

— Greece

All people in Moria camp must be evacuated to safety in wake of destructive fire

Project Update | 9 September 2020

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Nearly 12,000 men, women and children have been forced to evacuate Moria refugee camp, on the island of Lesbos, Greece, after a fire tore through the camp during the night of 8 September. While the fire is not believed to have caused any deaths, the camp was almost completely burned down, and people are now on the streets, with nowhere to stay. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) urges Greek and EU authorities to immediately evacuate people off the island to safety.

“Our teams saw the fire spread across Moria and rage all night long. The whole place was engulfed in flames, we saw an exodus of people from a burning hell with no direction,” says Marco Sandrone, MSF field coordinator in Lesbos. “Children were scared, and parents are in shock. We are relieved that there seem to be no victims and we are working now to address the immediate needs of the people.”



An MSF staff member watches as fire tears through Moria refugee camp, which was virtually destroyed. Lesbos, Greece, 8 September 2020.

MSF/MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES (MSF)

All medical services available for the refugees and asylum seekers have been interrupted, including services at the MSF paediatric clinic.

Almost five years of trapping people in dire conditions has led to tensions and despair. This has only increased over the last five months due to restricted movements in the camp, hastily justified as a public health measure amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the recent confirmation of positive cases of COVID-19 among the camp's residents, the increasing restrictions on people have made the situation unbearable.



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AURELIE PONTHEIU, MSF HUMANITARIAN ADVISOR ON DISPLACEMENT

MSF has been pushing the Greek health and migration authorities to set up an adequate COVID-19 response plan for Moria, that counts on people's collaboration and which offers dignity to the sick and to those who are infectious.



Moria camp residents pick their way through the remains of the camp, destroyed in a fire. Lesbos, Greece, 9 September 2020.

MSF/MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES (MSF)

“The Greek authorities have failed to put such a response in place, and the EU and other EU member states have disclaimed responsibility and have done close to nothing to resolve this situation,” says Aurelie Ponthieu, MSF Humanitarian Advisor on Displacement. “The years-long orchestration of human suffering and violence produced by European and Greek migration policies are to blame for the fire, and we can only hope that the same system of inhumane containment will not be reborn from the ashes in Moria.”

MSF calls on the Greek authorities to immediately adopt an emergency response plan and to evacuate all these people to a safe place on the mainland or to other European countries. We are ready to provide the support that is needed during the emergency response.

ensured

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The authorities have reportedly starting testing in the camp) and one unnecessary enforcement of a mass quarantine lockdown. If the Greek government is going to be accountable for its duty of care, it needs to urgently implement the other public health measures – or entirely evacuate all in Moria to safer places – rather than rely on a mass quarantine that will inevitably cause additional suffering while bringing absolutely no public health benefits to any one. In addition, if these people are still trapped, and are now contained by a police cordon. With a positive case confirmed in Moria, it is essential that these people are moved from the camp to safe accommodation now. To not do so would be a

clear dereliction of the Greek authorities' duty of care.

“Apparently, the local health authorities have started testing the residents of the camp for COVID-19, but that is a fraction of what needs to be done,” says Caroline Willemen, MSF field coordinator for COVID-19 on Greek police enforce unwarranted and cruel quarantine of Moria camp on Lesbos

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“Right now in Moria, there are elderly people with underlying health conditions, pregnant women, as well as children who are afraid and are being exposed to more trauma as a result of this policy,” continues Willemen. “The government should be protecting these people, but instead by keeping them hemmed in with COVID-19 in the camp, they are exposing them.”

CORONAVIRUS COVID-19 PANDEMIC REFUGEES, IDPS AND PEOPLE ON THE MOVE GREECE



The Greek Government is enforcing an ill-considered and potentially very damaging and harmful quarantine on Moria camp for migrants and asylum seekers with COVID-19 in Lesbos, Greece. This sort of mass quarantine must be avoided at all cost. Above all, such restrictive measures can never be a fig leaf to cover up a lack of comprehensive strategy to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in the camp and protect what is left of peoples’ dignity.

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CAROLINE WILLEMEN, MSF FIELD COORDINATOR

Anyone engaged in public health knows that a comprehensive approach is needed rather than quarantine, particularly when COVID-19 is evidently already spreading outside of the camp. Moria makes a public health’s response during outbreaks not successful. The public health response for the asylum seekers of Moria, not to imprison them in their hellish conditions as a way of pretending to protect the island from the spread of the virus.

- ensuring proper information and collaboration of the community;
- ensuring basic hygiene measures are as accessible as possible for all;
- underlying health conditions put them at serious risk from COVID-19. For months, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and other organisations have been calling for the total evacuation of all the residents of Moria camp, with mass testing agency to move these particularly medically vulnerable people to safe accommodation on Lesbos, the mainland or other EU states.
- isolation and treatment of the positive cases;

- contact tracing; and
- quarantine only in places where minimum standards are in place and where medical follow-up can be ensured.

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