

URGENT ACTION

REFUGEES AT GREAT RISK DUE TO UNSAFE CAMPS

Over a thousand refugees and migrants face uninhabitable and unsafe conditions in three camps in Elliniko, Athens. Women and girls are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence. The authorities must urgently provide residents with adequate alternative housing, following a genuine consultation, with a view to close the camps.

Over a thousand refugees and migrants, including many children, are living in appalling and unsafe conditions in three camps set up in two old Olympic sites and the arrivals terminal of the unused airport in the Elliniko area, in Athens, Greece's capital. The camps' residents, mostly from Afghanistan, have been living in tents for over a year, enduring very poor hygiene and sanitary conditions, with insufficient toilets and showers, and limited privacy. Residents complain of rats and cockroaches. Humanitarian actors working in the camps are reporting serious mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and suicide attempts, exacerbated by the conditions in the camps. *"Everyone lose their mind in Elliniko"* a refugee woman told Amnesty International in March.

Insecurity is a major concern in the camps especially for women and girls, who report constant verbal harassment and the risk of sexual and gender-based violence. There is a lack of effective control over who enters the camps and police does not intervene in security incidents within them. Missing locks on doors of many of the showers and toilets for women, and having to sleep in tents in the absence of any security personnel in the camps, make the sites particularly unsafe for women and girls. Many women told Amnesty International that they live in constant fear of being attacked in their tents, in toilets or showers.

The media reported that the authorities are intending to close the camps but residents explain that they have not been provided with information on the timing of a potential closure and have not been consulted about alternatives.

The Greek authorities must urgently provide them with adequate alternative housing following a genuine consultation, ensuring the meaningful participation of women and girls. No one should be rendered homeless or at risk of other human rights violations as a result of closing the camps

Please write immediately in Greek, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to offer adequate, alternative housing to Elliniko residents with a view to close the three camps, following a genuine consultation, which ensures the meaningful participation of women and girls;
- Urging them to take immediate measures to ensure the safety, security and health of residents, until adequate alternative housing is provided, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls;
- Urging the authorities to guarantee that no one is rendered homeless or at risk of other human rights violations as a result of closing the camps. Alternative housing must be safe and secure, taking into account specific needs of women and girls, and should be in locations either within or with easy access to Athens, so that Elliniko residents can continue to receive support from networks they have established during their time in Elliniko, which include medical and mental health treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 JUNE 2017 TO:

Minister for Migration Policy

Ioannis Mouzalas
Ministry for Migration Policy
Stadiou 27, 10183 Athens, Greece
Fax: +30 213 136 4418
Email: aid@ypes.gr
Salutation: Dear Minister

Alternate Minister for Citizens' Protection

Nikolaos Toskas
Ministry for Citizens' Protection
P. Kanellopoulou 4
10177 Athens, Greece
Email: pressoffice@yptp.gr
Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR DIMITRIOS CARAMITSOS-TZIRAS, Embassy of Greece, 1A Holland Park W11 3TP, 020 7229 3850, Fax 020 7229 7221, gremb.lon@mfa.gr, www.mfa.gr/uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Three camps in the Elliniko area of Athens were set up in December 2015 and February 2016 to temporarily accommodate refugees and migrants. They are set up in the Olympic hockey stadium (Elliniko I), in the arrivals terminal of the unused airport (Elliniko II), and on the Olympic baseball field (Elliniko III). As of 18 April, they house 469, 483 and 257 refugees and migrants respectively. Amnesty International delegations have visited these camps four times since February 2016.

The majority of refugees and migrants in the arrivals terminal and the hockey stadium sleep in small camping tents of thin fabric. In the baseball field, the residents live in bigger tents set up on the field, and report exposure to weather elements such as rain and snow. In the arrivals terminal and the hockey stadium in Elliniko, refugees and migrants have attempted to create a sense of privacy by hanging up sheets and blankets between their tents. However, such attempts are largely futile as there is barely any distance between adjoining tents. Humanitarian organisations working in the camps are providing vital humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants in Elliniko but warn that the sites are completely unsuitable for accommodating people, so the work they can do to improve conditions is limited. They recommend the provision of alternative accommodation that takes into account the needs and vulnerabilities of the people living in Elliniko, affords greater safety and privacy, and upholds people's right to family life in dignified living conditions.

In addition to the hazardous and substandard living conditions, one major concern for residents in Elliniko is the lack of security in the camps. There is no system of effective control over who can access the camps despite police presence at the entrance of Elliniko I and Elliniko III. Residents complain that anyone can walk into the camps. For example, they explain that, on more than one occasion, unknown persons had come into the camp and spent the night in one of the tents on the baseball field. Many of the women interviewed by Amnesty International in March 2017 stated that they were subject to incessant verbal harassment by men and that this put a great strain on their mental health. Some said that they did not want to step out of their tents – even for their basic needs – to avoid such harassment. *“Our daughters cannot walk [around the camp]; single men bother and harass them”*. Women also reported further strain on their mental health due to this uncertainty and fearing imminent evacuation. One woman told Amnesty International: *‘Every day I’m getting more stressed. I am afraid of leaving the tent. (...) I hear we will be moved but I don’t know what will happen to us’*.

A large number of the residents in Elliniko have been in Greece for over a year and are likely to stay in the country longer. As such, they should be principally offered accommodation in flats or other smaller accommodation facilities instead of camps, in line with United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) recommendation that camps should be used only exceptionally and temporarily to host refugees. Options such as tents and containers should only be used as a last resort and any emergency accommodation must offer adequate and separate sanitary facilities for men and women. Appropriate medical care and services should also be provided, taking into consideration the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

Almost all of the residents in the camps in Elliniko are from Afghanistan, and many of them may have genuine claims to international protection. Options for Afghans to legally leave Greece for other EU countries are limited. They are not eligible for the EU emergency relocation mechanism agreed in 2015 to relocate asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU countries, because they do not meet the EU-wide average asylum recognition rate of at least 75 per cent. Hence, for many, the only option is to seek asylum in Greece. However, many lack trust in the asylum system in Greece due to the long delays in accessing asylum procedures and the reception conditions they have endured since their arrival in the country. As such, some still try to leave Greece irregularly through the Western Balkans routes despite the dangers of such journeys.