



KEY FIGURES

322,500

Refugees and migrants arrived to Europe by sea so far in 2015

2,750

Refugees and migrants estimated to have died / gone missing at sea in 2015.

115,500

Sea arrivals in Italy as of 31 August.

204,954

Sea arrivals in Greece as of 28 August.

53,571

Registered/arrivals in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from 19 June to 1 September.

104,915

Registered/arrivals in Serbia as of 31 August.

PRIORITIES

- Boost post-rescue reception capacity in receiving countries through support for States, civil society and local communities.
- Strengthen protection systems and prevent *refoulement* including through presence and capacity building.
- Increase strategic messaging and advocacy to and about people of concern.

EUROPE'S REFUGEE EMERGENCY - UPDATE #1 ON THE SITUATION IN GREECE, THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA AND SERBIA

30 June – 1 September 2015

322,500 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe across the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, including approximately 115,500 in Italy (UNHCR figure as of 31 August), 204,954 in Greece (UNHCR figure as of 28 August), 94 in Malta (official figure as of 31 August) and 1,953 in Spain (official figure as of 31 July). The top nationalities are Syrians (49%), Afghans (12%), Eritreans (9%), Nigerians (4%) and Somalis (3%), data as of 28 August for Greece, as of 4 August for Italy, as of 31 August for Malta and as 31 July for Spain.

The increasing number of refugees and migrants (up to 3,000 a day) arriving on the Greek Islands and moving onwards to western and northern European countries through the Western Balkans and Hungary has placed severe pressure on the reception capacities and asylum systems of **Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia**, with thousands of people camping rough without shelter, sanitation, food and water. Governments have struggled to meet the needs of the upsurge over recent days and volunteers from local communities and NGOs have combined efforts to alleviate the conditions.

As a result, UNHCR declared a level 2 emergency for these three countries on 30 June 2015. UNHCR has supported local authorities, NGOs and civil society to manage the situation at the borders, in reception areas, and to improve and accelerate the registration procedures.

This first edition update covers key developments since the declaration of the emergency up to 1 September. The update will be published on a bi-monthly basis.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In Greece, the reception infrastructure, services and registration procedures are falling dramatically short of needs. At all main entry points, there is a lack of adequate reception conditions resulting in serious hygiene, health and protection risks. The limited capacity to respond creates a tense and dramatic situation.
- The Ministry of the Interior of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is enhancing its registration system in order to manage this increasingly challenging situation. The electronic procedure is more efficient and protection sensitive. The reception conditions have also been improving. However, with the ever growing number of people arriving from Greece, these improvements remain insufficient and additional measures are needed.
- The Government of Serbia has worked to improve the reception facilities and has established three new refugee information and first-aid points at the green border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the way to the One-Stop Centre in Preševo; near Kanjiža at the border with Hungary; and in the centre of Belgrade, together with UNHCR and partners, to provide information and assistance to refugees. However, in light of the increasing number of arrivals, further efforts are needed.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Operational Context

Greece

The increasing backlog in registration and the lack of availability of ferry tickets leads to major congestion on most of the islands, particularly on Lesbos, Kos, Chios, Samos and Leros. The numbers of average daily arrivals almost doubled from 1,600 in July to 2,900 in August (Lesbos: 1,500 arrivals per day; Kos: 500; other islands: 1,000). Over the last days of August, at least 12,000 refugees and migrants have been present on the island of Kos. Demonstrations sometimes amounting to clashes between the police and refugees and migrants occur on a regular basis, particularly on Kos and Lesbos. The deployment of special ferry services has led to temporary reductions of refugees and migrants present on some islands. The majority of arrivals are Syrians (69%), Afghans (18%) and Iraqis (4%) and most do not wish to stay and apply for asylum in Greece and move onwards. So far, only 7,469 persons have applied for asylum in Greece in 2015 (as of end of July). The reception capacity on the Islands and in Athens remains highly inadequate given the increasing number of arrivals. Discussions are on-going between the European Union, EASO, Frontex and Greece, on the implementation of the hotspot approach, which envisages provision of support to facilitate identification, access to the asylum procedure and relocation.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia

In both countries, refugees, including an increasing number of families with small children, arrive traumatized, exhausted and in need of food, water, medical services and basic reception facilities. Since early June 2015, the numbers of arrivals have increased dramatically to reach 2,500-3,000 people per day.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the asylum law was amended on 18 June and people can now indicate their intention to apply for asylum at the border and benefit from a document authorizing them to travel legally to Skopje and have their asylum claims registered within 72 hours, reducing the risk of exposure to attack by criminal gangs or to traffic accidents. From 19 June to 1 September, 53,571 people have registered their intention to seek asylum in the country.

In Serbia, 37,195 people expressed intention to seek asylum in August alone (as of 31 August), totaling 104,915 applications so far in 2015. It is estimated these figures constitute approximately half of the total number of people transiting through these countries.

Due to the increasing number of arrivals, the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia closed its border with Greece on 19 August. 6,000 – 7,000 individuals were stranded on the Greek side until the border was reopened on 22 August, when the authorities started admitting smaller groups of people at a time.

Both Governments have requested international support, in particular in the area of reception, asylum and migration management. Additional support is urgently required, including through joint efforts with the EU, national authorities and civil society.

Achievements

Protection

Greece

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR currently has 20 protection/field staff positioned at key arrival and exit points, including on Lesbos, Kos, Samos, Chios, Leros, Rhodes and the land border region (Idomeni, at the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Protection teams are monitoring arrival processes and are meeting newcomers in order to provide information on procedures, rights, responsibilities, and assistance. The teams also support local authorities in the profiling of the population in order to improve identification of specific needs.

- UNHCR increased the capacity of the interpretation service provided by METAction. 19 interpreters are now based on the islands, covering Arabic and Farsi/Dari. Their presence has facilitated communication and understanding between the law enforcement authorities and the refugees. An additional pool of interpreters for various languages is available in Athens and these can be deployed on mission on a needs-basis.
- On Lesbos, to address the exposure of those on the move to accidents, exhaustion and other risks, UNHCR has advocated to change the law so the transportation of undocumented people, under certain circumstances, is no longer criminalized.
- With the assistance of its partner METAction, UNHCR has supported the transfer of unaccompanied children from arrival points to specialized facilities on the mainland.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The reception infrastructure, services and registration procedures are falling dramatically short of real needs. There are long waiting times for registration on the Islands as the number of trained police officers dedicated to registration is not sufficient.
- Given these precarious procedures, it has been challenging to adequately inform arrivals of their duties and responsibilities once in Greece, the different procedures and messages as well as to counter information provided by the smugglers.
- The changing registration procedures, inadequate reception conditions, and disorderly distribution of insufficient assistance compounded by limited crowd management capacity continue to cause tensions amongst refugee groups and between refugees and law enforcement authorities.
- There is a need to set up systems to identify, refer and follow-up on people with specific needs. In addition, safety and security around reception centres and informal settlements should be strengthened to prevent violence, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) incidents.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Achievements and Impact

- The Ministry of the Interior, in collaboration with UNHCR, is developing measures to enhance the registration process. The presence of 12 new data entry clerks from the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), and financed by UNHCR, as well as the new software supported these efforts.
- UNHCR has worked with the local Red Cross to reunite families separated when crossing the border.
- UNHCR's information desk in Gevgelija provides information on registration and protection. Video messages for refugees from refugees are currently being produced to use social media for outreach and information campaigns. Materials containing relevant information on different issues of interest have been produced by WHO, IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR, the Red Cross and MYLA.
- UNHCR and its partners offer free legal assistance in Gevgelija. MYLA also assists asylum-seekers at the Vizbegovo Reception Center with their asylum procedure. These activities are funded by UNHCR.
- UNICEF is planning to support the NGO Open Gate La Strada to set up a team of pedagogues who will cater for the needs of children transiting through the train station in Gevgelija. UNHCR is financing a team of outreach workers to provide psychosocial first aid.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- While the registration procedure has improved, additional measures are needed to ensure that the specific needs of people are identified and addressed, including through appropriate referral channels.
- UNHCR will be working with partners to strengthen the existing legal protection monitoring system using innovative approaches and mobile technology.
- Community outreach activities to raise awareness on the plight of refugees and to prevent tensions between the local communities and refugees are planned.

Serbia

Achievements and Impact

- In order to speed up registration and the provision of humanitarian and medical assistance to refugees with specific needs, the Government, with UNHCR support, has established a processing centre in the southern border

municipality of Preševo, which became operational on 8 July. Together with the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) and Border Police at the One-Stop Centre in Preševo (hereinafter: the Preševo Centre), UNHCR is identifying and prioritizing people with specific needs by referring them to fast-track registration procedures.

- UNHCR's partner, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, distributes information brochures, offers legal assistance to people with specific needs and accompanies them through the asylum procedures in Belgrade.
- Following the joint initiative of the municipality of Belgrade, UNHCR and its partners, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and the BCHR, an Asylum Info Centre was set up in Belgrade on 24 August to provide information, various forms of counseling, referrals and assistance to refugees.
- UNHCR, together with the Government and other partners, has reunited several children with their families, who have been separated in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- UNHCR has provided training on profiling to its partners in the village of Miratovac, at the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Partners are now identifying people with specific needs and distributing food and water to families along their journey to Preševo.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Systematic identification and referral of cases with specific needs require further improvement.
- There is a lack of adequate interpretation in Arabic, Farsi and Urdu particularly for authorities.

Humanitarian Assistance and Technical Support

Greece

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR has supported a limited number of individuals with specific needs with one-time assistance, such as coverage of exceptional accommodation and food in case of need.
- UNHCR has also provided buses to the coast guards to transport new arrivals to registration points on the Islands.
- UNHCR has rendered daily expert advice to the Greek authorities on the construction of the Eleonas/Votanikos site in Athens. The new site, which opened on 20 August, has a total capacity of 700 people and contains 66 prefabricated houses. In addition, the setting up of tents in the unofficial sites of Cara Tepe and Moria on Lesbos has been improved in line with UNHCR's recommendations.
- During the days when the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was closed, UNHCR and its partners delivered food, water, sanitary items as well as plastic sheeting and blankets to those stranded on the Greek side of the border. Volunteers also distributed food, water and clothing.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- There is a lack of basic reception conditions (shelter, water, food, sanitation) with serious hygiene, health and fire risks at all main entry points. Although continued efforts are being made to identify additional viable reception facilities and areas, they have so far not yielded results.
- Additional sanitary facilities are urgently needed, particularly toilets and a more effective waste management strategy.
- All actors' combined stocks of relief items currently fall short of the needs of new arrivals.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Achievements and Impact

- During the weekend of 22 – 23 August, UNHCR worked closely with the Red Cross to distribute food, water and blankets to arrivals stranded at the border.
- UNHCR and partners are pursuing their efforts to improve the health and hygiene conditions in Gevgelija and Tabanovce. The installation of additional toilets and showers, funded by UNHCR, has been completed.
- UNHCR is funding four mobile teams of the Red Cross, which are providing medical assistance and first aid in Gevgelija and Tabanovce.

- UNHCR's partners, the NGOs Nun, Legis and Help the Migrants with the support of individuals are providing daily food packages and other items to the refugees. With the support of UNICEF, the Red Cross is distributing age-specific food for babies in Gevgelija.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The existing water, sanitation, hygiene facilities remain insufficient. Hygiene promotion activities and a health awareness campaign are being envisaged in Gevgelija and Tabanovce.
- The World Health Organization (WHO), in cooperation with the Ministry of Health will support the training of medical teams and Red Cross volunteers in the hospitals in Gevgelija and Kumanovo. This training is planned in mid-September.

Serbia

Achievements and Impact

- As part of its contingency planning for the winter, the SCRM is currently working to increase the capacity of the Preševo Centre, which will be able to host 350 people following the completion of the work.
- UNHCR and its partners have stepped up the distribution of water and food in various locations across the country. UNHCR covered the cost of food assistance for refugees at the Preševo Centre, which was distributed by the Red Cross (RC).
- The Government, with the help of UNHCR and partners, established three new refugee information and first aid points (RAPs). These are located at the green border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the way to the One-Stop Centre in Preševo, near Kanjiža at the border with Hungary, and in the centre of Belgrade. The authorities and NGOs, including UNHCR's partners, provide humanitarian, medical aid, identification and referral for those with specific needs.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Sanitary conditions remain a concern at the Preševo Centre. The situation at the old brick factory site in Subotica is also deteriorating due to the lack of basic sanitary facilities.
- The Health Centre in Preševo is faced with the lack of medical professionals and emergency vehicles for the transportation of refugees.
- The recent worsening of the weather conditions (drop in temperatures and the start of torrential rains), is leading to further difficulties for the refugees.
- UNHCR will increase its assistance by delivering blankets, high energy biscuits and bottled water and four containers at the RAP in Kanjiža and at the Miratovac RAP to improve the conditions at the site.

Working in partnership

- UNHCR has continued its close cooperation with the Commission and relevant EU Agencies (including Frontex and EASO) to jointly assess the needs on the ground and seek complementarity in the support provided through the respective operational plans.
- UNHCR's emergency assistance and protection services in Greece are delivered through several partners, including the Greek NGO METAction, which provides interpretation services and facilitates escorts of unaccompanied children from arrival points to specialized facilities on the mainland. The partnership with the Ecumenical Refugee Program of the Church of Greece is now including family reunification cases under the Dublin procedure and increased support for integration of recognized refugees. In addition, UNHCR supports the Government's coordination efforts by facilitating an information sharing forum at the Athens level.
- In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the refugee response activities are headed by the Crisis Management Team since the declaration of a crisis situation in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Partners working with the Ministries and municipalities are the following: Help the Migrants in Macedonia, HERA, IOM, La Strada Open Gate, Legis, MYLA, Nun, Red Cross, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and WHO. The Crisis Management Group will be responsible to head the emergency response for 30 days after which a decision will be taken by the Government whether or not to extend its term.

- In Serbia, UNHCR acts as an observer to the Government's Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Mixed Migration Flows, and is in regular coordination with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations. UNHCR partners include the above mentioned ministries, municipal authorities, the UN Country Team, Amity, ADRA, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), CRS, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the Humanitarian Centre for Integration, MSF and Tolerance (HCIT), Indigo, INTERSOS, Microfins, Praxis, Sigma Plus and Vizija.
- Of particular note is the impressive role which civil society and volunteers in the countries concerned are playing in supporting and assisting refugees and migrants.

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Links:

UNHCR, [Mediterranean Sea crossings exceed 300,000, including 200,000 to Greece](#), 28 August.

UNHCR, [Treat refugees humanely, work together, says UNHCR, as thousands continue heading into the Western Balkans from Greece](#), 25 August.

UNHCR, [UNHCR assists refugees at Greece-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia border, reiterates readiness to help affected governments](#), 24 August.