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## Information bulletin no. 1 Greece and Turkey: Population movement

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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<b>Date of disaster:</b> since 27 February 2020	<b>Point of contact:</b> Nebojsa Medojevic, Disaster and Crisis Preparedness Delegate, IFRC Regional Office for Europe M +36 70 9537701, <a href="mailto:nebojsa.medojevic@ifrc.org">nebojsa.medojevic@ifrc.org</a>
<b>Operation start date:</b> 27 February 2020	<b>Expected timeframe:</b> TBC
<b>Number of people affected:</b> approx. 56,000 and more	<b>Number of people to be assisted:</b> approx. 56,000 and more
<b>N° of National Societies currently involved in the operation:</b> Hellenic Red Cross, Turkish Red Crescent	
<b>N° of other partner organizations involved in the operation:</b> IFRC	

*This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Hellenic Red Cross, the Turkish Red Crescent, with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), are currently looking at modalities for assistance.*

## The situation

Since 28 February 2020, many people have travelled towards Turkey's frontiers in the attempt to cross into the European Union. Neighbouring Greece is currently seeing the greatest number of crossing attempts from Turkey via Edirne in the northwest, as well as via Çanakkale in the southwest on the Aegean Sea. An estimated 10,000-15,000 people wanting to cross to Greece are currently at the borders. The land border in Greece remains closed under heavy control. Recent reports from the Turkish authorities indicate tens of thousands of people on the move towards the Ipsala border gate in Edirne.

In 24 hours from Sunday to Monday (from 1 to 2 March), 977 people had reached the Greek islands in dinghies, most of them on Lesbos but also on Chios, Samos and some of the smaller islands. A total of 16 boats made their way to the Greek shores.

There is increased tension, as local anger and frustration about Greece's stretched capacities to receive new arrivals boiled over, with some residents gathering in several places, preventing people, including young children and babies, from disembarking from a dinghy that reached a small harbour. Elsewhere on the island, they prevented buses from taking new arrivals to Lesbos massively overcrowded centre of Moria. At the port of Thermi, about 50 people, including several minors, have not been allowed to disembark. Many islanders want the Moria camp, home to nearly 20,000 refugees and migrants, to shut down and its residents to be transferred to the mainland.

For months already, Greece's reception and asylum system for refugees and migrants has been stretched beyond its capacities. The continuous and increased number of new arrivals has pushed the existing accommodation and other support services to its limits. In total 115,000 migrants and refugees remain stranded in Greece, of whom around 41,200 are on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos.

**More than 41,000 people remain stranded** in reception centres across five islands which were originally designed for 5,400 people:

- On Samos 6,782 people are staying in a centre designed for 660 while others are in makeshift shelters pitched on surrounding fields on a steep slope.

- Moria camp on Lesbos is hosting 21,752 people inside a facility for 2,800 and others are staying in adjacent olive groves. The camp is known for its poor hygiene conditions and outbreaks of violence.<sup>1</sup>
- Reception centres on Chios, Kos, and Leros are also overcrowded. The majority of the residents in the camp are families.
- Children account for a third of the migrant population on the islands, of whom 15 per cent are unaccompanied or separated,<sup>2</sup> and the majority are below the age of twelve.

Thousands of women, men, and children who currently live in small tents are exposed to cold and rain with little or no access to heating, electricity or hot water. Hygiene and sanitation conditions are unsafe. Health problems are on the rise. Despite the dedication of medical professionals and volunteers, many cannot see a doctor as there are simply too few medical staff at the reception centres and local hospitals.

In the past period, the Greek authorities have been looking into possibilities to ease the tensions on the islands, but the capacities and resources overall in Greece are at their limits. Between September 2019 and January 2020, the Greek government transferred 14,750 people from the islands to the mainland, as 36,000 new arrivals crossed the Aegean to Greece from Turkey. Given the situation overall in Greece and the different tensions, the latest initiative by the authorities on the islands have met strong resistance from local communities.

As the situation in Syria is becoming ever more serious and unpredictable, the risk of newer and sudden influxes of people fleeing the conflict zones keeps escalating. Turkey sees increased pressure on its border in Syria with hundreds of thousands of people ready to cross it, taking into account continuing hostilities in Idlib. Turkey remains host to some 4 million refugees within its borders, including nationals from Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan – making it the country with the largest refugee population worldwide. Turkey makes commendable efforts to provide massive humanitarian aid and support to Syrians seeking refuge of which more than 93 per cent of these people are living in urban areas in 20 cities throughout Turkey.

## Red Cross Red Crescent Action

**The Hellenic Red Cross (HRC)** has setup three mobile units near the Kastanies border in Evros to provide first aid and health related services. HRC is in contact with the national authorities and discussed the measures to take as a response to the situation. HRC is currently in discussion also with the IFRC's Regional Office for Europe regarding support to prepare and respond to the situation.

**Turkish Red Crescent (TRC)** Migration Services Department and local branches mobilized an assessment team to the area. 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 at the border gates of Pazarkule, and Ipsala in Edirne, as well as Çanakkale's Ayvacık province. Delivery of humanitarian assistance items is being made by land vehicles from TRC warehouses and offices temporarily allocated to the National Society by the Turkish government authorities. Neighbouring regional TRC Disaster Management Directorates are also supporting the provision of urgent relief items (including clothes, shoes, socks, baby diapers, hot food and beverages.) These items will be stocked in a nearby warehouse allocated by the Turkish government's State Hydraulic Works (DSI) and prepared for distribution.



Pazarkule Border Gate, Edirne, Turkey, 3 March 2020 Migrants wait to cross into Greece at the Pazarkule border gate near the Turkish border town of Edirne. Photo: Turkish Red Crescent

<sup>1</sup> Violence broke out in Lesbos in February when asylum seekers from Moria camp, marching peacefully toward the island's capital of Mytilene, met a concerted police response.

<sup>2</sup> According to the latest numbers given by the Ministry of Migration Policy, Lesbos is accommodating 21,779, Chios 5,576, Samos 7,659, Leros 2,645 and Kos 4,380 people.

**The IFRC Regional Office for Europe** is following developments closely and is ready to support the National Societies (NS) as requested. The information sharing calls have been organized with the Turkish Red Crescent, Red Cross Society of the Republic of North Macedonia, Cyprus Red Cross, Red Cross of Serbia and Bulgarian Red Cross to inform NS contingency planning and better understand possible needs. The IFRC President and the IFRC acting Under Secretary General for Programmes and Operations are visiting Greece from 4 to 7 March, and will visit Athens as well as the land border, Thessaloniki and Lesbos. [Press release](#), [photos](#) and [key messages](#) are also available on the current situation and the migration-related activities of Hellenic Red Cross, IFRC and ICRC in Greece.

In Greece the IFRC has been engaged since 2015 with a CHF 43 million Emergency Appeal to respond to the migration crisis. As initially planned, the IFRC's Population Movement Emergency Appeal was closed in December 2018, but the continuity of the longer-term migration activities of the Hellenic Red Cross was ensured by including them under the IFRC's Operational Plan for Greece. At the moment, in partnership with UNHCR, IFRC is implementing for the fourth consecutive year (since May 2017) a cash programme for migrants in Greece reaching 15,000 asylum seekers. The Multifunctional Centre for integration services and orientation is reaching 4,000 people monthly.

In Turkey the IFRC continues to support the Turkish Red Crescent in assisting some 2.85 million people who have been affected by the crisis in Syria and other neighbouring conflicts. This operation of 121 million Swiss francs was launched on 9 November 2012 as an Emergency Appeal and in 2016 transformed into an International Appeal, focusing on a longer-term community support. This International Appeal will last until 30 June 2021. Through the International Appeal the Turkish Red Crescent has continued to play a leading role in supporting refugee camps and urban settings, providing first-line response through deployment of its volunteers, staff, and emergency supplies, organizing its structures and resources to receive and provide safety for people in need as well as providing support to refugee and host communities through 15 community centres since 2015. All activities that have been conducted at the community centres and supported by EUTF MADAD funding, continue to prioritize enhancing the resilience, well-being and social cohesion of both refugees and host communities as well as capacity development of the National Society staff and volunteers for strengthened service delivery.

The challenges that the current situation poses to refugees in Turkey, in terms of protection, are many and complex. Therefore there is greater needs to meet the protection related needs of the refugees. The ECHO-supported HIP Protection project seeks to reduce the vulnerability of the refugee population through individual case support, individual protection assistance, legal advice, family reunification and capacity building of service providers.

## Overview of non-RCRC actors' actions in the countries

On 27 February, the Turkish government announced that it would no longer stop refugees from attempting to cross by land or sea into Europe because the country has reached its reception capacity. Since the announcement, tens of thousands of people have gathered at the borders of Greece and Bulgaria, trying to cross.<sup>3</sup> The Turkish authorities have temporarily allocated some land for migrants who are waiting at the border. The Turkish AFAD will donate eight 112m<sup>2</sup> tents, requesting the Turkish Red Crescent Disaster Management Directorate to install them.

In response to the arrivals, the Greek government has announced that for a month, Greece will not accept any asylum applications or migrants entering to Greece. They will immediately return the migrants that are trying to cross the borders irregularly to the country they entered from.<sup>4</sup>

Greek and the Bulgarian governments reinforced security measures at their borders and deployed armed forces to prevent irregular entries.

On 2 March 2020, the government of Greece requested assistance from EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM) Member and Participating States to prepare for an increased number of new arrivals migration flow: in terms mobility (buses, ambulances etc.), health, water and sanitation, shelter and other household and hygiene items.

On 3 March, the Presidents of the European Commission, Parliament and Council visited the Greek-Turkish land borders. The FRONTEX Emergency team will be sending additionally 7 boats, 1 helicopter, 100 border guards for both land and sea borders, The EU has committed EUR 700 million financial support to Greece. Civil protection mechanism has been activated for support in kind. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, said that the situation at the borders is an EU responsibility.

<sup>3</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/01/europe/turkey-greece-migrants-open-border-intl/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/02/greece-cancels-asylum-as-turkey-lets-migrants-travel-towards-europe>

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## How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and the **Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (Sphere)** in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



**Save lives,**  
protect livelihoods,  
and strengthen recovery  
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**  
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**  
and a culture of  
**non-violence** and **peace**.