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Fires at the Moria camp on Lesbos | Manolis Lagoutaris/AFP via Getty Images

## Fires destroy Moria refugee camp on Lesbos

The overcrowded facility was housing nearly 13,000 people.

By **NEKTARIA STAMOULI** | 9/9/20, 10:01 AM CET | Updated 9/9/20, 10:03 AM CET

**ATHENS** — Thousands of refugees and migrants were forced to flee the overcrowded Moria camp on the Greek island of Lesbos after multiple fires erupted overnight and razed much of the site.

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The fires broke out shortly after midnight in several places in the camp. By Wednesday morning, most of the containers and tents as well as other facilities had been burned to the ground. A few spots were still burning inside the camp, fire brigade officials said.

Police said the 12,500 people living in the camp were now on the road heading to the island's capital Mytilene, carrying the personal belongings they were able to rescue from the fire. Riot police were deployed to block their way.

The camp is “probably totally destroyed,” Migration Ministry official Manos Logothetis told the state-run Athens News Agency.

There were no reports of fatalities or injuries. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called a crisis meeting with ministers, the head of the Greek armed forces and the head of the national intelligence service early on Wednesday.

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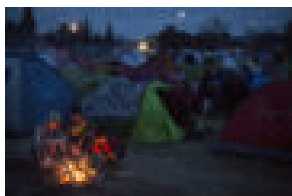
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“Moria has the capacity to house some 3,000 people but was sheltering people more than four times its capacity in abysmal conditions.”

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European Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas said on Twitter he spoke with Mitsotakis this morning about the fire and “assured him that the European Commission is ready to assist Greece directly at all levels during these difficult times.”

“My thoughts and sympathies are with the people of Lesbos and in particular the migrants and staff working in Moria,” Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson tweeted. “I have already agreed to finance the immediate transfer and accommodation on the mainland of the remaining 400 unaccompanied children and teenagers.”



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Moria has the capacity to house some 3,000 people but was sheltering people more than four times its capacity in abysmal conditions, with many of them sleeping rough or in tents.

The facility was placed under quarantine last week after authorities confirmed that an asylum seeker had tested positive for the coronavirus. The Migration Ministry said on Tuesday that confirmed cases in Moria had risen to 35 and that the affected people were kept in isolation in an area inside the camp with their families.

Migrants and refugees in camps throughout Greece have had their movements restricted since Athens imposed a country-wide lockdown in late March. The restrictive measures were eased for Greek citizens in early May, but are still in place for migrants and refugees.

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Aid groups and international organizations have repeatedly warned that social distancing and basic hygiene measures are impossible to implement in the overcrowded camps. They have accused the government of using the pandemic as an excuse to effectively detain migrants and refugees.

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