

On March 22, Greece's prime minister announced a nationwide lockdown (<http://www.ekathimerini.com/250917/article/ekathimerini/news/full-lockdown-in-effect-from-monday-to-curb-coronavirus>) banning "all unnecessary movement by citizens."

As of March 22, the population of the hotspots (<https://infocrisis.gov.gr/8275/apotyposi-tis-ethnikis-ikonas-katastasis-gia-to-prosfygiko-metanasteftiko-zitima-tin-22-3-2020/>) on Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Leros was almost 31,400 over capacity, with 37,427 people in facilities with a total capacity of just 6,095. Conditions in the centers cannot be characterized as suitable for dignified, humane living, the groups said. Extremely limited access to running water, toilets, and showers, as well as hours-long lines for food distribution and insufficient medical and nursing personnel, make it impossible to abide by the guidelines for protection from the coronavirus, putting people at significantly heightened risk in the face of the growing threat of widespread COVID-19 transmission.

Greece's government should adopt measures to prevent an outbreak and prepare a response plan to be enacted immediately once the first case of COVID-19 in a reception center is detected. In the event of an outbreak, a quarantine that would trap tens of thousands of healthy people together with people infected by COVID-19 in the overcrowded camps, accompanied by a lack of adequate and appropriate medical preparedness and response, would almost certainly lead to preventable deaths of numerous people, the organizations said.

Greece's government should take the measures outlined below, which will reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections among the population living in these centers and generally help protect public health:

- Move people out of the reception centers to appropriate, small-scale centers on the mainland, such as hotels and apartments, taking necessary precautions for safe transport. This will enable the government to carry out the guidelines against the spread of the coronavirus. Priority should be given to older people, people with chronic diseases and serious underlying medical conditions, people with disabilities, pregnant women, new mothers and their children, and children, including those who are unaccompanied. Accommodation for people with disabilities should be reasonably adapted as needed, taking individual needs into account. Suitable shelters for unaccompanied children should be established immediately.
- Adopt special measures to guarantee universal and unhampered free access to healthcare in the public system for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants alike without discrimination, including testing and treatment for COVID-19. These groups should also have access to any preventive measures put in place in Greece in response to COVID-19, as do people in the rest of Greece. Asylum seekers should receive without delay their Provisional Insurance and Health Care Number (PAAYPA), as mandated by Common Ministerial Decision 717.2020.
- Supply the reception centers with adequate sanitary and hygiene products and ensure continuous running water so that residents can follow the guidelines of the National Public Health Organization and the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding protection from COVID-19. Ensure frequent disinfection of common areas, bathrooms, and toilets, as well as timely collection and removal of waste.
- Provide information to all residents of the reception centers about (a) how to prevent COVID-19 and (b) what to do and how to get help if they experience symptoms of COVID-19 in a wide range

of languages, including ones that are less frequently used. People with disabilities should be provided with information in accessible formats, such as sign language, captioning, text, and easy-to-read messages. Ensure necessary responsive measures are available such as self-isolation and quarantine areas, and medical personnel with adequate training and protective gear.

- Urgently address the situation and special needs of people living in the informal settlements adjacent to the camps, as these groups may face additional challenges due to inadequate access to water and sanitation, hygiene products, and garbage collection.
- Ensure, until the reception centers are decongested, that they have adequate numbers of medical and nursing personnel, as well as mental health support services. Where possible, these services could be provided remotely.

The following quotes may be attributed to members of the groups involved:

“Restricting thousands of women, men, and children in severely overcrowded camps, where living conditions are unacceptable, makes it impossible to isolate people exposed to COVID-19 or to comply with minimum preventive and protective measures, even hand washing and social-distancing,” said Eva Cossé (<https://www.hrw.org/about/people/eva-cosse>), Greece researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The Greek government urgently needs to move people to mainland Greece.”

“The government must take the necessary steps in order to ensure that the thousands of asylum seekers and migrants living in claustrophobically congested RICs are protected,” said Vassilis Kerasiotis, HIAS Greece country director. “They should be relocated to otherwise empty hotels and apartments where they can practice social distancing. In these hard times, no one should be left behind. It is not only a moral but also a prudent thing to do, since the fates of asylum seekers as well as those of the locals are inevitably bound together in the face of the pandemic.”

“Asylum seekers and migrants residing in RICs should have equal access to protection and medical assistance as the rest of the Greek population,” said Dimitra Kalogeropoulou, head of IRC Greece. “The most effective way to curb the spread of COVID-19 is by ensuring that everyone can take meaningful measures to protect themselves, including adequate access to sanitation, space, and healthcare.”

“Given current conditions in the hotspots, containing any outbreak would be impossible and could potentially put thousands of lives in danger,” said Antigone Lyberaki, general manager at SolidarityNow. “There is a window of opportunity to address this issue while the situation is still manageable, but we fear this window may be closing fast.”

“When the virus hits overcrowded camps in Greece, the consequences will be devastating,” said Fotini Kokkinaki with HumanRights360. “That will be a nightmare within an existing nightmare since the public health system has collapsed during the previous years of economic depression. We must act now before it is too late.”

Organizations signing the news release:

Action Aid Hellas

Amnesty International

ARSIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth
Defence for Children International Greece
Greek Forum of Refugees
Help Refugees/Choose love
HIAS Greece
HumanRights360
Human Rights Watch
International Rescue Committee
Jesuit Refugee Service Greece (JRS Greece)
Legal Centre Lesbos
Médecins du Monde – Greece (Mdm-Greece)
Network for Children's Rights
Praxis
Refugee Legal Support
Refugee Rights Europe
Refugee Support Aegean
Solidarity Now
Terre des hommes Hellas

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ecoi.net summary:

Joint appeal by 21 human rights and humanitarian organisations to take measures to prevent spreading of coronavirus pandemic into refugee and migrant camps on Greek Islands

Country:

Greece

Sources:

[AI – Amnesty International \(/en/source/10960.html\)](/en/source/10960.html) (Author), [HRW – Human Rights Watch \(/en/source/11207.html\)](/en/source/11207.html) (Author), [IRC – International Rescue Committee \(/en/source/11266.html\)](/en/source/11266.html) (Author), Action Aid Hellas et al (Author)

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and
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Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

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