

'Robust action' required to assist growing number of refugees on Greek islands – UN

8 September 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency today urged “robust action” to improve conditions on Greece’s eastern Aegean islands, where the number of new refugee arrivals increased last month.

“In August, there have been 3,695 sea arrivals compared to 2,249 in July,” [said](#) Cécile Pouilly, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), at a press briefing in Geneva.

“While there has been progress to date, UNHCR is calling for robust action to improve conditions in reception facilities. We are also calling for the urgent deployment of additional national services staff, especially in the areas of health, psychosocial support and protection of unaccompanied children,” she added.

According to UNHCR, the situation is most worrying on Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Leros, which have received the largest number of arrivals, including many children. More than half come from conflict-hit Syria and Iraq.

The full management of the response to the refugee situation on the islands is being transferred from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations to the Greek authorities.

Calling it “a challenging period,” Ms. Pouilly said that arrivals on Lesbos, Samos and Leros have outpaced the rate at which people are being authorized by the authorities to transfer to the mainland – further worsening already very challenging living conditions.

“Estimated departures for the mainland last month were 2,561 against 3,695 arrivals, based on data from the authorities,” she flagged.

In addition, conditions have affected the physical and mental health of many of the people who have been staying on the islands for months. The threat of violence, self-harm and sexual assault is extremely worrying and more security is needed, said the agency.

“The situation is most critical in Samos,” she said. “Despite the recent transfer of some 640 people to the mainland from the island, more than 1,900 people remain crammed into an area meant for 700 at the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Vathy. Among them there are more than 600 children – as well as pregnant women, serious medical cases and people with disabilities.”

UNHCR voiced concern at the growing risks to their health and welfare, due to water shortages and poor hygienic conditions. The agency has been providing aid, such as blankets, mats, sleeping bags, hygiene kits, baby care and

female dignity kits.

“On Chios,” Ms. Pouilly said, “there were more than 500 arrivals in August. The Vial RIC has over 1,100 people, including over 100 people without proper accommodation. Most are staying in containers and some new arrivals are in 12 tents recently installed by UNHCR.”

Some 180 people also remain at the municipality-run Souda site, which has long been earmarked for closure.

Speaking about Lesbos, she maintained that “tension remains high at the Moria RIC, which has been twice rocked by riots in recent weeks in protest at the slow pace of registration and asylum processing for certain nationalities, as well as the crowded conditions.”

In August, there were 1,052 arrivals on Lesbos, and over 700 in the first week of September. Lesbos hosts some 5,000 people.

Turning to Leros, Ms. Pouilly pointed out that “more than 290 arrivals were recorded in August, and the number of people on the island stood on Friday at 649. This puts a strain on capacity in understaffed Government-run sites, including Lepida RIC.”

UNHCR is helping the Greek Government to identify gaps in the transition period and continues providing targeted services in child protection, support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, relief items, transportation, and interpretation with a recent grant from the European Commission.

[On International Day, UN promotes online literacy in digital world](#)

8 September 2017 – New technologies open opportunities to improve lives and connect globally, but they can also marginalize those who are illiterate and lack other essential skills needed to navigate them, a senior United Nations official today said, highlighting that some 750 million adults worldwide are not literate.

“Traditionally, literacy has been considered a set of [reading, writing and counting skills](#) applied in a certain context. Digitally-mediated knowledge societies are changing what it means to be literate, calling for new and higher-level literacy skills,” said the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), Irina Bokova, in her message for International Literacy Day.

Marked annually on 8 September, the International Day this year is devoted to

better understanding the type of literacy required in a digital world to build more inclusive, equitable and sustainable societies.

In Paris, opening the International Conference on International Literacy Day, Ms. Bokova today said that technologies must be more accessible and work for people.

“First, they must be inclusive, bridging gaps, not deepening them. Second, they must be underpinned by respect for human rights and dignity. All this gives rise to new questions about the [meaning of literacy](#) today,” she said.

Also speaking at the event, Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, who is the UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development, emphasized that literacy in today’s world is at the heart of social participation and engagement.

“There is no inclusiveness if we leave behind 750 million people who lack the basic literacy skills to participate in today’s digital world,” she said. “There is no social cohesion if we allow young people to develop feelings of exclusion and lack of self-confidence.”

Most people who are illiterate around the world – more than 60 per cent – are women, according to UNESCO figures.

As part of this year’s events, UNESCO awarded its annual Confucius Prize for Literacy to The Citizens Foundation, a Pakistani literacy programme with an online platform for women and out-of-school girls. In 2016, the programme enrolled 14,020 girls and women, of whom nearly 80 per cent completed the curricula, per [information](#) on the winning organization. Local communities run nearly all of the Foundation’s 1,440 school units in the poorest slums and villages in the country.

The other winners this year are from Canada, Colombia, Jordan and South Africa.

[UN scales up response as 270,000 flee Myanmar into Bangladesh in two weeks](#)

8 September 2017 – The United Nations migration agency today confirmed that 270,000 people have fled violence in Myanmar for safety in Bangladesh over the past two weeks, and the number of new arrivals continues to increase.

Humanitarian agencies are deploying mobile medical teams, installing emergency latrines, providing water, and are distributing tarpaulins for basic shelter and food rations to new arrivals. But [much more is needed](#) and we are fast running out of stock, Margo Baars, who facilitates the

Inter Sector Coordination Group convened by the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)), said in a press release.

On Wednesday, at least 300 boats arrived in Cox's Bazar from Myanmar. Sea routes are particularly dangerous in this season of rough seas.

IOM said that new arrivals usually start by looking for space in the established makeshift settlements, where there are some services. But these are already full. Three new spontaneous settlements have sprung up in areas which still have very little services.

An estimated 130,000 of the new arrivals are now living in the registered refugee camps and three makeshift settlements of Kutupalong, Leda and Balukhali. Another 90,000 people are sheltering in host communities, and nearly 50,000 have settled in new spontaneous settlements.

IOM, which yesterday allocated \$1 million from its emergency funds to boost the humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar, is working with the government and partners to scale up its delivery of lifesaving aid – most importantly shelter, drinking water, food and medical assistance – to those most in need.

Separately, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund yesterday also announced a further \$7 million to help the thousands of destitute people who continue to flood into Bangladesh.

Most of the people now crossing the border are women, children and the elderly, many of whom are vulnerable and lack the ability to take care of themselves. There are also many pregnant and lactating women among the new arrivals.

Healthcare facilities are also struggling to provide adequate services as the number of people in need of emergency and basic health care continue to grow. Seven mobile health teams have been deployed to the spontaneous settlement areas, and IOM and partners are recruiting more doctors, nurses and midwives to increase the reach of the teams.

[Vital that users verify accuracy before hitting 'Share' button, UN meeting on combatting #fakenews told](#)

7 September 2017 – Amid the increasing proliferation of fake news and the resulting challenges in discerning accurate information from false ones, a United Nations forum today discussed ways to tackle the complex issue as well as equipping the consumers of information with the necessary skills and tools

to assess the credibility of any media message and news source.

“Today’s world is the most connected [one] through [the use of] social media and technology; we are oversaturated with news,” said Maher Nasser, the Director of the Outreach Division at the UN Department of Public Information, at the event *Unravelling #FakeNews from opinion-making information*, [organized](#) by the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).

In his remarks, Mr. Nasser spoke of the complexities in distinguishing accurate news from non-accurate ones, especially in an environment when algorithms, employed by social media platforms to present content to users, often depend on the users’ interactions with their circles and thereby create bubbles of existence.

Furthermore, the ease of sharing of information in today’s interlinked world adds a new dimension to these complex challenges, he added, underscoring the importance of users verifying the information – by looking through trusted sources and ascertaining their accuracy – before passing it on to their networks of friends and followers.

The event also included discussion on news literacy that saw the participation of Alan Miller, the Founder and CEO of News Literacy Project; Mitra Kalita, the Vice President of Programming at CNN Digital; Áine Kerr, Manager of Journalism Partnerships at Facebook; Dina Temple-Raston, Counterterrorism Correspondent at National Public Radio; and Michelle Ciulla Lipkin, Executive Director at the National Association for Media Literacy Education.

The discussion was moderated by Jordi Torrent, Project Manager of the Media Literacy Initiative at UNAOC.

Also on the subject of fake news, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) yesterday presented options to the Members of the European Parliament to counter the growing problem and its impact.

Highlighting the seriousness of disinformation and the deliberate discrediting of professional media, Guy Berger, the Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development at UNESCO, urged better protection of journalists and called for [investigation and prosecution in instances when purveyors of fake news are involved in fraud](#), such as misusing the names of reputable news brands.

He also called on the media to boost its credibility, through highlighting reliable brands and public service broadcasting, and to avoid advertising that has links to fake stories as well as to be more transparent about ownership and political leanings.

“In addition, journalists should do more to follow, debunk and tell the stories about the fake news phenomenon,” said Mr. Berger.

[UN, partners seek \\$106 million in humanitarian aid for drought-hit Kenya](#)

7 September 2017 – The United Nations and its humanitarian partners in Kenya today appealed for \$106 million to scale-up their response to the most urgent needs resulting from the egregious effects of the drought in northern Kenya.

“We as the UN family and the humanitarian community stand with the Government and people of Kenya to [address the devastating effects of the drought](#) on some of the country’s most vulnerable communities,” said Siddharth Chatterjee, UN Resident Coordinator in Kenya, urging donors to pledge additional resources to support relief efforts in the critical months ahead.

A news release from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) said that the previous appeal for Kenya, launched in March 2017, has been only 43 per cent funded. The revised appeal, which covers September to December 2017, complements the Government’s 13-month extended response plan.

However, the third phase of the Government’s response is likely to be delayed due to political developments, making the revised appeal even more critical.

“The Government of Kenya is doing its part with its resources stretched to breaking point. So should we,” said Mr. Chatterjee.

An estimated 5.6 million people have been affected by the drought, including 3.4 million people lacking enough food. Of them, 2.6 million people face severe food insecurity, including 500,000 experiencing ‘emergency’ levels of food insecurity.

A total of 369,277 children in the arid and semi-arid counties of Kenya now require urgent treatment for acute malnutrition, and, in the worst-affected counties, like Turkana South, the acute malnutrition rate is as high as 37 per cent, more than twice the emergency threshold of 15 per cent.