



Greece: Response to the Refugee Crisis

ECHO FACTSHEET

Facts & figures:

Nearly **857 000** refugees and migrants arrived in Greece in 2015. Close to **172 000** people came in 2016 to Greece by sea.*

Currently, over **62 000** refugees and migrants are stranded in the country.**

European countries offered more than **200 000** items such as tents, beds and hygiene kits to help.

As of June 2017, EU emergency support funding contracted to humanitarian aid partners stands at **€401 million**.

*Source: UNHCR

** Source: Government of Greece

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The EU emergency support instrument provides for a cash scheme that helps refugees and migrants in Greece to cover basic needs. © UNHCR

Key messages

- Greece has experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants. While close to 857 000 people transited through the country in 2015, in 2016 nearly 172 000 people arrived in Greece by sea alone. The closure of the border between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece in early March 2016 had the effect of leaving thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in Greece – often without adequate accommodation, healthcare and access to education.
- Upon request of Greece, the European Civil Protection Mechanism was activated on 3 December 2015. In response, 20 different European countries have offered more than 200 000 relief items, such as tents, beds, sleeping bags, blankets, hygiene kits and power generators.
- By July 2017, the European Commission has awarded emergency support contracts totaling €401 million to its humanitarian aid partners in Greece, such as UN bodies, the Red Cross/Crescent movement and NGOs. The funding covers the delivery of primary healthcare, psycho-social care, improved hygiene conditions and shelter (including in apartments) for those in need, care for unaccompanied minors, as well as informal education and a cash voucher scheme for refugees stranded in Greece.

Humanitarian situation and needs

In 2015-2016, Greece has experienced an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees fleeing war and deprivation in their home countries, or in search of a better and safer life in the EU. With the closure of the so-called "Balkan migration route" in March 2016, tens of thousands of refugees were left stranded in the country. Following the EU-Turkey Statement, the number of new arrivals in Greece has dropped significantly to an average of 81 per day between March 2016 and July 2017.

The overall humanitarian situation of refugees and migrants on the mainland has improved over recent months. The situation on the islands is challenging as migrants and refugees arriving on the islands after 20 March 2016 have to stay there until a decision on their asylum application has been taken.

The European Union's humanitarian response

EU emergency support

Under a newly established EU Emergency Support Instrument, the Commission has so far allocated €401 million for responding to the refugee situation in Greece. This sum has been contracted to the EU's humanitarian aid partners in Greece such as UN bodies, the Red Cross/Crescent movement and NGOs.

The Commission's flagship initiative under the EU Emergency Support Instrument is the 'Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation' (ESTIA) programme that helps refugees and their families rent urban accommodation and provides them with cash assistance. The ESTIA programme has a budget of €151 million and is composed of:

- **Rented accommodation for up to 30 000 people**

This €93.5 million project with UNHCR sets up large scale rental project to improve living conditions of refugees by providing 22 000 urban accommodation places. The project will increase the number of refugees living in rented apartments in Greece to up to 30 000 by the end of 2017. Some 2 000 rented accommodation places will be located on the Greek islands, with the bulk of apartments rented in cities and towns on mainland Greece and local landowners receiving a stable and reliable income for these apartments. A number of municipalities in Greece are also formally part of this project.

- **Cash assistance to empower refugees to meet basic needs**

This €57.6 million project with UNHCR establishes a basic social safety net for all asylum seekers and refugees in Greece by providing them with pre-defined monthly cash allocations through a dedicated card. It aims to enable refugees to meet their basic needs in a dignified manner. The allocations are consistent across the country, and pegged to the Greek emergency social safety net, as well as being based on the refugees' family size. At the same time, this assistance is re-injected into the local economy, family shops and service providers.

The remaining €250 million of EU Emergency Support funding, which are not part of the ESTIA flagship programme, support another 18 projects that address further humanitarian needs in Greece, including shelter, primary health care, psycho-social support, improved hygiene conditions as well as education.

The European Civil Protection Mechanism

Since 2015, the European Commission has helped coordinate the arrival of in-kind assistance to Greece through the European Civil Protection Mechanism. To date, twenty Participating States to the Mechanism have offered more than 200 000 items to Greece in response to the immediate needs created by the crisis with items such as tents, beds, sleeping bags, blankets, hygiene kits, power generators, water pumps, firefighting equipment and other specialised equipment.