



HIGHLIGHTS

<p>1,670</p> <p>Refugees and migrants accommodated in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre (as of 31 December)</p>	<p>46</p> <p>Persons with specific needs accommodated by UNHCR/partners in alternative facilities</p>	<p>1,907</p> <p>Core Relief Items distributed by UNHCR/partners during December such as rubber mats, blankets, hygiene kits, etc.</p>	<p>1,000</p> <p>Medical passports handed over to medical service providers, facilitating the tracking of support to medical cases</p>	<p>600</p> <p>Hot teas provided on a daily basis by UNHCR/partners in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre</p>
<p>603</p> <p>Beds available in the Vathy Reception and Identification Centre</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Unaccompanied children accommodated by UNHCR/METAdrasi</p>	<p>726</p> <p>Thermal blankets distributed by UNHCR/partners</p>	<p>150</p> <p>Vulnerable asylum seekers referred to UNHCR's accommodation scheme on the mainland</p>	<p>15</p> <p>Staff working at UNHCR Field Office Samos</p>

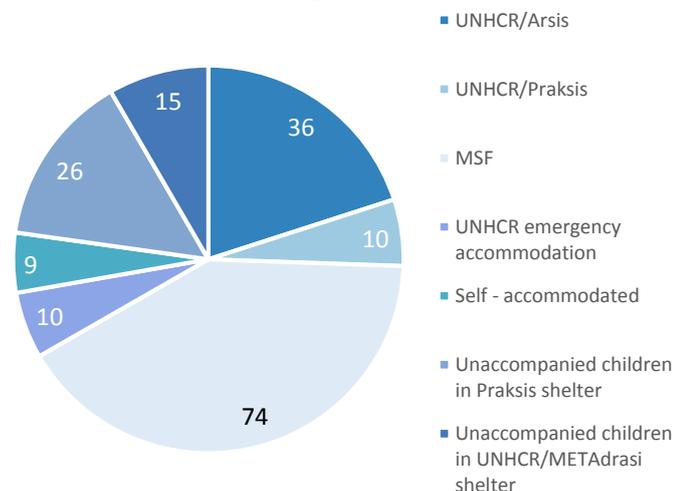
OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

During December **67** refugees and migrants arrived on Samos Island, compared to 274 in November. Arrival figures remain still significantly lower in comparison to the same month last year, when 9,124 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 December, there are an estimated **1,670** refugees and migrants present on Samos. A total of 33% of these refugees and migrants are from the Syrian Arab Republic, 16% from Afghanistan and 14% from Iraq. The majority of these persons have applied for asylum and are awaiting further steps in their asylum procedure. **25% 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 which refugees and migrants including women and children are exposed to.

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 603 beds is managed by the Greek Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and hosts around 1,670 persons (as of 31 December). UNHCR and its partners provide support to the Greek authorities in improving reception conditions in the RIC. Additionally, we offer temporary alternative accommodation in small-scale apartment/hotel facilities to a limited number 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: 180



In December, **UNHCR referred 150 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 12 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.

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 430 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.** 46 vulnerable asylum seekers have been accommodated by UNHCR and its partners Arsis and Praksis in alternative accommodation, providing also food, transportation and social services.



Conference for lawyers and judicial actors.
©UNHCR/D.Anagnostou

- **Referrals of vulnerable asylum seekers to the mainland.** UNHCR referred 150 vulnerable asylum seekers to the UNHCR’s accommodation scheme on the mainland during the month of December.
- **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 90 unaccompanied children (including at least 12 of them with pending decisions from the Public Prosecutor regarding the appointment of a caregiver as their guardian) and up to 400 accompanied children who are present in the RIC. Some UASCs have been in the RIC for over six months already. UNHCR mobilized partners and authorities to speed up referrals to UAC shelters, provide specialized services and appropriate administrative treatment. UNHCR’s partner METAdrasi hosted 15 boys and 1 girl in their shelter for unaccompanied children. UNHCR initiated focus group discussions for Arab and Farsi speaking UASCs who are about to turn 18 years old.
- **Provision of legal aid.** UNHCR through its partner METAdrasi continued to provide legal aid services in priority, to the appeal stage of the Greek asylum procedures, which is mandatory according to European and Greek legislation. This provides a bridge-the-gap measure until a State-led legal aid system starts being implemented.
- **Conference for lawyers and judicial actors.** UNHCR and the Samos Bar Association organized a conference attended by 35 lawyers and judicial actors. During the one-day conference, experts from the Asylum Service, METAdrasi and UNHCR, enabled with their presentations a constructive discussion around the basic concepts of refugee law, asylum procedures in Greece, the Common European Asylum System, legal aid, and administrative treatment of third-country nationals.

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

- **Core Relief Items.** UNHCR Samos, directly and through partners, distributed a total of 1,907 Core Relief Items during December.
- **Distribution of winter items.** UNHCR and partners continued to distribute winter items to the population in Vathy RIC. In December, 726 blankets, 193 sleeping mats and 171 sleeping bags were distributed to help combat the dropping temperatures.
- **Baby care kits.** 345 UNHCR baby care kits were distributed by several actors, containing wet wipes, baby cream and over 16,500 diapers, in Vathy RIC.

Core Relief Items	# distributed in December
Water bottles	159
Sleeping bags	171
Blankets	726
Sleeping mats	193
Rain ponchos	183
Baby care kits	345
Hygiene kits	130



Refugees and migrants awaiting for their hot tea in Vathy RIC.
©UNHCR/J.A.Van Der Stel

- **Tea station.** UNHCR and partners have started the operation of 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.
- **Winterization of tents.** UNHCR/SP finalized the construction of two rainwater trenches in the extended area of the RIC, providing minimal mitigation measures to flooding and landslide risks. The first heavy rains have already proven their effectiveness.
- **WASH maintenance and repairs.** UNHCR/SP continued to monitor the status and maintenance of all WASH facilities in the Vathy RIC, including of 74 showers, 87 toilets and 92 water taps. UNHCR/SP repaired the electrical hot water boilers in over 85% of the showers in the RIC. The remaining 15% of hot water boilers remain irreparable due to defects in the electrical grid and due to persistent wiring cutting by refugee and migrants.

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 519 persons benefited from this service during December.
- **Support to health service providers.** UNHCR handed over 1,000 medical passports to medical service providers, facilitating the tracking of support to medical cases. It is estimated that 80% of the current population in the RIC already possess a medical passport.
- **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

- **Pottery workshops.** UNHCR together with Save the Children and local artist Timos Chatzilagos organized pottery workshops for around 35 UASCs currently residing in Vathy RIC. The children had the opportunity to get introduced to pottery art and learn about the pottery tradition of Samos. Children's interest was evident, some had innate talent and their involvement with the clay allowed them to express their thoughts.
- **School donations.** Upon invitation of the Deputy Regional Governor (Mr. Katrakazos), UNHCR attended the Christmas celebrations of two elementary schools, in the villages of Platanos and Koumeika. UNHCR donated chemistry sets, whiteboards and sports equipment.
- **Child friendly activities.** UNHCR's partner Save the Children continued to carry out recreational and education activities in their new child friendly area in a building close to the RIC.



"I can see that the children have the need to express themselves, to act and create".
Mr Chatzilagos said during the pottery workshops. ©UNHCR/D.Anagnostou

GAPS, CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

- Serious overcrowding is exacerbating living conditions in Vathy RIC, where over 1,600 persons are hosted in a facility with a capacity of 603 beds. With temperatures approaching zero degrees, **an estimated 900 persons are living in unheated tents and another few hundred in unheated dormitories, including families with young children and vulnerable persons.** With winterization options for small camping tents being limited, UNHCR and partners provided insulating flooring and plastic tarps to 100% of the tents to mitigate flooding and provide minimal protection against the cold.
- The population in unheated accommodation remains at high risk during the coming winter months. In this critical situation, UNHCR continues to appeal to all responsible authorities to act swiftly to ensure adequate accommodation for refugees and migrants on the island. UNHCR stands ready to assist with **alternative short-term accommodation for families and vulnerable asylum-seekers**, such as use of hotels at special rates, in close collaboration with local and central authorities. 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.
- The **severe 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.
- **Extremely unhygienic conditions are observed in the RIC.** UNHCR/SP carried out a rapid WASH assessment highlighting urgent needs for repair and upgrade of the current WASH facilities. Facilities are generally overused due to the RIC hosting almost three times the 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 eight months, particularly affecting Iraqis, Afghans and Palestinians. UNHCR continues to support the Asylum Service in providing accurate information on asylum.
- UNHCR is concerned about the **high number of around 90 UASCs residing in Vathy RIC**, some of whom have remained in the facility for around six months already, with limited protection mechanisms in place. Whilst spaces remain available in accommodation facilities for UASCs 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 UASCs absconded 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 UASCs and monitor their situation as well as the conditions of **400 accompanied children residing in the RIC.**

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

