

# UNHCR says asylum situation in Greece is 'a humanitarian crisis'



Briefing Notes, 21 September 2010

*This is a summary of what was said by UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at the press briefing, on 21 September 2010, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.*

UNHCR is today calling on Greece to urgently accelerate implementation of its planned asylum reform. This is in light of the continued absence in Greece of a functioning asylum system, an issue with important implications for the wider EU.

The conditions for asylum-seekers in Greece, which is among the principal entry points to the EU, are notoriously difficult. Most asylum-seekers receive no assistance. Many live on the streets, including women and children. The refugee status determination system does not operate properly and as a result, persons needing international protection are not identified as such. This is a humanitarian crisis situation which should not exist in the European Union.

UNHCR welcomes Greece's plans to implement a far-reaching reform of its asylum system even in the face of current economic challenges. We also appeal to the European Union to step up its assistance to help Greece to comply with its international and European obligations. Until such time as an asylum procedure meeting international standards is in place in Greece, UNHCR reiterates its recommendation to other European countries not to send asylum-seekers back to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation. Yesterday, in a statement, Human Rights Watch called on UNHCR to intervene and take on responsibility for refugee status determination in Greece in light of these shortcomings. UNHCR notes this recommendation, but emphasizes that responsibility for asylum rests with the state, and as an EU member, Greece is bound by European Union legislation to have laws and procedures for dealing with people seeking asylum.