

## *Police Move Migrants From Greek Camp to Temporary Lesbos Site After Fires*

The move comes a week after fires destroyed the Moria camp, where 12,000 people were living. But rights groups say the new camp is only a temporary solution.

**By Niki Kitsantonis and Megan Specia**

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When fires tore through the Moria camp for migrants on the Greek island of Lesbos last week, about 12,000 people were displaced and left to sleep on the sides of roads, in parking lots or in graveyards.

A temporary tent camp has been erected for them, with the first arrivals trickling into the facility over the weekend. And on Thursday, the police began moving more people into the camp in an effort to speed up the process.

The new facility will offer immediate shelter to thousands in desperate need, but rights groups say the move should be a temporary fix while Europe comes up with a more comprehensive solution for the thousands of migrants and refugees arriving on the continent.

As the police began the operation to move more people to the facility, they were met with some resistance. Videos shared online and broadcast on Greek television showed some armed officers standing by as others in masks and hazmat suits as a protection against the coronavirus tried to persuade migrants to move into the new camp. Many migrants carried their meager belongings in plastic bags or dragged strollers piled with clothes.

Stelios Petsas, a government spokesman, said at a media briefing that 1,150 migrants had been transferred during the police operation. By Thursday evening, about 5,000 people were in the new camp, which can host all of those displaced by the fire, according to Greece's migration ministry. Of that group, 135 people are in isolation on the site after testing positive for the coronavirus.

Greek officials insisted that the operation to move people into the temporary camp was being done with the utmost care and in the best interests of those displaced by the fire.

Michalis Chrysochoidis, the minister for citizen protection, said the migrants and refugees were being moved “from abandonment to care, from public health risks and coronavirus to protection and control, from confusion to order.”



Migrants entering the new site on Thursday. Manolis Lagoutaris/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

But the aid group Doctors Without Borders expressed concern about the interruption of medical care during the move, saying that the Greek police had denied their staff access to migrants as they were being transferred.

“Lots of people need medical care but we cannot approach them? Why are they obstructing us?” the group wrote on Twitter on Thursday. At around noon, the group said it had managed to reopen its clinic.

Before the fires last week, Moria was the largest refugee camp in Europe, long plagued by squalid conditions and overcrowded tents. Since 2015, it had been filled with refugees and migrants who had risked their lives to cross the Aegean Sea into Greece.



Most of the current group are from Afghanistan and had been waiting on the island as their asylum applications are processed.

The camp was locked down after a coronavirus outbreak, prompting protests among residents and leading some to intentionally set fire to the camp. Six Moria residents, all Afghan citizens, have been charged with arson in connection with the fires.

Rights groups and countries on the frontline of arrivals, including Greece, have long called for a comprehensive Europe-wide approach to the crisis, and last week's fires have strengthened that call. Germany agreed this week to take in more than 1,500 people displaced by the blazes.

Photos of the new facility on Lesbos show dozens of white tents emblazoned with the logo of the United Nations Refugee Agency dotting a hillside near where the sprawling Moria camp once stood.

Philippe Leclerc, the agency's representative in Greece, said during a visit to Lesbos on Wednesday that the organization had worked with the local authorities to erect the temporary tents.



Riot police officers evacuating a road leading from Moria to the city of Mytilene. Petros Giannakouris/Associated Press

The agency “is also advocating for long-term solutions, with continuous European support and responsibility-sharing,” Mr. Leclerc said, adding that overcrowded reception centers on Lesbos and other Greek islands “must be decongested and their conditions improved.”

In an interview on the sidelines of a conference in Athens on Wednesday, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Europe’s migration crisis was too big for Greece to handle alone.

“The tragic Moria fire brought this to the forefront,” he said. “I think it’s clear to everyone that we can’t fail twice as Europe.”

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