



**HIGHLIGHTS**

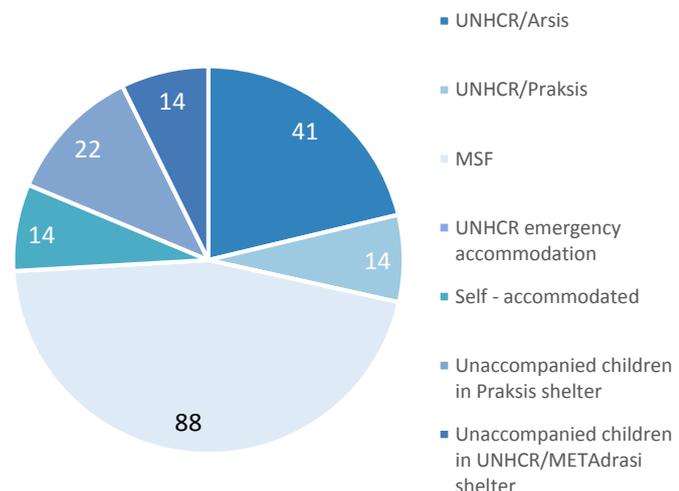
<p><b>1,379</b></p> <p>Refugees and migrants accommodated in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre (as of 31 January)</p>	<p><b>232</b></p> <p>Refugees and migrants arrived on Samos Island</p>	<p><b>99</b></p> <p>Persons with specific needs accommodated by UNHCR/partners outside Vathy Reception and Identification Centre</p>	<p><b>3,671</b></p> <p>Core Relief Items distributed by UNHCR/partners during January such as rubber mats, blankets, hygiene kits, etc.</p>	<p><b>600</b></p> <p>Hot teas provided on a daily basis by UNHCR/partners in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre</p>
<p><b>735</b></p> <p>Beds available in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre</p>	<p><b>297</b></p> <p>Asylum seekers transferred to UNHCR's accommodation scheme and sites on the mainland</p>	<p><b>14</b></p> <p>Unaccompanied children accommodated by UNHCR/METAdrasi</p>	<p><b>1,393</b></p> <p>Thermal blankets distributed by UNHCR/partners</p>	<p><b>16</b></p> <p>Staff working at UNHCR Field Office Samos</p>

**OPERATIONAL CONTEXT**

During January 232 refugees and migrants arrived on Samos Island, compared to 67 in December 2016. Arrival figures remain still significantly lower in comparison to the same month last year, when 4,087 persons arrived on Samos. However, due to the border closure with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement since March 2016, refugees and migrants currently stay weeks or months instead of a few days on the Island. As of 31 January, there are an estimated **1,379** refugees and migrants present on Samos. 28% of these persons are from the Syrian Arab Republic, 13% from Afghanistan and 15% from Iraq. The majority of these persons have applied for asylum and are awaiting further steps in their asylum procedure. **18% of the refugee and migrant population in Vathy RIC are children.** Overcrowding and poor reception conditions are the primary reasons to the existence of a range of protection risks to which refugees and migrants, including women and children are exposed.

Upon arrival on Samos Island, refugees and migrants are apprehended by the Greek authorities after which they are registered and accommodated in Vathy Reception and Identification Centre (RIC). This facility with a capacity of 735 beds is managed by the Greek Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and hosts around 1,379 persons (as of 31 January). UNHCR and its partners provide support to the Greek authorities in improving reception conditions in the RIC. Additionally, we offer temporary accommodation in small-scale apartment facilities to a limited number of persons with specific needs. Samos is the only Island in the Northern Aegean where besides the RIC there are no other sites accommodating refugees and migrants available.

**Persons accommodated outside Vathy RIC**  
**Total: 193**



In January, **UNHCR referred 200 vulnerable asylum seekers to UNHCR’s accommodation scheme on mainland Greece.** This includes elderly, pregnant women, lactating mothers, medical cases, persons with disabilities and victims of torture or Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). In addition, **UNHCR supported the referrals carried out by Greek authorities of 97 asylum seekers to sites on the mainland.** As per this State-led mechanism, the Greek authorities identify available sites on the mainland for a selected group of asylum seekers who have the required documentation to travel to the mainland. UNHCR assists with the identification of eligible asylum seekers, provides transportation and information. Since October 2016, UNHCR supported the transfer of around 770 persons to mainland Greece, with the majority being vulnerable asylum seekers.

## RESPONSE

### Protection

- **First line reception upon arrival.** UNHCR, together with partners and other organizations, continued to provide immediate response upon arrival to refugees and migrants on Samos.
- **Provision of information.** UNHCR continued to conduct group and individual information sessions on asylum and administrative treatment in Greece as well as on family reunification.
- **Support to people with specific needs.** UNHCR facilitated access for around 510 persons to specialized services, prioritization for registration and asylum procedures, and dignified accommodation to vulnerable new arrivals, including to elderly, pregnant women, lactating mothers, single-headed families, medical cases, persons with disabilities and survivors of torture or Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).
- **Accommodation of vulnerable asylum seekers.** 99 vulnerable asylum seekers have been accommodated by UNHCR’s partners Arsis and Praksis in accommodation, providing also food, transportation and social services.
- **Referrals of vulnerable asylum seekers to the mainland.** UNHCR referred 200 vulnerable asylum seekers to UNHCR’s accommodation scheme on the mainland during the month of January.
- **Support to Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC).** UNHCR and its partner Save the Children continued to closely monitor the conditions and administrative treatment of around 50 unaccompanied children (including at least 7 of them with pending decisions from the Public Prosecutor regarding the appointment of a caregiver as their guardian) and around 200 accompanied children who are present in the RIC. UNHCR mobilized partners and authorities to speed up referrals to UAC shelters, provide specialized services and appropriate administrative treatment. UNHCR’s partner METAdrasi hosted 13 boys and 1 girl in their shelter for unaccompanied children.
- **Protection and site management induction seminar for RIS staff.** UNHCR and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) facilitated a protection and site management induction seminar for around 60 staff of RIS, its implementing partners (MedIn, IOM, METAdrasi) and OAED (Greek unemployment agency), working in Vathy RIC.
- **Training to new Asylum Service staff.** UNHCR asylum experts facilitated a training on decision drafting, interview techniques and evidence assessment, for 15 new caseworkers of the Greek Asylum Service on Samos.

### Shelter, Basic Assistance, Core Relief Items, Water and Sanitation

- **Installation of rubb hall.** Upon request by the Greek authorities, UNHCR and its partner Samaritan’s Purse installed an insulated rubb hall including flooring, in the upper levels of Vathy RIC, providing accommodation for over 100 persons in bunk beds. 10 chemical toilets were installed as a temporary WASH solution until the installation of toilet and shower containers by UNHCR/Samaritan’s Purse. UNHCR/Samaritan’s Purse are also proceeding with the installation of lighting, heating and compartmentalisation for the rubb hall.
- **Installation of IRC LifeShelters.** UNHCR/Samaritan’s Purse undertook levelling and flooring works to support the deployment of 21 IRC LifeShelters which will replace some of the 29 Luxembourg tents, facilitated by the Hellenic Army.
- **Winterization of medical area.** UNHCR/Samaritan’s Purse winterized the outdoors medical area, where refugees and migrants queue for medical assistance, by installing electric heaters and insulation materials.



UNHCR rubb hall in Vathy RIC offers accommodation for over 100 persons in bunk beds. ©UNHCR/D.Anagnostou

- **Hot water bottles.** With around 600 persons residing in unheated accommodation in Vathy RIC, UNHCR/Samaritan’s Purse and Samos Volunteers distributed 350 hot water bottles. A daily hot water refilling station is operated by Samos Volunteers.
- **Tea station.** UNHCR and partners continue to operate a tea station in Vathy RIC, serving an average of 600 teas per day, to help persons to stay warm amidst very cold weather conditions.
- **Distribution of winter items.** UNHCR and partners continued to provide winter items to the population in Vathy RIC in several mass distributions. In January, 1,393 blankets, 164 sleeping mats and 144 sleeping bags and 1,416 pieces of thermal women’s clothing, were distributed to help combat the dropping temperatures.
- **Core Relief Items.** UNHCR Samos, directly and through partners, distributed a total of 3,671 Core Relief Items during January.
- **WASH maintenance and repairs.** UNHCR/Samaritan’s Purse continued to monitor the status and maintenance of all WASH facilities in the Vathy RIC, including of 72 showers, 101 toilets and 122 water taps.
- **Hygiene promotion campaign.** UNHCR/Samaritan’s along with Samos Volunteers carried out a large scale hygiene information campaign and distributed 54 cleaning kits to every container and dormitory, leading to some improvements in the hygiene conditions in the RIC.

UNHCR Core Relief Items	# distributed in January
Water bottles	71
Sleeping bags	144
Thermal Blankets	1,393
Sleeping mats	164
Rain ponchos	6
Plastic Tarps	2
Hot water bottles	350
Hygiene kits	125
Thermal leggings	708
Turtle Necks	708



Visit to the Samos Public Institute of Vocational training. ©UNHCR/D.Anagnostou

### Health and Nutrition

- **Transportation services to Vathy Public Hospital.** UNHCR continued to provide transportation services for persons with specific needs from the RIC to the Public Hospital, as well as interpretation support, through our partner METAdrasi, leading to significant improvement in access to public health services for refugees and migrants. Around 526 persons benefited from this service during January.
- **Infant and Young Child Feeding activities.** UNHCR/Save the Children continued operating a Mother Baby Area in Vathy RIC, for use by children under 2 years old and their mothers. This is providing a safe space for breastfeeding and preparation of infant formula, as well as counselling on appropriate complementary feeding. Additionally, counselling is provided to pregnant mothers and mothers who have recently given birth, on maternal health during and after pregnancy and infant and young child feeding.

### Community Based Protection, Recreational Activities and Peaceful Coexistence Activities

- **Visit to Samos Public Institute of Vocational Training.** UNHCR attended a journalism class of the Samos Public Institute of Vocational Training and presented UNHCR’s role and activities on the island. The journalism students demonstrated significant interest on issues related to international protection.
- **Child friendly activities.** UNHCR/Save the Children continued to carry out recreational and education activities in collaboration with Samos Volunteers, in their new child friendly area in a building close to the RIC.
- **Pottery workshops.** UNHCR together with Save the Children and local artist Timos Chatzilagos continued to organize pottery workshops for around 30 UASCS currently residing in Vathy RIC. The children had the opportunity to paint and decorate their own creations.



Creations from the pottery workshops by unaccompanied children. ©UNHCR/D.Koletis

## GAPS, CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

- Severe winter conditions with temperatures below zero, torrential rainfall and storms, are posing significant risks to persons who continue to live in tents and other unheated accommodation in Vathy RIC, including families with young children and vulnerable persons. Due to significant efforts by UNHCR in referrals to the mainland, **the number of persons in unheated accommodation dropped from around 800 in early January, to 600 persons at the end of the month.** Due to dropping temperatures, refugees and migrants are trying by all means to heat themselves inside tents and dormitories, forming fire and other hazards amidst the overcrowded situation.
- Despite an increase in accommodation capacity through the installation of the UNHCR rubble hall and IRC LifeShelters, **serious overcrowding continues to exacerbate living conditions in Vathy RIC**, where over 1,370 persons are hosted in a facility with a capacity of 735 beds. **Overcrowding continues to lead to a deteriorating protection environment in Vathy RIC**, including particularly poor security and WASH conditions as well as difficulties in accessing medical services and electricity. There is limited availability of hot water. Characteristically, experience from Samos and other sites shows that overcrowding and unorganised accommodation structures increase the risk of SGBV.
- Amidst this critical situation, UNHCR launched a nationwide public tender for hotel accommodation for vulnerable asylum seekers, which was widely publicized to further promote the appeal to hospitality owners. **UNHCR continues to meet strong reluctance by local actors to avail accommodation space in hotels or empty public buildings on Samos.** Besides our appeal to all responsible authorities to act swiftly to ensure adequate accommodation for refugees and migrants, UNHCR strongly believes that all efforts should be made to reduce the pressure from the overcrowding on Samos, including through **full registration and transfers of more asylum-seekers to the mainland.** The limited number of persons with the required documentation to travel in a regular fashion to the mainland is hampering these efforts.
- Extremely unhygienic conditions are observed in the RIC.** Facilities are generally overused due to the RIC hosting almost twice its capacity, resulting in very dirty, broken or otherwise unusable facilities.
- Asylum seekers, including persons applying for family reunification in Europe, are increasingly frustrated because of the **length of the asylum procedures.** Asylum seekers of certain nationalities have been awaiting the processing of their claims for up to nine months, particularly affecting Iraqis, Afghans and Palestinians, whose claims have only started to be examined as of January. UNHCR continues to support the Asylum Service in providing updated information on asylum procedures.
- UNHCR is concerned about the **high number of around 50 UAC residing in Vathy RIC**, with limited protection mechanisms in place. Whilst spaces remain available in accommodation facilities for UAC on Samos and on the mainland, referral mechanisms to the shelters led by the Greek authorities remain inefficient. Amidst delays in the referrals to shelters, UNHCR has observed an increasing number of UAC gone missing from the RIC and leaving or attempting to leave the island irregularly. UNHCR and its partners continue to advocate with the Greek authorities to speed up referrals of UAC and monitor their situation as well as the conditions of around **200 accompanied children residing in the RIC.**



Yasamin, Battal and little Tawfiq just benefited from the mass distribution of winter clothing in Vathy RIC. ©UNHCR/D. Anagnostou

## WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- UNHCR Samos Field Office provides protection and assistance activities directly and through **6 implementing partners** (international and national NGOs) including: Samaritan’s Purse, Save the Children, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), METAdrasi, Praksis and Arsis.

Sector of Intervention	National NGOs	International NGOs
Protection	METAdrasi, Praksis, Arsis	ICMC
Child Protection	METAdrasi	Save the Children
NFI/Shelter		Samaritan’s Purse
WASH		Samaritan’s Purse

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**Links:** [UNHCR Data Portal](#) - [Refugee Stories](#) - [Facebook](#) – [Twitter](#)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

