

This report is an update to initial reporting on the situation on Lesvos (see: Snapshot: Displacement in Lesvos 22/09/2020) and provides greater detail regarding the risk of COVID-19 in camps.

### Fires in Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC)

Between 8 and 10 September, fires broke out in three different spots in the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), Lesvos, resulting in the displacement of more than 12,000 inhabitants, most of whom went to the new Kara Tepe camp – a temporary overflow facility roughly five kilometres away (IFRC 16/09/2020). The fire also destroyed a COVID-19 medical facility and interrupted all medical services for the refugees (MSF 09/09/2020).

NGOs have repeatedly raised concerns about the potential for fires in overcrowded camps after a six-year-old girl was killed in Moria and after 200 people were displaced in Samos when part of the camp burned down (Migration Policy Institute 25/09/2020; InfoMigrants 27/04/2020). Police operations have forced people to move to the Kara Tepe camp. Although no use of force has been reported, refugees have resisted the move, fearing inhuman conditions, and the required confinement within the new camp.



### COVID-19 in camps

In March, during the early days of the pandemic, ACAPS produced a visual analysis, anticipating how the spread of COVID-19 could affect a refugee camp, based on what was known about prevention and the spread of the virus at the time, and a comparison of initial outbreak locations. It demonstrated how population density, coupled with poor access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, could result in a higher than average rate of transmission of the virus, which would have grave humanitarian consequences.

Camps in Greece, and in particular on the island of Lesvos, have an even higher level of congestion than the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, and similarly poor WASH access.

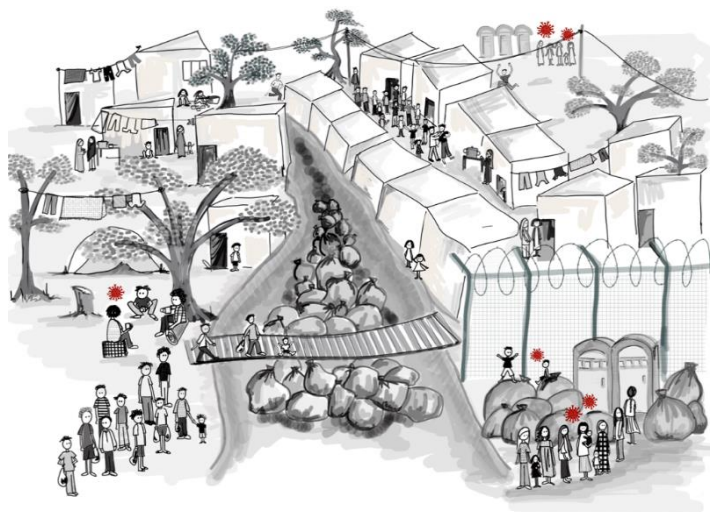
### The situation in Moria RIC prior to the fires

Greece has been a long-standing refugee recipient country, hosting migrants and refugees fleeing their home countries to escape conflict and political and economic instability. In recent years, between 2014 and 2019, approximately 1.25 million refugees transited Greece via land and sea, and 1,948 died in the attempt. As at 27 September, 12,824 people had been registered as arriving in 2020, coming mostly from Afghanistan (38%), Syria (24%), and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (11%) (UNHCR accessed on 05/10/2020). According to UNHCR, 4,337 refugees have arrived in Lesvos since the beginning of 2020 (UNHCR accessed on 05/10/2020), adding up to a total of 121,400 refugees in Greece by the end of August (UNHCR 31/08/2020).

The Moria RIC hosted the majority of the refugees in Lesvos. The exact population of the camp has never been clear, but the majority of agencies working in the camps reported a minimum of 12,000–13,000, including 4,000 children and 408 unaccompanied minors. Some agencies have suggested as many as 20,000 people may have lived in the camp, hosted in a facility originally designed for approximately 2,000–3,000 people (IRC 13/03/2020, UNHCR 07/02/2020, MSF 26/01/202, IFRC 12/09/2020).

**Overcrowding** was a persistent and major concern in Moria, with a population exceeding its capacity by four times. There were many reports of extremely **dire living conditions** for years. Human Rights Watch highlighted poor hygiene conditions and uncontrolled sewage spills (HRW 21/11/2018). According to MSF, IFRC, IRC Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and Oxfam, the population in Moria lived **inhumanly and under alarmingly poor sanitary conditions**, without access to clean running water, medical treatment or security (MSF 3/09/2020, IFRC 12/09/2020, GCR & Oxfam 02/2020). IRC further warned of major protection concerns, including frequent fights and high levels of gender-based and sexual violence (IRC 25/09/2018, IRC 09/2018). Local doctors visiting the camp warned that the dire situation could result in disease outbreaks and a major public health crisis (The Guardian 11/03/2020).

Moria had the potential for extremely high transmission rates of COVID-19. The camp covered an estimated 0.09 km<sup>2</sup> (IRC 1/04/2020). Assuming a population of 12,000, this would mean a population density of 133,000 per km<sup>2</sup>. Refugees living in overcrowded conditions lacked access to clean water, sanitation, and adequate healthcare (HRW 7/04/2020) – and queuing for food or latrines will have made social distancing impossible. In some areas of the camp, one water tap was shared by 1,300 people (IRC 1/04/2020). Only a few medical teams were providing healthcare for COVID-19 and mass testing was not available. MSF identified more than 200 individuals within the population at serious risk of COVID-19 due to their age and underlying health conditions. Despite this, on 17 March, the Greek government enforced what MSF called an unnecessary and “cruel” mass quarantine of the entire camp, thereby risking a further deterioration of its population’s mental health (MSF 03/09/2020). Even as lockdowns eased across Greece, Moria lockdowns were extended continually and remained in place as of late September (Migration Policy Institute 25/09/2020). The night of 8 September, fires broke out destroying Moria.

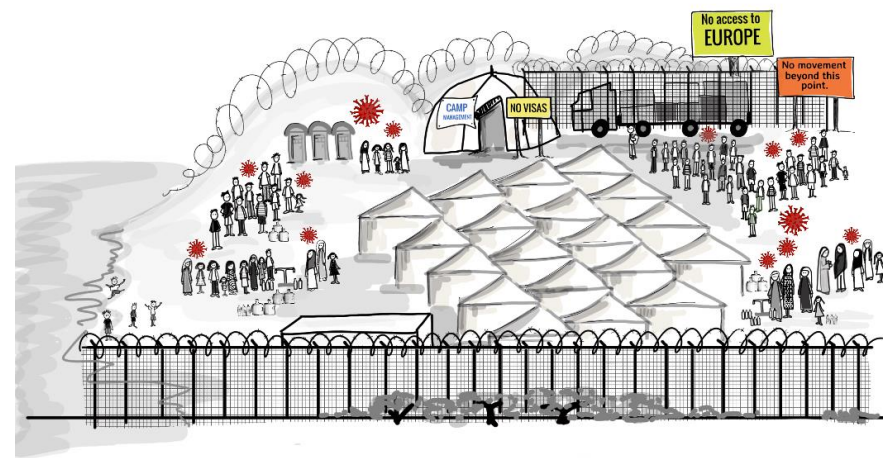


## The situation in the new Kara Tepe camp

Built for approximately 8,000 people, by 30 September Kara Tepe camp was hosting 9,370 refugees (IFRC 30/09/2020). It presents many dangers and has been referred to as “worse than Moria” by its residents, local NGOs, as well as MSF (ECRE 02/10/2020, InfoMigrants 28/09/2020). A toxicology expert says that the camp, built on a former military site, could present high risk of lead pollution due to lead particles in the air and ground, which can cause brain and kidney damage (Al Jazeera 2/10/2020).

The camp lacks stable electricity, sanitary facilities, sufficient food delivery, and space for social distancing (ECRE 25/09/2020). The location of the new camp and its proximity to the sea exposes it to harsh weather conditions (UNHCR 18/09/2020). Reports from inside the camp indicate that heavy rains have created unsanitary conditions in many areas, particularly where tents have inadequate drainage or flooring. Flash floods are likely to increase during the winter (ABR 09/10/2020).

According to UNHCR, refugees can only enter the new camp after undergoing a rapid COVID-19 test (UNHCR 18/09/2020). However, sources from IFRC Greece state that only people who have symptoms or have been in close contact with people confirmed positive for COVID-19 are tested before entering the camp. Considering the high rate of asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 recorded across the world, actual testing coverage will be a significant determinant of camp authorities’ ability to identify, isolate and trace cases. As at 25 September, 245 residents of the camp had tested positive for COVID-19 (IFRC 30/09/2020). If testing is not extensive, the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak remains high, particularly given the critical water and sanitation conditions in this camp. WASH capacity remains inadequate to meet the needs of all the refugees in the camp, which currently only has 45 WASH facilities installed, including chemical toilets and handwashing stations, and a total of 386 latrines (UNHCR 2/10/2020). Refugees who test positive for COVID-19 are transferred to an area enclosed by barbed wire (France 24 3/10/2020).



## Refugee containment

On 18 March 2016 an agreement was made between European states and the Turkish government (the "EU-Turkey deal"), which aims to control the crossing of refugees and migrants from Turkey to the Greek Islands (EC 18/03/2016). The desired outcome of the deal was to discourage people from making the dangerous journey from Turkey to Greece. In return, Turkey would receive aid and political concessions (BBC 20/03/2019). According to the deal, new arrivals must stay on the islands pending return to Turkey unless they successfully apply for asylum in Greece. Only those deemed vulnerable can be transferred to the mainland (Euronews 26/01/2020).

A new Pact on Migration and Asylum was issued on 23 September 2020 (EU 23/09/2020). According to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Greece's Minister of Citizen Protection stated, on 15 September, that no migrant or refugee was allowed to leave Lesvos without obtaining legal documents at Kara Tepe camp (ECRE 18/09/2020). A recent Greek law imposes rigid criteria and mandates official registration for NGOs dealing with refugee and asylum requests. The new measures require small and grassroots organisations to provide certificates to the Greek government, hindering their attempts to assist migrants (InfoMigrants 18/06/2020).

More than 82,000 migrants attempted to enter the EU using the eastern Mediterranean route in 2019, compared with 55,900 in 2018 (Euronews 26/01/2020). According to MSF, the containment of these migrants is resulting in thousands of men, women and children being trapped in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, and has failed to create alternative options for those who are forced to flee (MSF 18/03/2019). These strict conditions have also pushed many migrants to self-harm and suicide (Joint Agency BN 17/03/2017; IRC 6/03/2019) and are also likely to increase their exposure to COVID-19.



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ACAPS produced a visual analysis in the early days of the pandemic (available here). The graphic below is an updated comparison of population density and favourable conditions for spread of the virus.

