

Alert / Update

Europe (Greece, Hungary, Serbia)

Support to Refugees and Migrants in Europe

Geneva, 3 August 2016

1. Brief description of the emergency and impact

Since the beginning of 2015 a mass influx of people seeking asylum in Europe or a better life have been travelling into Europe in increasing numbers. The number of asylum seekers has constantly risen from a few thousand in 2014 to over a million entering Europe in 2015. While the number of people entering Europe via the Balkans has fallen since the second quarter of 2016, there are still significant numbers of people arriving daily in countries along the route. Many people are now staying in the countries of arrival in Europe and not moving further, which has caused both governments and NGOs to respond to new needs or respond to the needs in a different way (at least in the semi-long term), including more integration, education and other services.

Refugees and migrants arrive from countries of armed conflict, deep poverty, or social unrest, like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and African countries. Many come through the Balkan countries of Greece, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, but since the countries along that route began to close their borders and since the EU and Turkey made a deal to authorise deportations, we are seeing increasing numbers arriving in Italy. Of the 256,000 people who arrived in 2016, a high number of 22,500 people arrived in Italy in June, 24% more than in May¹. In light of this, ACT Alliance members will need to monitor closely the situation and be ready to respond to the unmet needs. Although Government authorities have scaled up their capacities, they are unable to handle all the needs. Serbia, Hungary and Greece now have significant populations of vulnerable people – many of whom will not be able to continue their journey into Europe – as well as face the probability of future arrivals.

At the time of writing, refugees who crossed the Aegean Sea to Greece are not able to officially travel on to other Balkan countries. Some are choosing to make the journey illegally, perhaps using traffickers which puts them at considerable personal risk. More than 20,100 refugees and migrants have been pre-registered and are accommodated in Greece in 53 formal and informal refugee sites. Those who are currently in Greece have found that the legal systems to ensure they are registered and have access to information have been slow to function adequately and preference has been given to Syrian nationals.

In Hungary officials estimate that approximately 1,500 people entered illegally since a new regulation called “depth border controls” has been introduced by Hungarian authorities along the Serbian and Croatian state border on 4 July. This control means that those migrants who are caught within a distance of eight kilometres from the border are taken back to Transit Zones (TZs). As a result of this new mechanism, the number of people constantly waiting at the TZs has increased (650-700 people), while

¹ Source : Frontex.

the number of illegal border crossing decreased. Reception centres are also operating at their full capacities.

In Serbia, there are over 3,500 refugees and migrants as of the day of writing (over 1,000 on the west Serbian border, around 800 in Belgrade and over 1,500 on the border with Hungary) with around 300 per day arriving in July. People traffickers are operating openly and the authorities have struggled to monitor and apprehend those responsible. People are arriving in the Presevo camp in often poor health (there are currently 150 people in the camp). Most are choosing to continue their journey, and at night there are about 600 people sleeping in Belgrade's parks waiting for an opportunity to cross one of the borders.

2. Why is an ACT response needed?

ACT Alliance members have been responding to this situation for over a year, supporting their governments to manage a situation that has been overwhelming. Much has been done in Hungary, Serbia and Greece by the authorities to respond. Besides, Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA), the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), in cooperation with Apostoli, and Philanthropy have played a critical role in helping the authorities and other civil society actors to establish camps, provide life-saving amenities and services and assist in the coordination and planning for the response alongside others. Being national organisations, they are uniquely positioned to anticipate the gaps in what their governments can provide and work efficiently, using local staff with insightful knowledge of the context.

At present there is still a need for NGOs to provide auxiliary support to their governments, as the human capacity and infrastructure is insufficient to respond and there is a risk that the fluctuations in this crisis may continue. Plus, as temperatures drop over autumn and winter, critical needs to be addressed will further arise. Shelter, food and protection particularly will become even more important, especially if the trend for informal migration continues.

3. National and international response

There has been a considerable international response to the crisis. Many international agencies such as the Red Cross, the UN and large INGOs have been working across the Balkans. Many governments have made funding available for the crisis as has the European Commission, which has made available 700 million EUR. This has bolstered the responses of national governments who have approached the fast-changing situation with commitment, but at times without the resources and/or experience.

4. ACT Alliance response

ADVOCACY: Christian Aid (CA) proposed for an ACT Alliance staff member to be present in Brussels and be a point person for common advocacy. This person was recruited by ACT Alliance EU in May 2016 and has been playing a critical role in helping to keep ACT members abreast of political developments in Brussels as well as sharing joint advocacy initiatives.

SERBIA: Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) is a new member of the ACT Alliance, and was not part of the last appeal, but has – with the bilateral partnership and donations of other ACT Alliance members (HEKS-EPER, NCA, DKH, ELCA and Bread for the World) – responded to the crisis, focusing on delivery of food, NFIs, medical services, protection, legal aid, support to shelters (maintenance, renovation and beds), etc. EHO is implementing its activities in Vojvodina and Belgrade.

Philanthropy distributed: food parcels, hot meals and fresh fruit and reached approximately 60,000 people; hygiene kits for 2,000 people; winter clothes for 6,500 adults and 2,500 children, and food, baby care and clothes for 1,500 babies. Philanthropy also hired staff to provide admin and legal support and

reached approximately 310,000 people. In Presevo and registration points in Zajecar, Philanthropy rented toilet and shower containers that have been used by approx. 300,000 persons.

HUNGARY: Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA)'s key activities and response to the crisis have been: aid distribution of NFIs, food and hygiene services, psycho-social support for children, awareness raising talk for adults and ensuring interpretation services for adults in legal processes helping the liaison between the refugees and Office of Immigration and Nationality.

GREECE: Since May 2015, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in cooperation with Apostoli, the humanitarian arm of the Archdiocese of Athens of the Greek Orthodox Church, has been responding to the refugee crisis. IOCC/Apostoli have met short and medium-term needs of refugees and migrants living in refugee sites, with a focus on food, NFIs, shelter (including provision of bunk beds and repairs to accommodation sites) and WASH. Activities have been carried out on the islands of Chios, Samos and Kos, and in Attika (greater Athens).

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) has implemented WASH services with IOCC/Apostoli in the Attica region. Water and sanitation facilities have been installed, and hygiene promotion provided in existing and planned camp locations such as Malakasa, Agios Andreas and Oinofyta. Currently, work is starting up in Lavrio and Elefsina. Assessment of needs and gaps will take place in additional locations in north Greece in August 2016 as there are large gaps in more remote locations. NCA seek to work with approximately 5,000 beneficiaries on access to adequate WASH services in Greece by end of 2016.

Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH), through local non-ACT partners, provided over 180,000 hot meals and clothes for refugees and migrants in Idomeni as well as shelter and food aid for more than 40,000 people in Kos and Leros. A day care centre for refugees and local poor communities will open in Thessaloniki in early September.

5. Planned activities

CA

- ACT Alliance policy and advocacy

EHO

- Food distribution
- WASH
- NFI distribution (all ages and gender)
- Subsidiary support for shelters
- Health services
- Protection/Advocacy

Philanthropy

- Food distribution (hot meals, fruit, food parcels)
- NFI distribution (clothes and footwear for adults and children)
- WASH (personal hygiene distribution, facilities hygiene material, engagement cleaning personal)
- Cash cards distribution
- Shelter (pellet for camps)
- Protection (engagement psycho-social, legal and administrative support and advisers)

HIA

- 6 psycho-social occasions for children
- Awareness raising talks for adult refugees

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The ACT Alliance secretariat is certified with the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership's 2010 HAP Standard for accountability and quality management.

- Interpretation services for adult refugees

IOCC/Apostoli

- Provision of pre-paid grocery cards for food and non-food needs
- Establishment of communal kitchens within the refugee sites
- Education: non formal education in Apostoli's after-school children's centres, fostering integration between refugees and local children
- Assistance to local communities impacted by the Greek financial crisis: provision of pre-paid grocery cards for food/non-food needs (in some areas refugees will receive pre-paid cards)

NCA

- WASH (access to water and sanitation facilities plus awareness on how to make optimal use of these; as well as awareness of key WASH related health risks and take action to prevent these)

6. Constraints

The most challenging feature of this response is the difficulty in anticipating forthcoming events. Agencies have to be well-prepared to provide assistance to people arriving in high numbers at short notice, particularly if the EU-Turkey agreement fails. With the borders now closed increasingly, people are travelling irregularly or illegally and the routes taken have been subject to sudden changes.

Another challenge is the difficulty in reaching those waiting at the Transit Zones or between borders to enter certain countries like Hungary or Serbia which – due to legal regulations – is difficult for NGOs to enter. Similarly, those choosing to travel with traffickers are difficult to approach or track.

Coordination between agencies in the sectors as well as coordination with relevant authorities is not always functioning well. So information disseminated might not fit the reality on the ground. Presence and close assessment of locations are needed in order to provide relevant support to the refugees.

The Greek army and Ministry of Interior are identifying suitable locations for new sites. However, bureaucratic constraints including planning regulations for sites, permissions from the military, building permissions, as well as labour law, slow implementation and lead to lack of timely service delivery.

Refugees are scattered in 53 sites in Greece, of various types and sizes. Some are away from urban centres which complicates access to services and establishing necessary infrastructure, some are unsuitable. Sites are changeable and sites (including those where adequate conditions are finalised) can be closed by authorities at short notice creating a lack of uncertainty. It is possible that some refugees may choose to move locations, complicating implementation.

Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to the Head of Finance and Administration, Line Hempel (Line.Hempel@actalliance.org).

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