

GREECE HIGHLIGHTS

TRACING MECHANISM HELPS IDENTIFY CHILDREN IN DANGER

24/7 helpline to the rescue of unaccompanied children



An Afghan unaccompanied child in Lesbos, waiting for his relocation in September 2019.

Vulnerable asylum-seekers, including children who are alone in Greece, have needs that require tailored support so as to ensure they are effectively protected. Significant gaps remain in the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece, which continue to affect negatively particularly those most vulnerable. A positive development this month was the establishment of a helpline to find emergency housing for unaccompanied children who are homeless or live in dangerous conditions.

Lone children are extremely vulnerable and often face insecurity and neglect. As of 6 April, [a tracing mechanism](#) is activated to quickly identify children who are on their own in Greece and homeless or

living in precarious conditions, and transfer them to safe shelters in the country.

The mechanism was launched jointly by the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and UNHCR. The initiative was also in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Arsis, METAdrasi and the Network for Children's Rights. The mechanism is co-funded by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund of the European Union.

The tracing mechanism includes a 24/7 helpline available in six languages. The helpline –

operated by UNHCR experts deployed at the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Children – provides step-by-step guidance to children, citizens, local and public authorities on what to do when an unaccompanied child is found and until they are given emergency accommodation. In its first month of operation, the helpline assisted over 80 unaccompanied boys and girls who were living in insecure conditions. Children are in need of special protection against the multiple dangers they face along their journey, among them violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking and exploitation

Under this new initiative, children are also provided with material and psychosocial support, interpretation, safe accompaniment when outside the accommodation, including representation during registration procedures with authorities and educational activities through mobile units, day centres and information desks established in Athens and Thessaloniki. Unaccompanied children in emergency accommodation receive specialized support until they are transferred to longer-term accommodation, after an assessment of their needs, their background and the options available in Greece.

Following the increased arrivals of 2015 in Greece, hundreds of unaccompanied children arrived in the country. They lacked appropriate support, housing, and guidance. With overloaded asylum reception structures, children often ended up in unsuitable conditions in police stations or detention centres for long periods of time.

The launch of the tracing mechanism comes after a series of positive developments for the protection of unaccompanied children in Greece. Almost all of them have been evacuated from reception and identification centres where conditions were dire. UNHCR estimates that as of 15 April, only 112 remained in reception centres. The practice of holding unaccompanied children in detention facilities for ‘protective custody’ – which lasted for nearly 20 years and affected over 100 children each month since 2017 – was abolished in December 2020. The practice had led to judgments against Greece by the European Court of Human Rights and had been widely

condemned by rights groups. The relocation of unaccompanied children to other European countries continues but additional places are needed to support Greece. As of 28 April, 761 unaccompanied children have been relocated from Greece to Germany, France, Finland, Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland, Bulgaria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Lithuania ([IOM data](#)).



3,623 unaccompanied boys and girls in Greece

2,498 unaccompanied children in temporary or long-term shelters

Most children are from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria
([EKKA data](#))

Who is classed as an unaccompanied child?

Unaccompanied children have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. They are sometimes called Unaccompanied Minors, based on the legal definition of majority in a national context. Authorities in Europe seek to reunify such children with family through the Dublin III procedures.

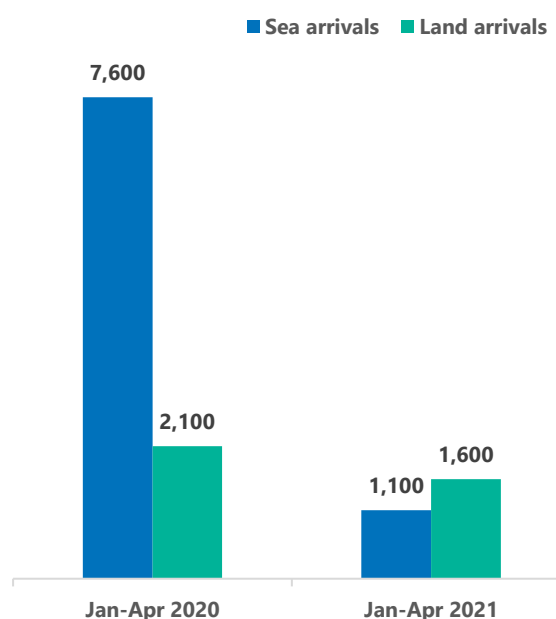
What more can be done?

Adequate care and services that put the children at the heart of protection, while being geared towards making self-reliance possible are key. This can mean relocation to a third country in Europe, but alternatives could also include inclusion and integration with appropriate support within the national child protection system in Greece, or reunification with family elsewhere.

IN BRIEF

- The recorded arrivals of asylum-seekers to Greece remain considerably lower than previous years. Arrivals by land are slightly higher than those by sea.
- 13,100 asylum-seekers and refugees live on the Greek Aegean islands. Conditions remain difficult on Chios and Samos where there is not enough suitable shelter for all despite the reduction of the population. Most of existing lodgings are not equipped for the summer heat.
- The 2020 report of the Racist Violence Recording Network was a reminder that the COVID-19 pandemic put on hold social life, but not racist violence.
- The Ombudsman presented its investigation on alleged incidents of informal returns from Greece to Turkey between 2017 and 2020.
- UNHCR continues to be concerned over pushback reports from land and sea borders and is engaging with various authorities on this issue. The local Public Prosecutor on Samos and other competent authorities were notified by a legal aid provider about an incident that occurred on the island on 21 April asking for a formal investigation.
- The European Parliament highlighted the mental health challenges of those staying in reception facilities on the Greek Aegean islands.
- On Lesbos island, April saw the closure of Kara Tepe, a camp that had accommodated vulnerable asylum-seekers since 2016 when it was established by the Municipality of Lesbos with the support of UNHCR and the European Union.

Total arrivals to Greece 2020/2021



Source: Hellenic Police. Figures are subject to future adjustment and should not be considered final.

Kara Tepe: end of a journey

A camp for vulnerable asylum-seeking and refugee families in Lesvos closes

Appropriate housing can ease the situation of vulnerable people, such as one-parent families, individuals with disabilities and others by offering them good conditions and targeted support. Kara Tepe – which was created in 2015 to receive the unprecedented number of refugees arriving at the shores of Lesvos – was one such example. The camp was run with the cooperation of national and local authorities, UNHCR, NGOs and volunteers with co-funding by the European Union. Over the years, Kara Tepe became home to thousands of vulnerable asylum-seekers offering dignified accommodation and a vast range of activities and services aimed to enhance the protection of its residents. Only in the last 2.5 years, over 4,700 people found protection shelter in Kara Tepe.

The Government announced that Kara Tepe would close in April 2021 following the request of the Municipality of Mytilene who wished to recover the land for other purposes.

In the months leading up to the closure, UNHCR worked with the authorities to identify a tailored solution for each of Kara Tepe’s residents. UNHCR assessed the needs of every family and

recommended the most suitable option for their accommodation elsewhere.

The departure of recognized refugees from Lesvos to Germany as part of the Europe-wide relocation scheme was one of these solutions. By the end of April, 855 recognized refugees had left the island to continue their lives in Germany. Amongst them were 272 Kara Tepe residents. In addition, a total of 543 people from Kara Tepe were temporarily moved to nearby Mavrovouni reception and identification centre and 60 to ESTIA apartments in mainland Greece until their asylum procedures complete or are transferred to the mainland.

UNHCR also transferred 54 accommodation containers to Mavrovouni to house former Kara Tepe residents or provide improved accommodation to other vulnerable families in the temporary RIC. This helps with housing and privacy needs until authorities, with EU support, complete the new reception and identification centre on the island.

The site was emptied on 29 April. You can read more about Kara Tepe [here](#).



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4,760 people found shelter and protection since 2019



83 % were women or families



261 accommodation units

30 organizations operated in 2020

Pandemic deepens racist violence

107 racist violence incidents recorded by the Racist Violence Recording Network

More incidents of racist violence against asylum-seekers and refugees were recorded in 2020 than in previous years. In its yearly report for 2020, the [Racist Violence Recording Network \(RVRN\)](#) documented, through interviews with victims, 107 cases of racist violence.

In 74 incidents the targets were migrants, refugees, or asylum-seekers due to their ethnic origin, religion or colour, human rights defenders due to their association with refugees and migrants, as well as shelters or other services for unaccompanied children or asylum-seekers.

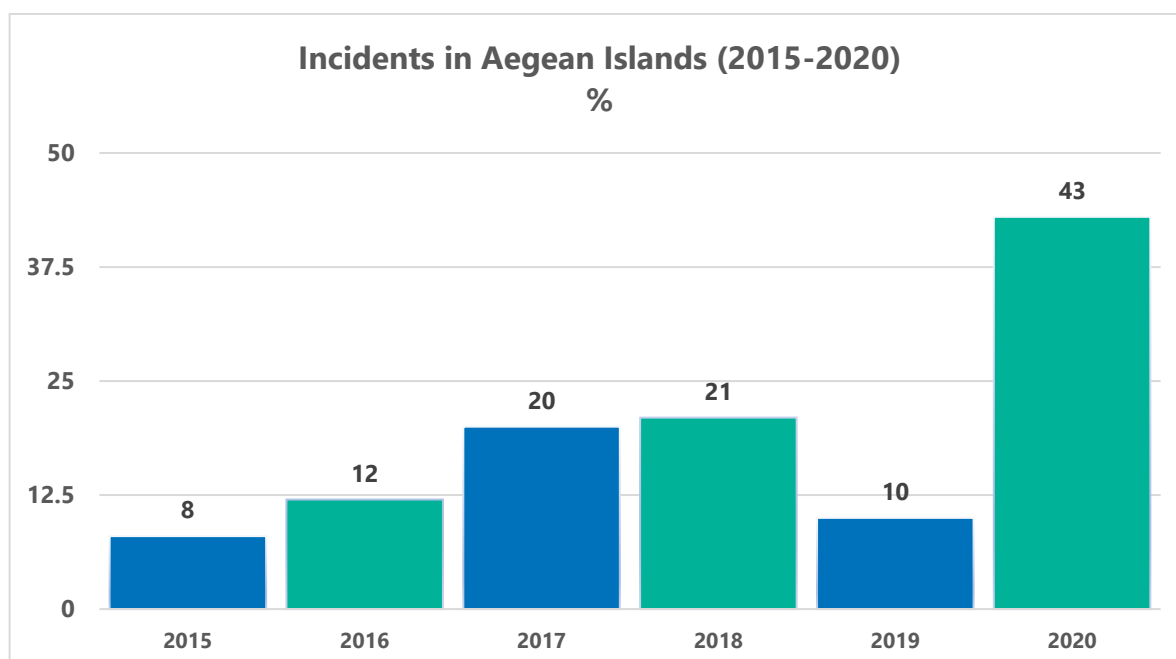
43% of the reported incidents took place on the Greek Aegean islands – many more than in previous years.

In 30 incidents, the victims were LGBTQI+ individuals, four of whom were asylum-seekers or recognized refugees.

RVRN found that the pandemic and the consequent restriction measures of individual freedoms have shaped a new context in which the aspects of racism have taken a new dimension. Refugees and asylum-seekers are perceived not only as a threat to national sovereignty but also to public health. In contrast to this perception, COVID-19 has not disproportionately affected asylum-seekers and refugees. The report also noted that discrimination against specific target groups in terms of their access to services, intensifies.

What is RVRN?

RVRN is coordinated by UNHCR and the National Commission for Human Rights and is comprised of 51 NGOs and civil society actors as well as the Greek Ombudsman and the Migrant Integration Council of the Municipality of Athens, as observers. RVRN was created in 2011 to systematically document incidents of racist violence.



Ombudsman report on pushbacks to Turkey

UNHCR welcomes Greece's indication of an independent monitoring mechanism

This month the [interim report](#) was issued of the Greek Ombudsman's investigation regarding alleged pushbacks of third country nationals from Greece to Turkey near Evros river. The report provides an overview of the inquiry from the summer of 2017 through the end of 2020, presents key information about the reported incidents and makes recommendations.

The report concludes that the large number of pushback reports by international and national organizations has raised concerns about the extent to which human rights are respected and protected in Greece. According to the Ombudsman's investigation, the Greek authorities' response has not effectively addressed these concerns yet.

UNHCR continues to be concerned over pushback reports from land and sea borders and is engaging with various authorities on this issue. The local Public Prosecutor on Samos and other competent authorities were notified by a legal aid provider about an incident that occurred on the island on 21 April asking for a formal investigation.

UNHCR welcomes Greece's recent indication that an independent monitoring mechanism will be established and has offered its expertise for its design. This would help ensure access to asylum, prevent rights violations at the borders between Greece and Turkey, and guarantee accountability.

Good mental health holds the key to integration

UNHCR works with the State and refugee communities to boost mental health



A young refugee sitting in front of a makeshift shelter in Lesvos, September 2020.

Confinement as a result of movement restriction due to COVID-19 can exacerbate vulnerable refugees' already burdened mental health. This is particularly true when asylum-seekers and refugees have limited options but to shelter-in-place under difficult living conditions. Poor mental health may compromise their efforts to find and maintain employment, to create social support networks and finally, to rebuild their lives.

The mental health and care for vulnerable asylum applicants in Greek reception facilities was

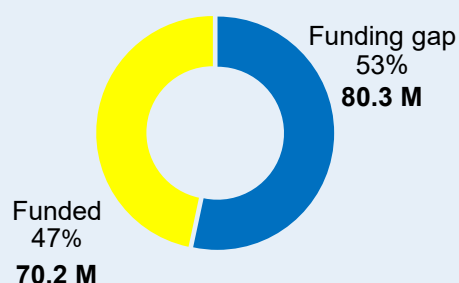
highlighted during the meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs on 19 April. European Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas underlined progress made in improving mental health care services on the Greek islands noting the need for long-lasting solutions.

UNHCR supports the Greek State with expertise and helps to reinforce health structures, which are currently overstretched, particularly on the Greek Aegean islands. There, UNHCR has assisted the authorities in the establishment of quarantine and isolation areas for COVID-19 cases, lifting the pressure off the local medical facilities. In addition, UNHCR works with partners towards refugee skills building and training, to provide essential psychosocial support and to empower vulnerable refugees, including those with mental health conditions. Such initiatives can help asylum-seekers and refugees feel empowered, regain control of their life and eventually promote their self-reliance.

UNHCR is grateful to donors who provide generous and timely support that enables a flexible and swift response to the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece

Funding information 20 April 2021

USD 150.5 M



Major donors of unearmarked contributions to the 2021 global programmes

Norway 80 million | **Sweden** 66.9 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **Germany** 26 million | **Private donors Spain** 21.5 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Ireland** 12.5 million | **Belgium** 11.9 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 10.8 million

Donors who contributed to support UNHCR's activities in Greece in 2021

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CONTACT US

Eleni Biza

Associate Reporting Officer
External Relations Unit

Tel.: +30 69 555 855 67

Email: biza@unhcr.org

Elena Marda

Government Liaison Associate
External Relations Unit

Tel.: +30 69 518 012 42

Email: marda@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.org