

Greece

Asylum Seekers and Migrants



	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Need for international assistance			X		
Expected impact	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Major
			X		

This is an assessment of the population of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Greece.

Key Findings

Anticipated scope and scale

- 100,000 people have arrived on the islands of Greece since the beginning of 2015, 130% more than arrived in all 2014. The Government expects 200,000 by the end of 2015.
- Most basic services are insufficient to cover the needs of the host population and the influx of displaced people.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- **Shelter and WASH:** new accommodation with access to basic services.
- **Food assistance and NFIs to new arrivals.**
- **Protection:** the needs of vulnerable people and unaccompanied children must be addressed.
- **Healthcare** is needed in detention centres and for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers.

Aggravating factors

The influx of people is adding to the strain on the host population, already suffering from the consequences of economic crisis.

Crisis Overview

During the first six months of 2015, the islands of Greece overtaking Italy as the primary point of arrival, and already surpassing the numbers for whole of 2014. In January 2015, there has been a 145% increase in asylum seekers and migrants crossing the Mediterranean from Turkey to Greece compare to January 2014 (MSF, 09/04/2015). During the first six months of 2015, more than 158,000 people crossed the Mediterranean Sea. As of 24 July, 100,000 people have arrived on Greek islands since the beginning of 2015, 130% more than arrived in all 2014 (AFP, 12/07/2015; UNHCR, 24/07/2015). More than 1,000 people have been arriving every day since the beginning of June, as opposed to 200 in May (UNHCR, 01/07/2015). More migrants and asylum seekers are expected in the coming months as the peak season usually lasts from July to September (MSF, 09/04/2015). According to a government official, more than 200,000 migrants are expected to arrive by the end of the year (IRIN, 30/06/2015).

For the past decade, Greece has been an important first country of arrival in Europe for migrants and asylum seekers, although until 2015, the rise in Mediterranean Sea arrivals was felt primarily in Italy. In 2014, Italy received more than three-quarters of all maritime refugees and migrants (170,000), while Greece received less than one-fifth of the total (43,500 people) (UNHCR, 01/07/2015).

Due to the economic crises, Greece has been unable to meet the needs of migrants and asylum seekers reaching its shores, worsening their humanitarian situation (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015). On 30 May, the mayor of Mytilene, on Lesbos island, warned of the critical situation of asylum seekers and migrants on the islands and requested support from the Government (local media, 30/05/2015).

Limitations

There is almost no information on the food security and nutrition situation of asylum seekers and migrants arriving in Greece, or of access to education for the children among this population.

As a lot of asylum seekers or migrants are undocumented, most data covers those who are in detention; little is known about the situation of migrants living outside detention centres.

Displacement

More than 85% of people arriving in Greece are from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. Almost 40,000 Syrians (60% of the asylum seekers and migrants in 2015) arrived in Greece in the first six months of 2015, mostly on Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros islands (UNHCR, 01/07/2015). Most have arrived through Mytilene, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Evros (Médecins du Monde, 04/2015).

Syrian asylum-seekers in Greece: 60% of Syrians declared having previously spent time in Turkey and two-thirds said they had received no assistance in Turkey. The majority left Turkey because of unemployment and a lack of financial assistance (UNHCR, 01/07/2015). In April 2015, around 500,000 Syrian asylum seekers and migrants who were in Turkey aimed to cross over to Greece, according to local media (Local media, 02/07/2015).

Detention centres: Around 6,000 migrants and asylum seekers are currently being detained in Greece (The Guardian, 01/04/2015).

Asylum seekers and migrants stranded at the borders: During the first week of July, the number of migrants and refugees stranded around Idomeni at the border between Greece and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia increased tenfold, to reach 2,000 people (MSF, 07/07/2015).

Administration of Asylum Seekers and Migrants

New arrivals to the islands usually spend a few days in detention to determine their immigration status, after which they are issued with papers and released. Syrians with valid documents are given six-month residency papers. Other asylum seekers or migrants are provided with administrative expulsion notices with one month to leave the country. The majority of migrants and asylum seekers move on their own to the mainland and head to Athens (IRIN, 19/05/2015). The large majority of asylum seekers and migrants do not wish to remain in Greece and try to cross the Balkans to western and northern Europe (UNHCR, 01/07/2015).

Previous displacement: For the past decade, Greece has been an important first country of arrival in Europe for migrants and asylum seekers. In 2010, 90% of all arrests for unauthorized entry into the European Union took place in Greece, compared to 75% in 2009 and 50% in 2008 (Migration Policy Institute, 08/03/2012). In 2008, the official number of foreigners living in Greece was 800,000. Another 200,000 undocumented migrants were estimated to be living in the country (MSF, 2009). Since 2013, migration routes have been shifting to Italy and Greece and both have been faced with a significant increase in arrivals of people (Eliamep, 10/2014).

Shelter and NFIs

No infrastructure or services to address the needs of new arrivals have been built, as the scale of arrivals is quite a recent phenomenon. For the past six years, Greece has had housing capacity for only 1,100 refugees (International media, 31/07/2015). There are serious systemic gaps (UNHCR, 01/07/2015). Island communities are under incredible strain (UNHCR, 01/07/2015).

In detention centres, new arrivals are frequently forced to sleep in the wet clothes they arrived in, as they do not receive a change of clothes (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015). Most detention centres are overcrowded. The conditions in detention centres are such that in 2011, during a court case between Belgium and Greece, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Belgium, which had, as per the Dublin protocols, returned a migrant to Greece, where he had first sought asylum. The degrading living conditions to which he had been subjected in Greece caused the court to overrule the statute. Since then European countries cannot send back migrants or asylum seekers to Greece (Politico, 03/07/2015).

On **Lesvos**, people often have to be kept in an open area at the port until space becomes available at a detention centre (IRIN, 19/05/2015). In the detention centre, asylum seekers and migrants are forced to sleep in a building which is three times over capacity (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015). In **Moria**, a screening centre is currently housing over 1,000 asylum seekers and migrants: its official capacity is 410 people. In **Kara Tepe**, an education facility is being used as temporary accommodation for around 1,000 refugees (UNHCR, 09/06/2015).

On **Kos**, there is no reception facility. Police have taken asylum seekers and migrants to an abandoned hotel with makeshift beds, limited running water, and no electricity. Others sleep in tents provided by international organisations, or on the streets (Human Rights Watch, 28/05/2015).

On **Samos**, the immigration detention centre has a reported capacity of 280 people, but was holding up to 600 refugees in June (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015). Sanitation and living conditions are below minimum standards (UNHCR, 16/06/2015).

On **Chios**, detention centre's capacity of 208 people was exceeded by more than 300 people (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015).

In **Athens**, hundreds of refugees from Afghanistan and Syria have set up temporary camps in Areos park (Reuters, 25/07/2015).

WASH

The majority of Syrian asylum seekers and migrants waiting to be registered declared they were treated well in Greece but conditions were very difficult. Almost 20% did not have regular access to sanitation and 70% did not regularly receive hygiene items. 30% had no mattress to sleep on, and more than half had no access to a shower or blankets (UNHCR, 01/07/2015).

On **Leros**, there have been reports of skin infections among migrants due to poor hygiene conditions (local media, 21/06/2015).

Detention centres: Chronic overcrowding and lack of hygiene facilities and materials mean overflowing toilets, soiled mattresses, shortages of bedding and clothing, power cuts and a lack of hot water (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015). According to MSF, in **Komotini** detention camp in the northeaster mainland, human excrement was leaking through pipes (The Guardian, 01/04/2015).

In **Athens**, there are two chemical toilets in the park for the migrants, who wash with water from a garden hose (Reuters, 25/07/2015).

Food Security and Livelihoods

On **Lesvos**, food rations are not enough for all the new arrivals (MSF, 20/07/2015).

On **Kos**, no food is being provided to new arrivals sent to an old hotel building (IRIN, 19/05/2015).

Poverty rates rose by 35 percentage points for children in migrant households in 2012, compared with 15 percentage points for all other children (UNICEF, 09/2014).

Protection

Migrants and asylum seekers face protection challenges on their journey to Greece. They are at the mercy of smugglers and criminal gangs (UNHCR, 01/07/2015). Reports of attacks on migrants were particularly common around Lesbos in the east Aegean (AFP, 31/07/2015). In addition, Amnesty International documented some cases of Greek coastguards pushing asylum seekers and migrants' boats away from Greek territory.

The majority of the refugees and migrants interviewed by Amnesty International said that they had experienced or witnessed physical violence and intimidation by the Greek police officers and coastguards (Amnesty International, 04/2014).

The Racist Violence Recording Network reported 46 physical attacks in public places against immigrants in Greece in the first nine months of 2014. This is more than half of the total number of racists attacks reported during the same period, and likely to be well below the actual number (UNHCR, 07/05/2015).

Vulnerable Groups

Asylum seekers and migrants with specific needs, such as unaccompanied children, older people, pregnant women, people with disabilities, and victims of torture, may not be receiving appropriate care (UNHCR, 16/06/2015). Disabled and elderly people have been reported abandoned on islands by smugglers, without any food or water (local media, 26/06/2015).

Child Protection

A lack of screening procedures in Greece has resulted in a failure to identify members of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied children. In 2014, 1,097 unaccompanied children officially arrived on the islands and Evros – 216 arrived between 1 January and 3 June 2015. The actual numbers are likely to be much higher. Shelter facilities for children are overcrowded, therefore most unaccompanied children are in immigration detention facilities for an extended period of time, around 37 days in average (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015). No central authority has been established to deal with their needs. Despite some improvements since 2013, protection measures remain inadequate and in urgent need of reform (UNHCR, 01/07/2015; UNHCR, 07/2013).

Health

Officially, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers are not entitled to access public health services, except for emergencies (Médecins du Monde, 04/2015). In practice, in some islands, migrants and asylum seekers are referred to local health centres for testing and hospitalisations (MSF).

Detention centres: The majority of new arrivals have limited or no access to medical or humanitarian support and are often forced to stay in overcrowded detention centres or open camps (Amnesty International, 25/06/2015). MSF warned that the practice of holding migrants and asylum seekers on a large scale creates a breeding ground for disease (The Guardian, 01/04/2015). In 2013–14, MSF's medical data shows that the most common medical conditions included respiratory, gastrointestinal, dermatological, and musculoskeletal diseases, as well as anxiety, depression, and extreme acts such as self-harm, and suicide attempts. Recurrent scabies outbreaks observed in many detention facilities were directly linked to poor sanitary conditions. In addition, detainees with communicable outbreaks were detained in conditions harmful to their health for

long periods of time, and no measures were taken to protect other detainees from possible disease transmission (MSF, 01/04/2015).

Asylum seekers and migrants stranded at the borders: No basic facilities exist at the western borders. The majority of medical problems among people there are respiratory tract infections, skin infections, muscle pains, and gastro-intestinal diseases, which can be linked to living conditions. Many suffer from serious blisters and muscle pain from having to walk for more than 70km from the city of Thessaloniki, as they are refused access to public and private transportation to the border areas. In addition, there have been several accidents where people have died trying to cross the border (MSF, 07/07/2015).

Vaccinations: A large number of children lack proper vaccination coverage, and the majority are from legal migrant families who face administrative or language barriers accessing public health services, according to Doctors of the World. In addition, the cost of medical consultations and vaccines cannot be covered by thousands of migrant and Greek families in Greece (Médecins du Monde, 04/2015).

Host Populations

The economic crisis has severely hit Greek families, and the need for assistance among nationals continues to grow.

Poverty

23.1% of the total population lives below the poverty line, meaning 2.5 million people live in a household with an income below 60% of the national median income (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2014). More than 210,000 Greeks have requested to be part of the Greek government's Humanitarian Crisis Relief Program as of mid-May 2015. The majority of households seek food assistance, while some seek financial support to pay rent or for electricity (local media, 18/05/2015). 27.3% of the total population live in overcrowded households and almost 30% state that they are unable to keep their home adequately warm (Médecins du Monde, 18/05/2015).

Unemployment

Unemployment stood at 26.6% in the first quarter of 2015 (Government, 05/2015). For every available job in Greece, there are 19 unemployed people, according to the European Commission (International Orthodox Christian Charities, 10/02/2015). Many unemployed have exhausted their benefits: just 15% of people who have registered as unemployed are now eligible to receive government assistance. In December 2014, unemployment benefits were limited to 12 months, after which there was no minimum income guarantee (Médecins du Monde, 18/05/2015).

Health

The financial crisis led to an almost 40% cut in the country's health budget. As a consequence, the Greek National School of Public Health reported a 21% increase in stillbirths between 2008 and 2011, which was attributed to reduced access to prenatal services, and a 43% increase of infant mortality between 2008 and 2010 (The Lancet, 20/02/2014). There is limited availability of medicines, not only for vulnerable groups, but also for the general population (MSF, 12/2013). Crisis and austerity policies have left almost one-third of the population without healthcare coverage. According to the annual programme evaluation of Médecins du Monde in 2015, 30.7% of patients seen in Greece were nationals. The percentage of people reporting unmet medical care needs has increased since the beginning of the crisis, rising from around 5.4% of the population in 2008 to 9% in 2013 (Médecins du Monde, 18/05/2015).

Children

Since 2008, the percentage of households with children that are unable to afford meat, chicken, or fish every second day has more than doubled in Greece, reaching 18% in 2012, the equivalent of 300,000 children (UNICEF, 09/2014). One in four children in Greece live in poverty (International Orthodox Christian Charities, 10/02/2015; Médecins du Monde, 18/05/2015).

Humanitarian Environment

Humanitarian Access

Greek legislation bans buses, taxis and other drivers from transporting undocumented migrants or asylum seekers in their vehicles (The Independent, 20/06/2015). There have been reports of local volunteers in Lesbos being threatened with arrest by police for helping asylum seekers or migrants (UNHCR, 16/06/2015).

Presence of International or National Actors in the Country

The police, coast guard, and local authorities (regional and municipal) on the islands have allocated additional resources, but the response continues to fall short of needs (UNHCR, 16/06/2015). Most islands are facing a critical financial situation and lack of funding hampers the creation or renovation of reception centres for refugees, as well as respect of procedures.

UNHCR has representations on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Rhodes and Kos (The Guardian, 22/04/2015). UNHCR has been present on Lesbos and other Greek islands since 2011 (UNHCR, 09/06/2015).

IOM Greece provides newly rescued migrants and asylum seekers with immediate humanitarian assistance (IOM, 26/06/2015).

MSF has been providing medical and humanitarian assistance to migrants and asylum seekers held in detention since 2008 (MSF, 04/2014). Caritas, Doctors of the World, and the Hellenic Red Cross are also providing healthcare or legal support in the mainland and some islands.

Coordination

In 2015, a migration minister was appointed for the first time. He promised to respect international treaties and improve conditions by setting up reception centres (The Guardian, 22/04/2015). He has also proposed shutting down detention centres (Aljazeera, 05/03/2015).

In Kos, there is no authority taking responsibility for the management of the ad hoc refugee camp to ensure the safety of asylum seekers and migrants (MSF, 18/06/2015).

Contextual Information

Dublin II

Dublin II regulations state that only one EU member state is responsible for examining an asylum application. The objective, according to the law, is “to avoid asylum seekers being sent from one country to another.” This means that once an asylum seeker has sought asylum in Greece he or she cannot seek it elsewhere, but must remain in the country until the process is completed, and status either granted or denied (European Union Law).

Map of Detention, Reception, and Screening Sites



Source: Welcome to Europe, 07/2015