



Winter is here. We must act, now

Refugees' health at increasing risk in Greek camps

Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World), the international medical NGO, raises the alarm over the health conditions of refugees in Greek camps caused by plummeting winter temperatures. Mdm calls upon the EU, UN and the Greek government to work harder and faster to get these people out of the cold and upon European countries to meet their human responsibilities by providing decent places for them to live.

In the last three weeks, night-time temperatures have plummeted at the camps we work at in. Some camps in the North have already experienced lows of -7° to -4°, and worse is predicted across the country as winter draws on.

These temperatures would be bad enough for people living in houses, but these men, women and children are sleeping in tents, in unheated camps, where the unreliable electricity supply means even the few lucky enough to own personal heaters, cannot stay warm long.

The implications now winter has arrived, are clear.

“In the past two months, we have already been seeing more children and older people with respiratory infections due to exposure to cold and humidity. The trend appears clearly in our data. Respiratory infections for October and November account for 31% of our consultations.” Doctor Nikolaos Marinos, medical coordinator Mdm, confirms.

“For some, this endangers their lives, as exposure to cold can trigger an asthmatic crisis or result in severe pneumonia, with potential complications. In the latter case, the percentage has almost doubled during the past two months.

“The risk is heightened even further because people in the camps are living in extremely small spaces, often alongside 4-5 others, and in very close contact to other individuals and families. Thus, the risk of epidemics within the camp populations is very high.”

And this only adds to the fact that, without heaters, people are already risking their lives to try to stay warm. One woman and her two children were badly burned at Oreokastro camp, in the North of the country, in a fire caused by them using cooking equipment to try to warm themselves.

And, as temperatures drop, and desperation rises, the risk increases.





Ahmed, a refugee from A'zaz, Syria, who now lives at Redestos camp, a warehouse in Northern Greece, said: *“The only thing we could do when the weather is so cold is to light fires. It is dangerous and spreads smoke. So we lit fires outside. But when we went back inside it was still too cold to sleep, so we had to light fires inside as well. We have never seen living conditions so bad. We did not think we would be left this way.”*

Doctor Marinos confirms: *“We must not forget long-term impacts to the respiratory system from inhalation of smoke or other toxic material, due to campfires from peoples’ efforts to stay warm and the impact on their, already deteriorating, mental health status. From a medical perspective, this is absolutely unacceptable”.*

Médecins du Monde is doing everything it can to prevent a human catastrophe here. *“The Greek government, the EU and UNHCR have made considerable efforts to improve living conditions in the camps, but it is not enough; it’s far from enough”*, confirms [redacted], general-director of MDM [redacted] *“Greece is in the midst of its own major crisis. We cannot expect it to deal with Europe’s refusal to accept refugees, as well. All European countries must act now and take their fair share of people from Greece. Nothing more, nothing less.”*

[Your country here], has welcomed just [number y] people in the last nine months, out of a total of [number z] that our country was foreseen by EU Council Decisions to receive. **SEE NATIONAL FIGURES BELOW**

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Médecins du Monde’s international network, led by MdM Greece, offers access to free and qualitative healthcare to refugees and migrants when they arrive on the Aegean islands and mainland Greece, according to the ever-changing needs and the new sites that are being created. Moreover, the essential needs of refugees are covered by ensuring access to free first aid kits, and in some cases, through food, clothing, blankets and sleeping bags distribution ad hoc.

The main duties of MdM in all its interventions include medical examination, provision of healthcare services and medicines, psychosocial support, identification of vulnerable groups, referral of vulnerable groups to social welfare bodies, distribution of first aid items, interpretation.

Currently, MdM works in 28 sites all over Greece.

The figures are as follows:

In the case of Sweden, no pledge was made and none was necessary.

Switzerland offered by herself to receive 130 people.

State	Foreseen in EU Council Decisions	Effectively Relocated
Belgium	2.415	177



Cyprus	181	42
France	12.599	1.924
Germany	17.209	196
Netherlands	3.797	629
Portugal	1.778	445
Spain	6.647	348
<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>28</i>