
Geneva, 27 April 2018

BRIEFER: Charlie Yaxley, UNHCR Spokesperson

UNHCR appeals to Greece over situation at Evros

This is a summary of what was said by the UNHCR spokesperson at today's Palais des Nations press briefing in Geneva. Further information can be found on the UNHCR websites, www.unhcr.org and www.unhcr.gr, which should also be checked for regular media updates on non-briefing days.

UNHCR appeals to Greece over situation at Evros

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is calling on the Greek government to urgently improve conditions and expand reception capacity, following a recent rise in arrivals at Evros via the land border with Turkey. Hundreds of people are at present being held in police detention facilities.

Some 2,900 people have arrived in Evros so far this month, mostly Syrian and Iraqi families. This is equivalent to half the estimated arrivals for all of 2017. According to figures compiled by UNHCR, in April land arrivals have outpaced sea arrivals.

At least eight people have died since the start of the year attempting to cross the Evros River.

The increase in new arrivals is placing strain on the only Reception and Identification Centre in Evros, which is located at Fylakio. The centre is filled beyond its 240-person capacity, including 120 unaccompanied and separated children.

With the Reception and Identification Centre overwhelmed, and struggling to conduct timely registration and identification, or to provide services such as medical and psycho-social care, and interpretation, the authorities initially place people, including many children, in inappropriate police detention facilities in the area while they wait for places at the centre to open up.

Some of those in police detention have been held for more than three months. Conditions are dismal and services are limited. A UNHCR visit found families in one facility sleeping on the floor beside a row of cells. Only one doctor and four nurses were available for more than 500 people in another police facility. The hundreds of people kept in these conditions include pregnant women, very young children and people in need of medical and psycho-social care.

While we welcome the recent release from detention by the authorities of more than 2,500 people, we are also concerned that this is being done without vulnerability screening and provision of proper information on asylum and other options. Their situation must be urgently addressed to enable access to care and asylum procedures.

We welcome the efforts of the police and the Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre to address the challenges however, with their resources increasingly stretched, the situation has become untenable. UNHCR is proposing:



PRESS BRIEFING NOTE

- Urgently enhance the reception capacity of the Reception and Identification Centre with additional space, and improve conditions and services.
- Identification of open transit sites where arrivals from Evros can be directed to and go through registration and identification procedures.
- Set up reception and identification mobile units.
- Immediate transfer of families in detention to safe shelter and referral to services as required.
- Improve conditions in police facilities for even the shortest stay, ensuring access to open space and basic services, with health care a priority.
- Increase the registration capacity of the competent Greek authorities to ensure access to asylum and timely registration of asylum applications.
- Prompt transfer of unaccompanied children to safe accommodation and prompt assessment of family links.

UNHCR continues to provide protection support at the Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre, and remains in close and constant contact with the Greek Government in order to address this exceptional situation. UNHCR will continue to assist the Greek authorities through the provision of technical and material support, including blankets, clothing, hygiene items, solar-powered lamps and other non-food items.

ENDS

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