

Sitrep – Greece COVID-19

As of 23.03.2020, there's an official restriction of movement in Greece in an effort to contain the spread of the pandemic.

As the Schengen area closed its external borders last week, in a move designed to replace the closing of member states' national borders against imported Covid-19 infection, some internal barriers still went up in Europe. The day after the European commission's announcement, the Greek government introduced a set of measures that would apply to the migrant camps in the Greek islands¹.

As of Wednesday, 18.03.2020, **the camps have been locked down from 7pm to 7am**. In the daytime, only one person is allowed out per family, and the police control their movements. Some camps, on the islands of Leros



and Kos, have been closed entirely. Meanwhile, visits to the camps' reception centres have been temporarily suspended, except for those who work there, and arrivals are being subjected to compulsory fever screening. The measures only apply to the camps, not to the resident population of the islands².

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/europe-news>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/mar/21/fears-catastrophe-greece-migrant-camps-lockdown-coronavirus>



In the context of mitigation of a COVID19 outbreak in the refugee sites, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum published a decision on restriction of movement for residents of hotspots.³

Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council Jan Egeland issued a statement on refugees and the current coronavirus threat stressing that as world leaders brace for the worst within their borders, they must not abandon those living outside them calling on international solidarity with refugees and displaced people during this time of widespread uncertainty⁴.

Highlights:

- Covid-19 outbreak, **closure of borders**
- Nikos Hardalias **appointed Deputy Minister for Civil Protection** in order to boost response against the pandemic
- The **next month will be very difficult**" said Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in an interview with *Proto Thema*. "We will have an increase of the cases and of the serious cases, some people will lose their lives, we should know that," he underlined. He echoed French President Emmanuel Macron, declaring that "we are at war." "The enemy is invisible but not invincible... If we curb the spread of the virus, we give time to the health system to address urgent cases", he added, noting that, "our first priority is to save lives." The government will provide 2.5 bln euros to tackle the problems to the economy and labor market caused by the virus, the premier said⁵.
- Following an emergency order issued by the Migration and Asylum Service, **all migration-related services will suspend their operation until April 10** as a preventive measure for the expansion of the coronavirus outbreak. All administrative services (registrations, interviews, submission of appeals, etc.) are being postponed.
- Hotels to close amidst COVID-19 outbreak; those hosting migrants will remain open
- **Coronavirus infection at Amygdaleza detention centre – decontamination also in Aliens' Directorate:** a coronavirus infection was traced in a policewoman providing secretarial support at the Amygdaleza pre-removal centre. As soon as she was found positive, she was quarantined, including police officers working on the same shift. There was reportedly no infection among the detainees. The centre was decontaminated as a precautionary measure, as well as the detention areas and the facilities of the Aliens' Directorate in Petrou Ralli^{6 7}.

³ Official Governmental Gazette 986/22.03.2020. Emergency Response Measures for the prevention of COVID19 in the Reception and Identification Centers in Greece for the period 21.03.2020-21.04.2020. Decision Number: Δ1α/ΓΠ.οικ. 20030. Available at: <https://www.oenet.gr/online/oen/item/68438-lipsi-metron-sta-kentra-ypodoxis-kai-tautopoiisis-kata-tis-diasporas-tou-covid-19>

⁴ <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/235386>

⁵ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/250742/article/ekathimerini/news/mitsotakis-we-are-at-war-with-an-invisible-but-not-invincible-enemy>

⁶ <https://www.cnn.gr/news/ellada/story/211060/koronoios-exetazetai-os-ypopto-kroysma-ergazomeni-sto-kentro-kratisis-amygdalezas>

⁷ https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/235207_koronoios-kathisyhazoy-n-gia-toys-prosfyges-stin-amygdaleza



- Vice-Governor for Public Health issued a statement calling on all residents to take necessary precautions to avoid a spread of Covid-19, and on RICs' directors to have third country nationals restricted within the camps. Responding to that statement, the Migration Ministry's press office issued an announcement saying that all competent Ministries have been systematically monitoring the developments. As for islands' RICs, these cannot operate as closed centres, it is explained, while adding that for that reason – namely the protection of public order and health – the government has been urging for the creation of new closed centres and the closure of current RICs⁸. At the same time, there is no provision as to where they can be moved.
- IOM and UNHCR announced steps to suspend resettlement departures for refugees. This is a temporary measure that will remain in place for as long as it remains essential⁹.
- *Efimerida ton Syntakton* published an article suggesting that the government uses the pretext of coronavirus so as to **enforce its anti-refugee agenda based on detention, deterrence and deportations**¹⁰.
- Some 1,200 migrants held at Korinthos center launched a **hunger strike to protest for their detention and poor living conditions in the threat of the COVID-19 outbreak**¹¹.

Islands

The Director of the artificial kidney unit at Samos hospital urged for all five islands hosting RICs to get isolated for precautionary reasons, arguing that in case of a coronavirus diaspora among local societies, then third country nationals will get infected causing a second wave of the pandemic. As a result, the local health system will collapse, he stressed¹².

Lesvos

The news of a confirmed case of Covid-19 on the Lesvos have sparked fears of the impact of an outbreak at the RIC, where troubling conditions have worsened. Several NGOs were forced to reduce or close services over safety fears. At the same time, remaining medical organizations are overwhelmed and access to healthcare for asylum seekers and refugees is challenging.

The Union of Lesvos Doctors held an emergency meeting to discuss the expansion of Covid-19 and needed measures to be taken. Among them is the urgent decongestion of the island from refugees and migrants. In the meantime, a team of doctors should be sent to the island to inform refugees and migrants, bring necessary hygienic equipment and organize an action plan together with local competent bodies. At the same time, there should be urgent prevention and organization measures at hosting sites¹³.

⁸ <https://www.stonisi.gr/post/7629/ekklhsh-stoys-dioikhtes-twn-kyt-apo-ton-antiperifereiarxh-ygeias>

⁹ <https://www.news247.gr/koinonia/koronoios-anastelletai-i-epanekatastasi-ton-prosfigon.7604440.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/235743>

¹¹ <https://www.documentonews.gr/article/se-apergia-peinas-proxwrhsan-1200-aitoyntes-asylo-sto-kentro-krathshs-korinthoy>

¹² <https://www.samos24.gr/>

¹³ https://www.lesvospost.com/2020/03/blog-post_544.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook&fbclid=IwAR1_mn65A4m9PBPT-OnNE_Jia2pXBKPhrrYvQcr_uHrHFswFdggv9zmS1Cw

The leader of “Pyxida” municipal party, tabled a question on whether there is an action plan regarding a Covid-19 case at the local RIC (with its current population estimated at >20,000). The director of Mytilene Hospital, said that there is a plan, but bodies do not wish to discuss in detail¹⁴.

Amidst fears of a coronavirus spread at Moria RIC, a story was published on the abhorrent living conditions for the approximate 20,000 refugees and migrants, noting that those held at the pre-removal center have not even a drop of water to drink, while at the area reserved for minors, there is no shampoo and not a single person to operate the washing machines. Those who lost their “house” after the latest fire, had nowhere to spend the night. The majority of NGO workers have left the island following the surge in racist attacks and threats by locals. Thus, it is of paramount importance to take precautions, set up a clinic and proceed with all much-needed measures to deal with the coronavirus. If not, we will be faced with a tragedy¹⁵.



Chios

“Chiaki Simpoliteia” issued a statement denouncing the detention of refugees and migrants under dire conditions posing challenges for public health, currently accentuated due to the coronavirus. It was stressed that while schools, universities, sports facilities remain closed, thousands of refugees are left at the mercy of weather conditions without hygiene standards. It was noted that approximately 100 people remain at the port of Chios while the container offered for the accommodation of women and children will be removed posing risks for their lives. “Chiaki Simpoliteia” appealed to the Municipality for the provision of roofed facilities to host these people¹⁶.

Vice-Governor for Public Health addressed the Medical Association of Chios requested the set-up of an outpatient clinic outside the RIC in order to prevent refugees and migrants from going to hospital. He noted that the outpatient clinic will provide basic medical services while it will operate with medical staff currently at VIAL¹⁷.

Leros – Kos

Regional Governor of Southern Aegean stated in his social media that he has asked the gov’t for current open accommodation sites on Leros and Kos to turn into closed sites, in the framework of coronavirus management measures¹⁸. Upon the order of Kos Mayor, a private security company has been employed at the RIC in Pyli to avoid the exit and movement of refugees, migrants so as to reportedly secure the health of Pyli and Kos residents in general¹⁹.

¹⁴ <https://www.stonisi.gr/post/7561/yparxei-sxedio-mystiko-an-yparksei-kroysma-sth-moria-video>

¹⁵ <https://www.koutipandoras.gr/article/i-moria-ehei-egkataleifthei-stin-tyhi-tis>

¹⁶ <https://astraparis.gr/na-metaferthoy-n-oi-prosfyges-apo-to-limani-kai-tin-vial-se-asfaleis-domes/>

¹⁷ <https://tvpatriida.gr/exoteriko-iatreio-sti-vial-gia-tin-aposymforisi-toy-nosokomeioy-kai-ton-periorismo-metakiniseon/>

¹⁸ <https://www.protothema.gr/koronoios-live/article/985631/koronoios-na-ginoun-kleistis-oi-domes-metanaston-zita-o-perifereiarhis-notiou-aigaiou/>

¹⁹ https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaionomata/235602_metra-kata-ton-prosfygon-kai-ohi-kata-tis-pandimias

State Response

Following the official guidance by the government on the necessary measures and actions to protect the population against COVID 19/coronavirus, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum has provided to all RICs, accommodation sites and the Asylum Service the following guidance for the protection of people residing in them, as well as the employees.



Credit: Efsyn.gr

More specifically:

- All the visits of persons/actors as well as their activities within the RICs and sites are suspended for 14 days. Entry is only allowed to the staff.
- Compulsory temperature taking of new arrivals and any other action deemed useful and necessary by competent local authorities.
- Two announcements daily on virus prevention guidance in Arabic, Farsi, English, French, Greek and / or in other languages understood by the facility's residents.
- Display of informative posters by EODY in Arabic, Farsi, English, French, Greek and / or in other languages understood by the facility's residents.
- Compliance with general hygiene rules with daily cleaning of indoor communal spaces with detergents and disinfectants as well as continuous disinfection of the doorknobs of these spaces.
- Following the official announcement for the closure of school units and in consultation with the refugee education coordinators, the operation of all levels of non-formal education facilities is suspended.
- Cessation for 14 days of all activities in indoors spaces for the host population with the view to prevent their gathering and interaction (sports facilities, libraries, etc.).
- Cessation of the meetings in closed spaces by actors operating in the sites.
- Close cooperation with EODY and compliance with its guidance in relation with issues of Public Health.
- In order to reduce the risk of the occurrence and spread of coronavirus within the Centres and Sites, residents are kindly requested FOR THE NEXT 2 WEEKS to minimize unnecessary movements both within and outside the centre and to only move when necessary and for a serious reason.
- During food distribution (for RICs), the following should be considered (a) the possibility to call residents to receive their meals in groups and / or (b) distribution of all meals once per day.
- Operation of special confinement spaces in each RIC.

It is noted that all the above instructions are interpreted in the spoken languages and communicated to the population residing in the Reception and Identification Centres and the accommodation sites. Updating of these guidelines will be ongoing, in co-operation with all co-competent ministries²⁰.

²⁰ <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/235524>



The measures also include the suspension of all special activities and facilities in the camp like schools, libraries and exercise areas, while new arrivals will be checked for a fever and other symptoms of Covid-19 at the door and confined to quarantine if found to be ailing. Camp residents will further be discouraged from venturing outside the facilities – even for getting supplies – but also from circulating within them without good reason²¹.

Following the above, the new Deputy Civil Protection issued a related press release as regards new measures at the RICs in the framework of restricting the spread of coronavirus to the population staying at islands' overcrowded RICs:

1. New arrivals after March 1st remain outside current RICs, to avoid the risk of spreading the coronavirus. In the coming days, they will be transferred to closed sites on the mainland.
2. Movement of people residing at the RICs will be restricted for a period of 30 days. Their movement to the urban centers to cover their basic needs will be controlled. More specifically, they will be able to move in limited groups every hour to the neighboring urban centers between 7am to 7pm. These groups of people will consist of one member per family. The coordination and control of this movement will be carried out by the police, and they will only use public transport means of controlled and limited circulation. Wherever this is feasible, provision of food to RICs residents through phone orders will be prioritized.
3. The turning of the RICs on Kos and Leros into closed sites will begin immediately, following the letter of the Regional Governor of Southern Aegean.
4. The completion procedure of the new closed center on Samos is being sped up, in a smaller piece of land in relation to initial planning, following a recent decision of the municipal council, closing down in parallel the open facility in Vathy.
5. The process to set up special health units inside the RICs has already started, which will include medical offices, isolation spaces for sick people in order to prevent and respond to any possible infected cases. It is noted that there has been no incident of infection from coronavirus inside the RICs until today.
6. All visits of people/organizations have been suspended, as well as their activities inside the RICs and accommodation sites. Entry is only allowed to staff²².

Media also report that Greek authorities have suspended all transfers of prisoners between penitentiaries as part of broader efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus and are considering the early release of those serving time for minor offenses in a bid to ease congestion and further lessen the chances of transmission²³.

Police will begin in the coming days car and motorcycle patrols with loudspeakers in Athens and other big cities to inform citizens that public gatherings of more than ten people are banned²⁴.

The President of the Germany's Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, Gunte Yansen, asked from the federal government and the EU to draft emergency plans so as to help Greece should there be a COVID-19 pandemic at its overcrowded refugee camps. She also stressed the need to send medical and pharmaceutical products as well as protective equipment and materials.²⁵

²¹ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/250739/article/ekathimerini/news/migrant-camps-on-islands-put-on-lockdown>

²² <https://www.presspublica.gr/a-se-atypi-karantina-vazei-i-kyvernisi-toys-prosfyges-kai-metanastes-sta-nisia/>

²³ <https://thepressproject.gr/kratitiria-fylakes-hotspot-apo-chori-agonias-simera-kindynevoun-na-ginoun-chori-martyriou-avrio/>

²⁴ <https://www.skai.gr/news/greece/peripolies-me-megafona-apo-tin-elas-gia-tis-synathroiseis-anakoinoseis-kai-sta-aravika>

²⁵ <https://www.amna.gr/home/article/441506/l-proedros-tis-Epitropis-Anthropinon-Dikaiomaton-kai-Anthropistikis-Boitheias-tis-Bundestag-uper-schedion-ektaktis-anagkis-sta-kentra-prosfugon-stin-Ellada>



Advocacy

NGOs in Greece and France have been urging the respective countries to enforce emergency measures for the protection of refugees and migrants, especially for unaccompanied minors, in the context of the current coronavirus outbreak. In France, 24 organizations, including Doctors of the World and Refugee Rights Europe, addressed a letter to the government and Mayors demanding immediate measures to address the unacceptable conditions of refugees, including lack of shelter, absence of hygiene standards, anxiety, cold, distress. In Greece, organizations sent a letter to Greek and EU leaders asking for the immediate support of refugee families and minors, who reached the country over the past few weeks, stressing that children are not protected²⁶.

Doctors of the World and MSF stressed the need to protect public health, including all population groups. They noted that the real solution for the protection of those living or working at islands' RIC is the immediate decongestion and transfer to proper structures on the mainland. These could be hotels or apartments, where one can avoid overcrowding. Despite intensive efforts made by MSF on Samos and Lesbos, hygiene standards are dire and unless there is a proper plan to collectively manage the issue, we will be facing a pandemic. Program Director Apostolos Veizis wondered to whom one can say "wash your hands", when there is one tap for 1,500 people. And how they can "stay at home" when they have no place to stay. The same worries are raised by Evgenia Thanou, Director General of Doctors of the World, who waits to see how isolation areas could work at the RIC, while stressing the importance of properly briefing the refugee, migrant population²⁷.

Nikitas Kanakis, of Doctors of the World, told MEGA TV that the current COVID-19 crisis shows the failure of the anti-vaccination movement. He then called for homeless and refugees to be included in coronavirus talks/measures, stressing that the "stay at home" motto cannot be applied by all²⁸.

MDM-GREECE RESPONSE

Since last week, Mdm-Greece has been contacted by the Greek Ministry of Health in view of launching a coordinated and complementary response. MsF and Red Cross have also joined hands.

Loyal to its medical and humanitarian mandate, Mdm-Greece continues operations targeting the most vulnerable as follows:

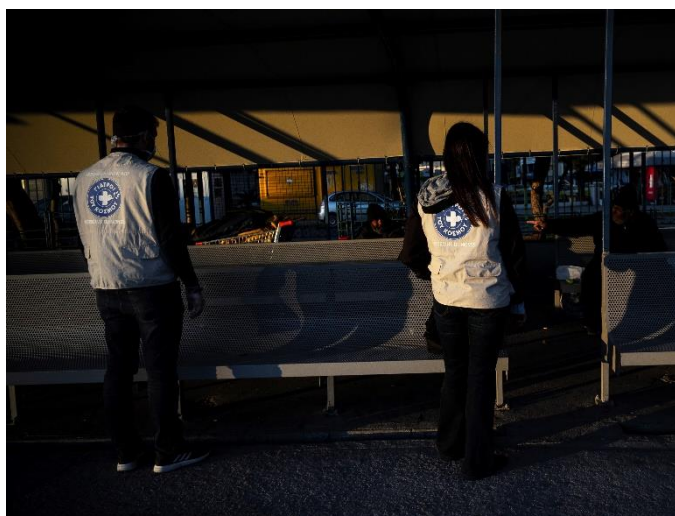
²⁶ <https://www.in.gr/2020/03/18/greece/ekklisi-organoseon-stin-ee-en-meso-epidimias-lavete-metra-gia-tous-prosfyges/>

²⁷ https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaionomata/235602_metra-kata-ton-prosfygon-kai-ohi-kata-tis-pandimias

²⁸ <https://www.megatv.com/megagegonota/article.asp?catid=27369&subid=2&pubid=38560795>

Homeless:

MdM-Greece has already **deployed street-work teams** in Athens and Piraeus aiming to assist and support those who have no home to stay into. The Mobile teams are distributing hygiene kits (soap, antiseptics, gloves, masks) while they are also spreading information and messages to people that have no access to information. MdM-Greece already maintains an extensive mapping of homeless and drug-users' gatherings and meeting points as well as ground relations with this population forged on its ongoing street work component and long standing intervention "Streets of Athens". MdM- Greece is in dire need of funding to cover staff, medicines and operational costs in order to sustain and expand this activity.



Hotline & Interface: MdM-Greece assesses the possibilities of operating a hotline emergency line and the option of a web-based platform in order to keep on informing people on the health protocols, prevention actions etc that need to be followed also according to the MoH's relevant announcements. MdM-Greece is in need of funding in order to support staff and operational costs.



ROMA:

Particular fears have been expressed with regards to ROMA settlements and populations around Greece in view of the pandemic.

MdM-Greece is working with ROMA people, supporting communities' social empowerment and accountability in the area of Dendroptamos in the vicinity of Thessaloniki. Since last week, in cooperation with its local partner, the ROMA women's association of Dentropotamos, MdM-Greece has actively supported the population in terms of advocacy and info sharing: A letter dully signed by the Director General of the organization, making specific reference to relevant national law provisions and articles, has been sent to local



Mayors and respective authorities including the vice-governor of Central Macedonia Region, the Secretary General for Social Solidarity and Poverty alleviation and the Secretary General of EODY/ MoH. Following its submission, the Secretary General for Social Solidarity dispatched specific instructions in regards to ROMA populations' protection to all respective Municipalities and Regions.

MdM-Greece has also translated the COVID-19 related instructions and protocols circulated by the Government in Romanes in order to make them more accessible to ROMA people understanding only the Romanes dialect.

MdM-Greece is in need of additional funding in order to distribute hygiene kits to ROMA populations in Dendropotamos and the surrounding areas. As well, additional funding is required in order to disinfect/spray some of the makeshift settlements.

Moreover, MdM-Greece has received a request on behalf of ELLAN PASSE, that is the Panhellenic ROMA union/association, requesting for additional support. As the organization presently experiences shortages in hygiene material such as disinfectants etc. additional provision are urgently required in order to correspond to the request.

Refugees and Migrants:

As described above, the situation is of particular concern. MdM-Greece is present in Lesvos with UNHCR funding but much more is required in order to correspond to this new situation: additional staff and operational costs, material costs (disinfectants and medical consumables, medicines for chronic patients) are urgently needed in order to scale up prevention and protection measures for staff and beneficiaries.

Challenges & Risks:

Distance management and coordination are becoming even more challenging in light of the pandemic. Additional admin, communications and IT costs are required in order to rapidly and efficiently correspond to the situation.

As days go by, **medical staff is getting exhausted**. In case there is a rapid increase of cases, there are evident fears that the **Greek Health system will not be able to manage and will collapse under pressure**.

Specialist doctors, nurses and modern medical equipment are the main components of the intensive care unit (ICU) where a significant number of patients win the battle for life. In Greece, ICUs suffer from understaffing: **20% of the ICUs beds remains closed** due to this reason. High dependency Units (HDUs) are "non-existent". The above were stressed during a press conference, in the context of the 17th Panhellenic Conference of Intensive Care representatives of the Hellenic Society for Intensive Care (ΕΕΕΘ)²⁹. As they said, we have about **750 ICU beds and 680 are open**. "It is characteristic that in Greece, in the last 20 years there are **2.2 nurses per bed, when the ratio at European level is 5-6 nurses per bed**", while the **waiting time for the patient's admission to the ICU is 24 hours in Athens and 2-4 hours in Thessaloniki**, stressed the President of the ΕΕΕΘ, Prof. Anastasia Kotanidou³⁰.

It is also to be noted that while the percentage of patients that survive after hospitalization in ICUs is as high as 75%, it should be highlighted that of crucial importance is also the existence of a **system of timely reception** of patients that remains a grave challenge in Greece.

²⁹ <https://www.newsbeast.gr/health/arthro/4207538/oi-monades-entatikis-therapeias-stin-ellada-paschoyn>

³⁰ Idem