

Urgent Action: write to your MP today

Refugees facing winter catastrophe in Greece

Churches and international aid and humanitarian agencies are reporting a worsening situation for refugees in Greece. The conditions facing thousands of people inside Europe are deteriorating. There is a real danger that families in need are being forgotten, as the interest of the international media and global institutions has shifted to other situations.

This resource has been produced by the Joint Public Issues Team (the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church). For more information and resources, visit: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

Poor conditions and overcrowding.

MSF have called the situation a “mental health emergency”

There is chronic overcrowding in poor conditions for many vulnerable people, including children.

Médecins sans Frontières say: “There are whole families fleeing war zones in Syria and Iraq. In the last few months our clinics have seen more people who have suffered violence, who are victims of rape, who have been tortured, than ever before.” In a report published in October 2017 they describe a “mental health emergency”.

Responsibility for refugee support has been handed over to the Greek Government, which is reported to be struggling to offer an adequate response to the worsening situation.

Last winter six people died in Moria, all the deaths linked to the inhumane living conditions in the camp. There is a lack of preparedness to prevent more deaths this coming winter. Already at the start of this month a five year old girl died.

“approaching critical”

Inhumane living conditions are causing deaths.

The top UNHCR official in Greece, Phillipe Leclerk, said the situation on the islands was “approaching critical.”

Children seeking asylum

Over 2000 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum

New arrivals on the islands are taken to hot spots (facilities that were designed to accommodate people during a short registration process but which now serve as refugee camps).

Hotspots are massively overcrowded.

Some people have remained for more than a year. The hot spot on Chios has 1,325 people in a space meant for 894, while Lesbos's Moria facility on 29 September held 4,825 people, more than double its capacity of 1,800.

One third of asylum seekers currently in Greece are children.

There are 2,100 unaccompanied asylum seeking children. 40 are eligible to come to the UK under the 'Dubs' route, but so far none have been resettled.

#Open the Islands, a group of organisations working with the refugees, says that the current situation has been directly caused by Greek government and EU policies, which keep people trapped on the islands for prolonged periods of time, unable to move on and seek better conditions for themselves and their families.

The deal agreed between Turkey and the EU was intended to lessen the number of migrants eligible for help in EU countries. However, by excluding people fleeing war from the EU and not providing safe and legal routes for them, more have been forced to turn to smuggling and other desperate measures.

Alleviating the situation

#Opentheislands are calling for three changes to improve the inhumane conditions on the islands

They are urging:

- An end to all returns of refugees from other member states to Greece, due to the inhumane conditions in the islands.
- Authorities across the EU to take speedy steps to ensure that families who are divided can, where possible, be reunited. Many have been forcibly separated by war and persecution and have been waiting many years to be reunited.
- An end to the EU-Turkey deal, where asylum seekers are forcibly returned to Turkey. Turkey is not a safe country for asylum seekers as they cannot fully access their right to apply for international protection.

Take Action

What you can do to help improve the situation.

Write to your MP expressing your concern and asking them to raise these issues with the Government and for them to do everything they can to help alleviate the crisis in Greece.

If you live in Scotland, Write to your MSPs asking them to urge the Scottish Government Minister for International Development and Europe to raise Scottish concerns with the UK Government.

See if your organisation or faith group can sign up to the solidarity statement on the #Open the Islands Webpage.
www.opentheislands.wordpress.com

For further information:

- A letter [from 19 civil society organisations to Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras](#), dated 23 October 2017
- UNHCR, IOM and Unicef report into [Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe – Mid Year Overview of Trends January – June 2017](#)
- Open the Islands campaign www.opentheislands.wordpress.com
- Jesuit Refugee Service in Greece www.www.jrsellada.com/en/
- Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe www.ccme.be
- Oxfam October 2017 report, [Beyond fortress Europe](#), which reviews EU refugee policies and calls for a fundamental change.
- Save the Children October 2017 report [Keeping Children at the Centre](#)

Produced by the Joint Public Issues Team

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To give feedback or ask any questions on this resource please email enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk

