

**UNHCR recommends urgent measures to address the serious humanitarian needs in the Evros region**

Athens - Following a two-day mission to the Evros region at the Greek/Turkish border on 12-13 October, UNHCR calls for urgent measures to address the critical detention conditions and the absence of functioning screening procedures for the thousands of people arriving in Greece, including persons in need of international protection.

During its visit to Evros, UNHCR observed a severe deterioration of the detention situation for new arrivals in Greece due to overcrowding of existing detention centres. Men, women and children are crammed together with little space, in dire hygiene conditions and without access to yards. Essential services such as information to persons in detention, interpretation in a language they can communicate and legal counseling on the asylum procedure, are totally absent. This situation is particularly serious for persons with special needs, such as unaccompanied and separated children or single women with small children.

"This is an emergency that needs urgent action since it cannot be managed with current administrative structures and human resources. It also needs responsibility-sharing and solidarity from the European Union", stated Giorgos Tsarbopoulos, Head of UNHCR in Greece.

Evros has seen a dramatic increase in number of irregular arrivals this year. According to most recent figures, provided by the local police authorities, the number of arrivals reached 34,000 persons, compared to almost 9,000 persons during 2009. In the attempt to reach the Greek side of the Evros river, as many as 44 persons have been officially registered as having died to date in 2010. The actual number of persons who perished on their way across the Evros river to Greece is believed to be higher.

UNHCR supports the efforts of the Greek government to implement the National Action Plan on Migration Management, which foresees the creation of screening centres for new arrivals at border areas, among other actions to reform Greece's asylum and migration management system.

However, until such reforms are implemented, the UN Refugee Agency urges that immediate short-term measures to address the acute situation in the Evros region are taken:

- Sufficient staff should be deployed to provide essential services to new arrivals, including social, medical and psychological care, interpretation and legal counseling, thereby complementing the work of local police forces.
- Immediate measures should be taken so that detention conditions meet basic standards of human dignity. Additional available facilities in the region could be renovated and refurbished to replace the existing police border guards' detention facilities which are not appropriate to detain persons.
- Unaccompanied and separated children and persons seeking asylum should normally not be detained and instead be accommodated in open facilities.

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