



With Hungary's tighter border restrictions, new arrivals—most of whom are refugees—are primarily using an alternative route through Croatia to reach European Union (EU) countries. International Medical Corps teams are on the ground in Serbia, Greece, and Turkey. Previously, International Medical Corps and partners also provided assistance in Hungary in response to the crisis.

SITUATION UPDATE

Refugees and migrants continue to travel via the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe, with more than 590,000 people having made the journey in 2015. Cold weather and rains have begun to arrive in the Western Balkans, adding new challenges for refugees and migrants who are moving northward from Greece and passing through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, and Hungary, mainly en route to other destinations.

The International Organization for Migration reports a significant rise in the number of daily arrivals to Greece, which remains the primary point of entry to Europe via the sea route. Daily arrival rates have increased from 4,500 people per day at the end of September to 7,000 people per day in early October. Relief organizations and local authorities attribute the rise to people rushing to make the Mediterranean crossing before the sea becomes impassable with the arrival of winter. Along the route from Greece, relief organizations responding to the crisis are preparing winterization programs, such as distributing clothing suitable for cold weather, addressing weather-related illnesses, and improving shelter conditions at transit centers. International Medical Corps and its local partner in Greece are also monitoring land routes across the Greece–Turkey border, as these may be used more frequently by new arrivals once the weather turns.

FAST FIGURES

- More than 590,000 refugees and migrants have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe since the start of 2015
- More than 3,000 people in 2015 have died or gone missing crossing the Mediterranean
- More than 450,000 of the new arrivals have entered Europe through Greece

SITUATION AT A GLANCE

- The rate of new arrivals to Greece have increased since late September
- Relief agencies have begun to prepare for the arrival of winter
- International Medical Corps is working with local partners to provide assistance in Serbia, Greece, and Turkey

International Medical Corps has a team in Serbia, where an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 people are entering the country from Macedonia each day. The Government of Serbia has begun enforcing a more thorough registration system to track arrivals and facilitate asylum processing, resulting in overcrowding at Presevo. Authorities and relief agencies are working on ways to accelerate registration and prevent crowds. Under the coordination of local authorities, new arrivals to Serbia are traveling by buses and trains from Presevo to the northwest town of Sid, where they are able to cross into Croatia. Along Serbia's southeast border, arrivals via Bulgaria are beginning to increase, doubling from 200 people per day to approximately 450 people per day, according to relief organizations.

Hungary maintains tightened border restrictions along the border with Serbia; however, more than 39,000 people arrived in the country since the start of October, the overwhelming majority traveling via Croatia, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Hungary eventually plans to utilize a fence along its border with Croatia similar to the one it erected along the Serbia border. If caught crossing the fence along the Hungary–Serbia border, refugees and migrants face up to three years' imprisonment in Hungary or expulsion back to Serbia.

Other countries in the EU are also moving toward tightening their border controls as one means of addressing the crisis. At an October 8 meeting, EU officials agreed to bolster support for FRONTEX, the EU border control agency, as well as accelerate the deportation of people who do not qualify for asylum. However, the EU also conducted the first refugee relocation under the recently approved plan to transfer people determined to be in need of international protection from Greece and Italy—the first points of arrival for most refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Twenty Eritrean refugees were flown from Italy to Sweden for resettlement on October 9. According to the plan, a total of 160,000 refugees are to be relocated over a two-year period to countries across the EU.

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS RESPONSE

Mobile Medical Unit Assisting in Sid and Belgrade, Serbia

International Medical Corps, in collaboration with International Aid Network (IAN), is providing medical care and psychosocial support to refugees through a mobile medical unit (MMU) in Serbia. The MMU has been operating daily since September 28 and delivering care at two sites: the Principovac one-stop center in Sid; and a park near the bus station in Belgrade, which has become one of the largest informal gathering places in the capital for refugees. The MMU coordinates with Serbia's Commissariat for Refugees and local health centers to identify appropriate areas of operation and needed assistance.

The MMU is staffed with a doctor, nurse, psychologist, and interpreter. Between September 28 and October 11, the team conducted 602 medical consultations. Nearly 90 percent of the patients seen by MMU staff were male, and primarily between the ages of 16 and 49.

Although fewer in number, most of the female patients fell into the same age range. The most common health problems addressed by the team were related to long and difficult travel, deteriorating weather conditions, poor hygiene, and malnutrition. For example, consultations addressed exhaustion, blisters and sores, diarrhoea, skin rashes, and other common illnesses. International Medical Corps and IAN are also addressing the psychosocial support needs of the refugee population through the provision of Psychological First Aid (PFA), and conducted 225 PFA consultations



An MMU team member bandages the arm of a young Syrian refugee in Belgrade.

during the reporting period. Despite the prevalence of Syrian refugees in the overall affected population, MMU staff observed that an increasing percentage of the refugees seeking assistance were from Afghanistan.

International Medical Corps Partnering with PRAKSIS in Greece

International Medical Corps is partnering with Programs of Development, Social Support, and Medical Cooperation (PRAKSIS) to assist refugees as they transit Greece. In northern Greece, International Medical Corps and PRAKSIS visited the transit point at Idomeni, where refugees are crossing the border to Macedonia. The situation on the border has markedly improved since the chaotic period of mid-August. The border crossing process is now coordinated by the Greek and Macedonian police and UNHCR, and International Medical Corps staff estimate that wait times to cross were a maximum of six hours. Several relief organizations are assisting refugees at Idomeni, providing medical care, food, and water. Refugees also have access to sanitation facilities.



International Medical Corps staff conducted field visits to crossing points in northern Greece.

International Medical Corps and PRAKSIS also visited the Greece–Turkey land border, along which Greek authorities completed a fence in 2012 to help tighten border controls. Although not a route currently utilized as heavily by refugees and migrants compared to the sea, International Medical Corps and PRAKSIS are monitoring the situation at the border given that people will likely begin to seek alternatives to the sea route once winter arrives.

On the Greek Islands of Kos, Leros, and Samos, International Medical Corps and PRAKSIS plan to operate medical units near new arrival reception centers where there is limited local capacity to address needs. The medical units will provide primary health care services, as well as referral services to hospitals and other facilities where possible.

Assisting Refugees in Mediterranean Coastal Areas of Turkey

The current crisis in Europe is part of a much larger refugee situation spanning regions, and is heavily affected by ongoing crises in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere. Refugees from these countries often reside in or pass through Turkey, which is also the launching point for the majority of refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean. Turkey currently hosts more than 2 million refugees, the majority of whom are from Syria.

In mid-September, approximately 7,000 Syrian refugees organized through social media and began moving toward Edirne, a city near Turkey's land border with Greece, in hopes of making the less dangerous crossing via the land border. While many were halted en route to Edirne by Turkish officials, an estimated 2,000 people camped out in Edirne for several days in protest before leaving under pressure from authorities. International Medical Corps staff in Turkey note that many of the refugees then made their way toward the coast city of Izmir, from which they may attempt to cross to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

International Medical Corps is working with local partners, such as the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), to assist refugees transiting through and settled in Izmir and the Bodrum Peninsula. Together, International Medical Corps and ASAM are ensuring refugees have sufficient access to medical care and basic services. International Medical Corps also plans to work with local partners to distribute food, seasonal clothing, blankets, and other key supplies, as well as incorporate capacity building and technical guidance, such as on mental health and psychosocial support, for local partners as part of the response.

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