



# NORTHERN AND WESTERN GREECE

## FACTSHEET

February 2017

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### HIGHLIGHTS

**6,182**

UNHCR accommodation places established for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers by the end of February

**160**

UNHCR accommodation places established for unaccompanied children by the end of February

**5,798**

Asylum-seekers benefited from UNHCR's transportation to Regional Asylum Offices, Embassies, and medical facilities in February

**9,151**

Non-food items including clothes, footwear and blankets were distributed by UNHCR as part of the winterization plans in February

**1,500**

Asylum-seekers able to cover their needs through UNHCR's cash assistance programme by the end of February

**582**

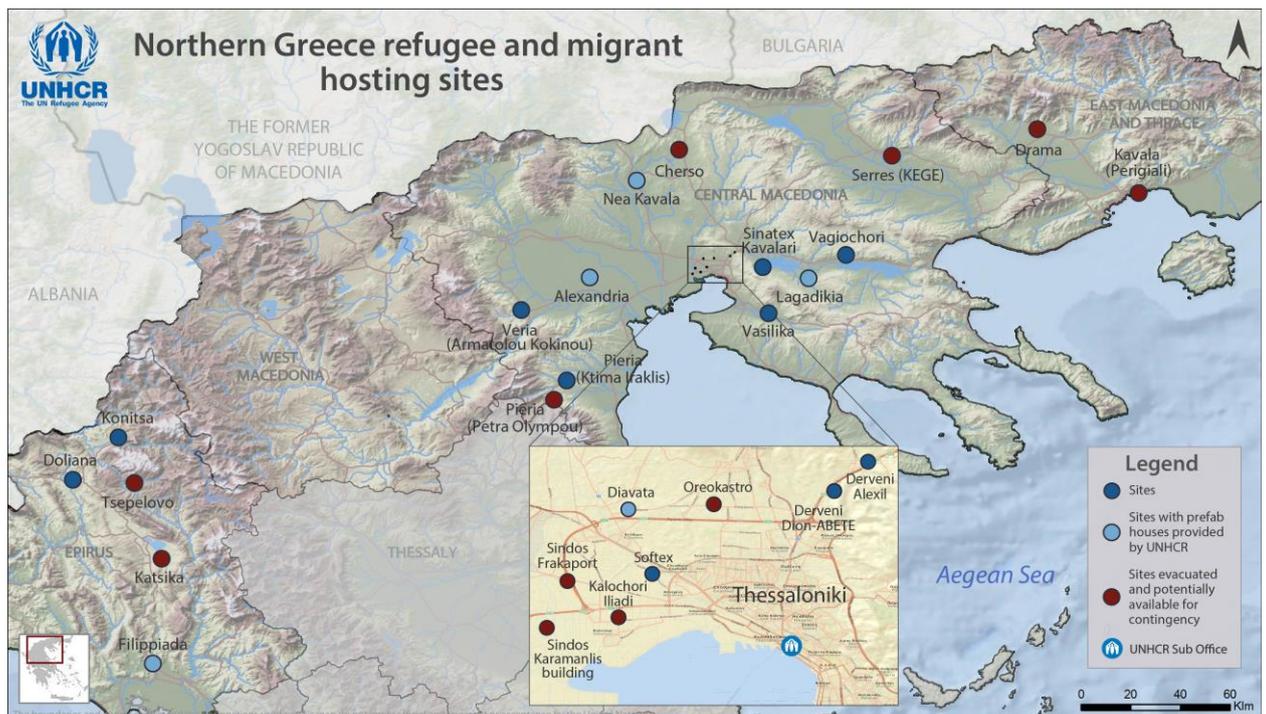
UNHCR prefabricated houses provided and installed in sites by the end of February

**15**

Inter-agency coordination sectoral working groups established and chaired or co-chaired by UNHCR

**12**

Water and Sanitation facilities with shower and toilet containers or chemical units installed in February



## OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

- UNHCR is active, through a variety of interventions, in **all 15 sites in northern and western Greece** (Macedonia, Thrace and Epirus regions) hosting **3,611 asylum-seekers** as of 28 February (Government figures). UNHCR provides **protection services and monitoring** in all sites in line with its protection mandate. UNHCR provides **Site Management Support** in the six sites of Nea Kavala, Alexandria and Lagadikia in northern Greece, and Konitsa, Doliana and Filipiada in western Greece.
- UNHCR offered **over 6,182 accommodation places for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers in apartments, renovated buildings, host families and hotels** in line with UNHCR's out-of-camp policy to accommodate more people in accommodation places out of the sites, where they will enjoy better conditions, and better access to services. UNHCR also transports refugees to the accommodation facilities, and to appointments at the Regional Asylum offices in mainland Greece.
- UNHCR continued supporting the **decongestion of Oreokastro, Sindos/Karamanlis, Kalochori/Iliadi and Sindos/Frakapor warehouse sites** by transferring the residents to hotels, apartments, and the sites of Veria and Alexandria that have prefabricated containers.

## INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **northern Greece**, the **inter-agency coordination structure** is led by the Ministry of Migration Policy (MoMP) and the following Working Groups (WG) meet on a regular basis: **WASH, Hygiene Promotion, Protection WG** and its sub-working groups **Legal Aid, Child Protection, and Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV), Communication with Communities (CwC), and Urban Response; Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS); Health; Site Management Support (SMS); Shelter/Non-food Items (NFI); and Education**. In **western Greece**, WG meetings are held on **Protection, Education, Urban Response, and General Coordination** which included inter-sectoral Coordination.

## UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

### Protection

- Blue Dots – Child and Family Support Hubs.** In northern and western Greece, UNHCR and partners continued to operate **eight “Blue Dots” Child and Family Support Hubs<sup>1</sup>** in **Lagadikia, Diavata, Nea Kavala and Alexandria sites in Macedonia region, as well as in Doliana and Filipiada sites, and Lakkas and Amfithea hotels in Epirus region**. UNHCR's partner Solidarity Now manages the four Hubs in the Epirus region. The **Blue Dot project** was launched in February 2016 by UNHCR, UNICEF and ICRC, aiming to step up protection for the growing number of refugee children and women in Europe. The Hubs in Greece provide safe areas for children and their families, mother and baby spaces, playgrounds, protection, counselling and other vital services, all in a single and easily identifiable location.
- UNHCR's partner Solidarity Now operates the **urban Blue Dot in Thessaloniki city, named “Blue Refugee Centre”**. The Centre, inaugurated in December 2016, provides a wide range of services to asylum-seekers and refugees living in urban settings, including: social and legal info point, info-help line, informal educational activities, recreational activities, facilitation of seminars and focus group discussions, medical corner with support to SGBV cases, breastfeeding area, Internet corner/tea corner/reading area, vocational and language courses.
- The Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) Sub-Working Group** endorsed the **regional SGBV Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)**. The SOPs help to improve the humanitarian response to SGBV incidents. They include a standardized SGBV interagency referral form, referral pathways, case reference documents, an intake form, and procedures, norms, and principles for SGBV prevention and response.
- Child protection.** Under the framework of the Blue Dots, UNHCR continued to promote and develop alternatives for care arrangements and alternatives to detention for unaccompanied children (UAC). The establishment of Safe Spaces for UAC was identified as an interim alternative care solution at adequate sites. In February, the **Safe Space in Diavata remained active**. UNHCR continued working on the development of the Safe Space, and transferred UAC to sites where they have access to services and benefit from follow-up by child protection actors. While pursuing immediate and mid-term solutions for UAC, UNHCR further strengthened efforts to identify shelters as a longer-term solution. Through its partners Arsis and Praxis, UNHCR provides in northern and western Greece 160 places for unaccompanied children in **five transit or longer-term shelters**, currently accommodating 133 boys and girls between five and 18 years old.
- Support to accommodation capacity for asylum-seekers.** UNHCR continued to identify accommodation places for relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers. This is done in support of the Greek authorities' efforts to expand the reception capacity and in line with UNHCR's out-of-camp policy. In northern and western Greece, UNHCR had established **6,182 accommodation places** by the end of February in **hotels, apartments, and with host families**, located throughout **18 different municipalities** (Thessaloniki, Kilkis, Katerini, Volvi, Grevena, Kastoria, Ampelokipoi-Menemeni, Kalamaria, Sykies-Neapoli, Chalkidona, Gainnitsa, Thermaikos, Kordelio-Evosmos, Doliana, Konitsa, Filippiada, Ioannina and Igoumenitsa). The project is implemented by UNHCR in partnership with the Municipality of

Thessaloniki, and the NGOs Praksis, Arsis, Solidarity Now, Intersos, Iliaktida, and Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and funded by the [European Commission](#).



*Distribution of mini-lexicons in Derveni site. © UNHCR/ February 2017*

- **Communication with Communities (CwC).** UNHCR together with the site managers distributed mini-lexicons to facilitate basic communication between the refugees and service providers (a project by UNHCR, Swiss Embassy, METAdrasi and EADAP).
- **Four community centres** are operating in Thessaloniki, providing social, legal and health care-related activities. Two of these centres are funded by UNHCR, and the other two by Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH) and the Swiss Red Cross.
- **Spontaneous arrivals.** More than 200 asylum-seekers reached different sites spontaneously throughout the month. They are either coming from the islands with geographical restriction, or crossing from Evros at the Greek-Turkish land border, or have been pushed back from the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. UNHCR keeps the record of the different

profiles in order to provide an adequate legal response, assess their needs, follow their cases with the Asylum Service, as well as monitor the trends.

## Education

- **Formal education.** UNHCR continued to support the Education Program implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE). In February, children from Nea Kavala, Alexandria, Diavata **started attending schools**, with IOM and UNHCR providing school supplies and school bags. Although certain groups of local people opposed the admission of refugees to one of the schools and organized protests, there were no problems for the children during their first day at school, nor at a later stage.
- At the end of February, **508 refugee children attended afternoon classes at local schools from Lagadikia, Derveni Dion-ABETE, Sinatex/Kavalari, Nea Kavala, Alexandria, Diavata and Softex sites in northern Greece, and Konitsa, Doliana and Katsikas sites in western Greece** according to data from IOM. This includes 353 children going to primary schools, and 155 to secondary schools.
- **Informal education.** To complement efforts to integrate refugee children into the public school system, UNHCR and partners continued informal education activities (community-based schools, language classes, etc.) within the framework of the Blue Dots. In Nea Kavala, the volunteer groups *We Are Here* and *Timber Project* completed reconstruction of the community school at the site, which had been destroyed by a fire on 28 November 2016. In Sinatex/Kavalari, DRC installed two new spaces for pre-school education classes.



*Electricity and heating for the prefab houses in Nea Kavala site is provided by a UNHCR generator installed © UNHCR/ February 2017*

## Shelter and Non-Food Items

- **Non-food items.** Following transfers from some warehouse sites and spontaneous arrivals, the population increased at the winterized sites, and UNHCR and partners provided the necessary assistance.
- In the site of **Nea Kavala**, UNHCR, through its partner DRC, completed the connection of the prefabricated houses to the generator that was installed by UNHCR in January. The Army provides fuel, ensuring safe electrical connection and heating for the prefabricated houses installed in the site. UNHCR installed a **generator also in the site of Alexandria**. UNHCR provides fuel through its partner Intersos until construction is completed that will connect the site to the main electricity network.

## Site Management Support (SMS)

- In the site of **Lagadikia**, the **community service building**, rehabilitated by UNHCR through its partner DRC, was inaugurated on 16 February. The new building hosts an Mdm clinic, counselling rooms, a help desk, and space for community activities.
- Four new **containers** were installed in **Nea Kavala**, to be used as office space for UNHCR, legal counseling (Greek Council for Refugees), NFI distribution (Samaritan's Purse) and community space for different activities carried out by the NGO Praksis and the Ministry of Education.

## Cash Assistance

- In February, the **cash assistance program progressed** in accommodation places managed by UNHCR's partner Iliaktida. This included Volvi, Polykastro, Kilkis, Katerini, and Iannitsa, thus covering the needs of around 1,500 persons. About 500 cards were distributed to the heads of households.

## Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

- UNHCR continued to support **community-based interventions** in several sites in northern and western Greece, which aimed to encourage the participation of refugees and asylum-seekers in the day-to-day activities of each site, empower them and reduce their anxiety.
- UNHCR conducted a **Participatory Assessment** with people of concern, partners and host communities. This was the first time that such a comprehensive exercise was carried out in Greece. The assessment aims to enhance partnerships with refugees of all ages and backgrounds by promoting meaningful participation through structured dialogue.
- UNHCR staff conducted discussions with refugees and host communities (285 individuals in total) in eight sites and apartments and hotels that are part of the UNHCR Accommodation Scheme, as well as non-UNHCR accommodation places.
- Around 70 staff members from UNHCR and implementing and operational actors IRC, IFRC, Save the Children, Arsis, Solidarity Now, Prechoreisis, DRC, ASB, MoE and NRC were trained on conducting the assessment. The main focus was on how to hold discussions with women, girls, boys, and men, including adolescents, in order to gather accurate information on the specific protection risks they face and the underlying causes, to understand their capacities, and to hear their proposed solutions.
- Thirty-four focus group discussions were conducted with Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, Moroccan, Somali, Yemeni, Pakistani persons of concern, as well as with the host community. To focus on peaceful coexistence and given that education is a cornerstone in this regard, group discussions were organized also with parents from the host community in schools in Polykastro and Lagkadikia. All discussions were conducted separately with female and male participants, and per age groups.
- Topics of the discussions were selected based on UNHCR's daily interactions with refugees and their feedback: Communication with communities (CWC), Community participation, Safety and Security, Registration and Documentation, Access to services, Persons with specific needs, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV), Child protection, Education, Self-reliance and integration.



*Participatory Assessment focus group discussion in Elpida, conducted by UNHCR together with partners © UNHCR/ February 2017*



*Roundtable discussion during the Participatory Assessment at Softex site in cooperation with IFRC and Save the Children © UNHCR/ February 2017*

- The assessment reflects the problems, gaps, challenges and solutions as expressed by the persons of concern. The majority highlighted the need to have more tailored **ways of communication** rather than leaflets or posters which many women and elderly are not able to read. Without proper information and guidance available, female refugees remain fully dependent on the men of their community. Refugees also report reduced access to information due to the lack of interpreters, especially when it comes to the smallest communities (e.g. Pakistanis, Somalis). People highlighted the need to create communication channels between the Regional Asylum Offices, Embassies and persons of concern for a better flow of information. Finally, most refugees seem to require further information on their rights. They also want to receive further clarification regarding the asylum procedure, preferably by UNHCR, which they consider a trustworthy source. Currently they rely primarily on fellow refugees and social media for information.
- A major concern shared by all the refugees is **dependency on the humanitarian actors**. Also, asylum-seekers feel they have not been properly consulted in the design of the activities.
- **Insufficient electricity/inadequate lighting** is a major gap and the key security concern at sites, as reported by everyone, irrespective of age, status, nationality and gender. Women, girls and young boys especially expressed their fear to go to WASH facilities during the night. Serious concern was also raised regarding the misuse of empty accommodation containers on some sites. To curb the issue of harassment and abuse, women and unaccompanied minors in sites **suggest additional lighting** on the streets and effective control along the fence areas around the camps where there is allegedly illegal activity. Another suggestion is for the **Police to increase patrolling** in all sites, particularly at night, which could improve the safety of all residents in the sites.
- In terms of shelter, asylum-seekers consider that the **residential containers in the sites are better than tents**, but continue to express frustration over the criteria that UNHCR, other organizations or volunteers use to guide the selection of which family is provided accommodation outside the sites.

- Some locals stated that refugees have overused the health system at a time when locals themselves face challenges in accessing specialized services. They expressed their frustration over the fact that refugees have easier access to specialized services as they benefit from the support and referral of different medical partners.
- Some groups of refugees reported that sites are not adequate for elderly and persons with disabilities. Hotlines where refugees could seek assistance for PWSN would be of great help. Participants across different locations agree that the risks for **persons with specific needs** (PWSN), especially for female-headed households, are lesser in the hotels since a smaller community can enhance the support provided to them.
- Refugees who are more accepting of individuals of diverse sexual orientation remain a good support mechanism for the **LGBTI** community. The discussions showed that sites are not an appropriate place for people with a different sexual orientation, as they might be targeted by their family members or even mocked at by the humanitarian actors and the Police. The discussions revealed that refugees do not trust that different actors will ensure confidentiality, and people fear that their sexual orientation might be disclosed to the community members. Information materials targeting this particular community is in high demand, as the majority are not familiar with the specialized services available in the site. Some also confirmed that for cultural and other reasons, they prefer to not report.
- Children shared their **wish to go to school**, while their parents in the sites acknowledge that while learning is important, many of them do not engage in issues related to schools or education. They do not attend meetings for parents and do not assist their children to support their learning. All parents and adolescent children said that uncertainty about their situation in Greece demotivates parents and children from attending school. Limited capacity of Child Protection actors and finding appropriate activities for **unaccompanied minors** according to their needs remain a clear challenge.



- The results of the Participatory Assessment will be used as the baseline to develop UNHCR’s operational strategy for 2018, and to revise the priorities set for the second half of 2017.

## Logistics

- UNHCR continued to **support asylum-seekers in their process of registering with the Asylum Service** by providing them with transportation between the sites and the Asylum Service offices. In February 2017, the **UNHCR Thessaloniki Transportation Team** facilitated the **transportation of 5,386 asylum-seekers from the sites in northern, central and western Greece to the Regional Asylum Office** in Thessaloniki (1,782), Alexandroupoli (50) and Athens (2,479), and of **148 asylum-seekers to different Embassies** for interviews related to family reunification and relocation. Between **May 2016 and February 2017**, UNHCR’s Transportation Team in Thessaloniki **provided transportation to a total of 39,118 asylum-seekers**.
- UNHCR also provided transport to 917 relocation candidates and vulnerable asylum-seekers in February **to move from the sites to more dignified accommodation in apartments, hotels or other buildings**, and for **184 non-emergency medical cases** from sites and accommodation facilities to hospitals and medical clinics. UNHCR also provided transportation for **80 asylum-seekers to attend events and cultural initiatives** that were organized jointly with local authorities and partners.

## GAPS, CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

- During a monitoring visit to one of the shelters for **unaccompanied children**, UNHCR learned about **raising concerns** of children about how they are perceived by the host community. Lack of creative activities designed for their age and culture, and isolation from the rest of the community were also highlighted. UNHCR is following up on the raised concerns with partner-NGOs and looking into potential collaboration with other actors.

## WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- UNHCR Sub-Office Thessaloniki and Field Office Ioannina provide protection and assistance to persons of concern directly and through the **15 implementing partners**: Arsis, Catholic Relief Service (CRS), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Iliaktida, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Intersos, Médecins du Monde (MdM), METAdrasi, Praksis, Samaritan's Purse, Save the Children, Hellenic Theatre/ Drama & Education Network and Solidarity Now. UNHCR also has a **successful partnership with the Municipality of Thessaloniki** and regularly liaises with the other local municipalities and operational partners, including volunteer groups.



PAOK FC with refugees in Alexandria site where they brought winter clothes and gifts. © UNHCR/ February 2017

## MISSIONS AND EVENTS

- PAOK FC made an in-kind donation of winter clothes (isothermal shirts, underwear, gloves, beanies and sweaters) to cover the most urgent needs of people of concern in northern Greece during the cold weather. The donated items by PAOK FC were greatly appreciated by the refugees in the sites of Alexandria and Nea Kavala.
- UNHCR donated three playgrounds to Lagadas Municipality, as part of the efforts to ensure peaceful coexistence between the local community and the refugee community living in the site of Lagadikia.

<sup>i</sup> The first Hubs were set up along the Balkan route with a view to provide safe spaces for vulnerable families on the move towards north Europe, and in particular for children, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their families. After the closure of the Balkan route, the Blue Dot Hubs address the refugee population remaining in countries that once were mainly transit points.

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