

Greece: Migration

Key messages / 03 March 2020

Background

On 27 February, the Turkish government announced it would no longer stop refugees from attempting to cross by land or sea into Europe because it had reached its capacity. Since the announcement, thousands of migrants have gathered at the borders of Greece and Bulgaria, trying to cross.¹ IOM reported there are at least 13,000 migrants along the Evros river, near the Turkish border town of Edirne.²

In response, the Greek and the Bulgarian governments reinforced security measures at their borders and deployed armed forces to prevent migrants from entering. In Greece, several clashes took place between migrants and police, with police using tear gas and water cannons and migrants throwing stones.³

Arrivals on the Greek islands have also increased dramatically; at least 1,000 migrants⁴ reached the Eastern Aegean islands over the weekend of 1 March. On Lesbos, local anger at the migration situation boiled over, with some residents preventing people from disembarking from a dinghy.⁵ A child died in hospital after a boat carrying migrants capsized.⁶

In response to the arrivals the Greek government has announced that for a month, Greece will not accept any asylum applications from migrants entering the country and will immediately return them to the country they came from.⁷

According to UNHCR data⁸, more than 115,600 migrants remain stranded in Greece, of whom around 41,200 are on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos.

Key figures

At least **13,000** migrants have gathered near the Turkey-Greece land border

More than **1,000** people have arrived in the Aegean Islands by sea in two days

More than **115,600** migrants are living in Greece

More than **41,200** people remain stranded in camps on the Greek Islands

Red Cross Red Crescent Action

¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/01/europe/turkey-greece-migrants-open-border-intl/index.html>

² <https://www.iom.int/news/more-13000-migrants-reported-along-turkish-greek-border>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/greece-defensive-turkey-opens-border-refugees-200229091808379.html>

⁴ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-syria-security-greece-migrants/child-dies-1000-migrants-reach-greek-islands-from-turkey-idUKKBN20P14Q?rpc=401&>

⁵ <https://www.euronews.com/2020/02/29/greek-police-fire-tear-gas-at-refugees-amid-violence-at-turkish-border>

⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/02/europe/greece-turkey-migrant-child-drowns-intl/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/02/greece-cancels-asylum-as-turkey-lets-migrants-travel-towards-europe>

⁸ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/74134>(until 31 January 2020)

Following reports on 28 February about the movement of migrant groups towards Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria, Turkish Red Crescent Migration Services Department and local branches mobilized an assessment team to the area.

Turkish Red Crescent mobile emergency response teams are distributing relief items such as winter clothes and blankets and providing internet hotspots and charging units on the border to help migrants connect with their family members. Two mobile catering units are serving hot soup, water and biscuits.

Hellenic Red Cross and Bulgarian Red Cross local branches near the border are ready to support migrants if they cross the border.

The IFRC Regional Office for Europe is following developments closely and is ready to support the National Societies as requested. Separate key messages and fact sheets are also available on the migration-related activities of Hellenic Red Cross, IFRC and ICRC in Greece.

Key Messages

- **We are deeply concerned by the media reports coming from the border of Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey.** There are thousands of people waiting at the border, sleeping in the open without shelter or food. Many of them are vulnerable and sick, including children and older people. We fear this dire humanitarian situation could become worse in the coming days.
- **Every human being must be treated with dignity and must be never used as a political tool.** Desperate people cannot be used as a tool to put pressure on governments. We call on all governments to respect human dignity, save lives and respect international human rights and refugee laws.
- **States have the right to set migration policies and protect their borders, but this should not lead to the suffering of human beings.** Any political decision that threatens the fundamental rights, safety and human dignity of people is unacceptable. The excessive use of force or violence against people seeking international protection is not acceptable.
- **Thousands of people are living in unacceptable conditions on the Greek islands.** Hundreds continue to arrive every day to overcrowded facilities that are hosting six times more people than they were built for. We are deeply concerned by any scenario that puts further strain on the already overburdened facilities.
- **This is an issue that stretches beyond the borders of Greece and Turkey.** Making sure people fleeing violence, persecution and poverty are protected and treated with dignity is a collective responsibility and we call on all states to take this responsibility seriously.

For more information

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