

Brussels and Athens, 15/09/2020

To the attention of the:

President of the European Commission , Mrs Ursula Von Der Leyen
Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr Margaritis Schinas
European Commissioner of Home Affairs, Mrs Ylva Johansson
Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Mr Kyriakos Mitsotakis
Minister of Migration & Asylum of the Hellenic Republic, Mr Notis Mitarachi

Cc'd to the:

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,, Mrs Dunja Mijatović
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Filippo Grandi
United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right to Housing, Mr Balakrishnan Rajagopal

Immediate action needed: ensure dignified accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees formerly residing in the Moria Reception Identification Centre.

On Wednesday 9th of September, the Reception Identification Centre (RIC) in Moria on the island of Lesbos was destroyed by fire, leaving more than 12,000 people who already lived in dire conditions without shelter.

Even before the start of the pandemic, the Eastern Aegean island hotspots suffered from a lack of access to hygiene facilities and primary healthcare. At the onset of the pandemic, civil society urged the Greek government to relocate people from the Aegean Islands to the mainland in order to avert a public health crisis¹.

On the 2nd of September, the RIC was placed in quarantine following the first confirmed COVID-19 cases among the camp population, coming into immediate effect with a joint ministerial decision by the ministries of Citizen Protection and Migration & Asylum.²

At the time of the fire, 12,700 asylum seekers and refugees were residing in inhumane conditions in the Moria RIC and in makeshift shelters and tents in its surroundings, without access to adequate sanitation facilities. The official capacity of the camp was 2,840 people. It is noteworthy that the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, in the report published following her visit to Moria in June 2018, *'observes with great concern that living conditions in reception camps present significant risks to people's health, which are exacerbated by very difficult access to primary healthcare services.'*³

In July 2020, FEANTSA published the 5th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe, raising an alarm regarding the unsanitary conditions in the hotspots in Greece. FEANTSA and its Greek members warned about the

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/24/greece-move-asylum-seekers-migrants-safety>

² <https://migration.gov.gr/en/thetiko-kroysma-sto-kyt-morias/>

³ <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-the-visit-to-greece-from-25-to-29-june-2018-by-dunja-mijatov/16808ea5bd>

imminent danger to the population, highlighting the violation of the fundamental rights of asylum seekers with regards to material reception conditions. Conditions in these hotspots were characterized by overcrowding, lack of private space, vulnerability to bad weather, lack of safety in tents and makeshift huts, lack of medical services and information, and a high risk of violence. In Moria specifically, in December 2019, two people died when a container caught fire.⁴

As of the 14th of September, 5 days after the destruction of the camp, fewer than 1,000 people are sheltered in the temporary camp set up in Kara Tepe, with no tangible adequate housing solution in sight for the vast majority of the former camp residents, 2,800 women and more than 4,000 children among them. The immediate transfer of 400 unaccompanied minors to mainland Greece is a positive step, with similar action needed for the rest of the population.

The recent events in Moria highlight the need to urgently address the situation of overcrowding which is prevalent in the Reception Identification Centres in the Eastern Aegean islands, as underlined by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe in her most recent statement.⁵

Taking into account that accommodation reception facilities for asylum seekers in mainland Greece - in Open Reception Centres and ESTIA apartments - are close to full capacity, and thus adequate accommodation cannot be ensured, there is an urgent need for the European Commission to launch relocation schemes to other EU member states.

FEANTSA and the Greek Housing Network urgently demand that the European Commission and the Greek Government uphold international human rights and ensure adequate and dignified accommodation, adhere to Article 18 paragraph 1(b) of EU Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU)⁶ and take immediate action to:

- urgently transfer asylum seekers and refugees currently in Lesvos to the mainland, and then to other member states, ensuring that adequate housing is provided for all,
- transfer asylum seekers and refugees currently in overcrowded Reception Identification Centres in the Eastern Aegean Islands (Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros, Kos) to the mainland, and then to other member states,
- ensure the provision of adequate housing for asylum seekers on mainland Greece,
- develop and implement a new asylum and immigration policy that respects fundamental rights and is coordinated on a European scale. This new system must enable asylum seekers to directly access EU territory, must evenly distribute the management of asylum applications, give greater consideration to asylum seeker's choices in order to enable their social inclusion, and end the sanctions imposed on secondary movement within the EU.

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, with over 130 member organisations from 30 countries, including 28 Member States. www.feantsa.org

The Greek Housing Network is an association of 35 civil society organisations working for the right to housing in Greece. www.greekhousingnetwork.org

⁴ FEANTSA and Fondation Abbé Pierre, 5th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe, July 2020, available at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/news/2020/07/23/fifth-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2020?bcParent=26>

⁵ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-calls-on-the-greek-authorities-to-provide-adequate-support-to-all-those-affected-by-the-fire-in-moria>

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN>