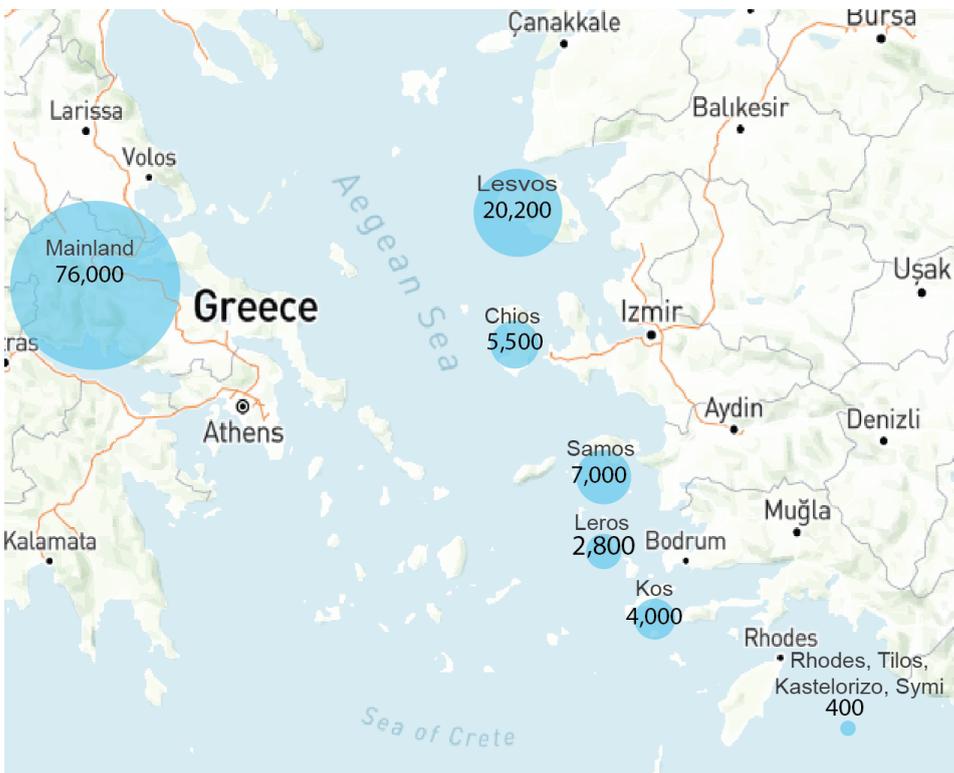


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GREECE - UNHCR RESPONSE TO COVID-19 AND OTHER ACUTE NEEDS

UNHCR is stepping up its preparedness in Greece to support Government's efforts to fight COVID-19 and address the most acute needs of refugees.

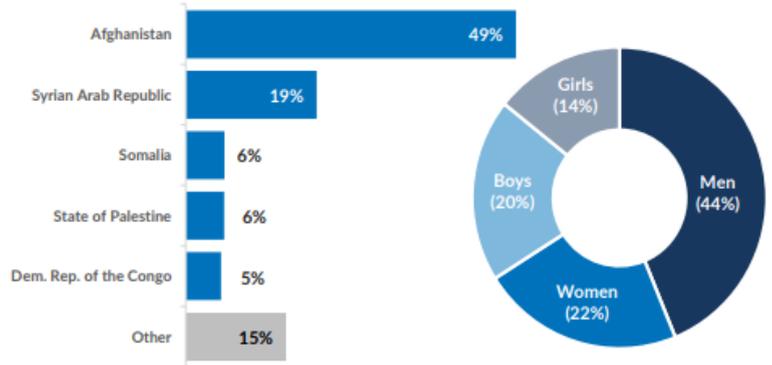
UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is scaling up its support in Greece to help the authorities mitigate the risk of COVID-19 spreading rapidly, especially to overcrowded reception centres where thousands of asylum-seekers – including elderly and vulnerable – are living in squalid conditions. To date, the country hosts over 115,000 refugees and migrants, of whom 40,000 are living on the islands, and are at high risk in case of an outbreak.



Refugee and asylum-seekers population in the islands as of 22 March 2020 (population figure on the mainland as of 29 February 2020).

In the Aegean islands, out of 40,000 refugees and migrants living there, about 35,000 individuals are hosted in five Reception and Identification Centres (RICs), which only have the capacity to host 5,400. Some of the RICs, and the informal extensions around them, host up to ten times the intended number of people, causing major protection, security and now health risks, especially for the most vulnerable individuals in the context of COVID-19 rapid spread. Greece's Government is leading the prevention and response to COVID-19 and UNHCR has been advocating for the full inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in the national health surveillance, preparedness, and response plans. UNHCR has also repeatedly warned of the need to urgently tackle overcrowding at the island reception centres and improve hygiene conditions and access to healthcare, which now, more than ever, represent a major risk.

UNHCR has continued all critical activities and services on the islands while fully adhering to Government-adopted COVID-19 prevention measures. The Greek Government has introduced timebound preventative measures which include the suspension of asylum services and the regulated movement of asylum-seekers in and out of the reception centres. Restrictions may have an impact on some of the planned rapid response actions but UNHCR is already supporting with core relief items, cash card top-ups, communication with and mobilisation of communities and establishing medical response facilities. In order to effectively combat any public health emergency, refugees and asylum-seekers are in need of support, especially in regard to sufficient prevention measures, and access to adequate health facilities and services.



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Refugees on the island of Lesbos

stock for 5,000 persons and provision of essential items to 10,000 persons recently arrived / arriving in the islands is urgent. Over 35,000 persons of concern currently reside in overcrowded RICs (of 5,400 capacity) and precarious shelter arrangements with poor sanitation inside and outside the RICs persist. Warehousing and dispatch of tents, blankets, sleeping bags, tarpaulins, hygiene items and baby care kits are crucially needed.

COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE



COVID-19 Prevention and hygiene support

Refugees are queuing for hours for basic services, such as food and hygiene items that are, in the context of COVID-19 spread, even more crucial. UNHCR is planning to procure and deliver hygiene and sanitation items to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 spreading. Kits will include hygiene and sanitation items – shampoo, soap, tooth paste and toothbrushes, jerry cans, and other personal items (sanitary napkins and baby care kits), as well as disinfectants to increase COVID-19 prevention amongst asylum-seekers and refugees on the islands. Additional cash top-up will also be considered in lieu of hygiene and sanitary items.



Provision of core relief items

Procurement of humanitarian material support such as provision of core relief items (CRIs) to maintain a contingency

WASH support for prevention of the COVID-19

Water, sanitation and hygiene interventions are critical to limit the spread of COVID-19. Additional funding is needed in order to implement key interventions that will primarily focus on repairing and replacing WASH facilities in RICs on the islands, providing chemical toilets for urgent needs pending the establishment of the new WASH containers, and installing functional handwashing and laundry stands. Additional maintenance and repairs will include the replacement of broken water tanks, fixing broken pipes, increasing the number of chemical toilets, as well as handwashing stands, and taps.



Communication with communities

Strengthening communications and making quality information available for refugee and displaced communities on hygiene measures is essential, by using available as well as ad hoc national and community mechanisms and adapting communication materials to suit local linguistic and cultural needs. To this end, interpreters with clear consideration of specific languages requirements are key to enable UNHCR discharge its mandate and support all ongoing activities on the islands, in particular to boost the communication with communities and messaging to persons of concern in relation to preventive measures related to COVID-19 (hygiene awareness sessions, fighting rumours and dissemination of official information).

Support medical response

Surveillance and preparedness activities include the establishment of screening, isolation and quarantine areas (e.g. rubble halls and prefabricated housing units for isolation purposes) in order to better monitor and isolate (when necessary) possible COVID-19 cases. Such measures are already planned, but additional resources will be required to step up this component to implement at the scale that will be adequate and responsive to expected increased needs.



OTHER CRITICAL ACTIVITIES

Legal aid and protection services

Legal aid on the islands remains a priority. Due to the multiple types of asylum procedures in place and in light of the recent announcement by the Greek authorities of the suspension of asylum claims, the provision of legal aid is becoming a crucial safeguard and an indispensable pre-condition for a fair and efficient asylum procedure. With additional funds, UNHCR will be able to prioritise vulnerable asylum-seekers and those in detention. In addition, most refugees who have arrived in Greece do not speak Greek, which represents an additional challenge for receiving adequate support. For UNHCR it is crucial to effectively safeguard their rights and undertake protection interventions.

Non-formal education / Child friendly spaces



Learning opportunities were already scarce on the islands RICs that house some 11,100 school-aged children of whom 1,600 are unaccompanied. Fewer than three per cent of school-aged children attend formal schools. With few official classes, UNHCR has been bridging the gap in the education of children on the islands through six non-formal education centres, as well as legal and psychosocial support to children at risk. In line with the Government's suspension of education activities in Greece as part of COVID-19 social distancing measures for schools, UNHCR is now supporting children's education with self-learning material (e.g. online platforms, homework packages) and by providing refugee households with essential items (e.g. solar lamps) to help children continue to learn. Education can have a positive impact on the fear, trauma and anxiety that these children and their parents have experienced and can empower and equip adolescents with life skills promoting resilience and relieving them from stress and frustration.

Financial information

Greece is part of UNHCR COVID-19 Emergency Appeal where USD 255 million are sought to globally boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address the immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities prompted by the spread of COVID-19. The amount presented in the appeal does not represent the magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a fast-moving situation and UNHCR is looking further at reprioritizing certain activities in operations. The full amount of UNHCR's operational engagement will be updated as required, including for Greece.

The best way to support UNHCR's appeal is through softly earmarked contributions supporting the global COVID-19 prevention and response efforts. Such flexible funding will be key in allowing a timely emergency response to the evolving needs wherever required. It will allow UNHCR flexibility to allocate funds across regions and operations according to priority needs.

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