

UNHCR Voices Concern about Developments at Border of FYR Macedonia and Greece

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GENEVA, Aug 21 (UNHCR) – The UN refugee agency expressed concern today over the increasingly precarious situation at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR Macedonia), where force was used earlier to prevent people trying to cross.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres spoke with FYR Macedonia Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki about the situation, and received assurances that the border will not be closed in the future.



A young Syrian refugee carries his brother across the border between Greece and FYR Macedonia, near Eidomeni, Greece, in June 2015

"UNHCR is particularly worried about the thousands of vulnerable refugees and migrants, especially women and children, now massed on the Greek side of the border amid deteriorating conditions," UNHCR said in a statement.

The agency said that while it understood the pressures facing FYR Macedonia and legitimate security concerns, UNHCR appeals to the government to put in place mechanisms necessary to establish an orderly and protection-sensitive management of its borders.

In particular, the agency said it encouraged the government to work with UNHCR to establish sufficient reception capacity in the country as well as organized registration and identification.

"UNHCR is also appealing to the Greek authorities to enhance registration and reception arrangements for people in need of international protection and to provide urgent assistance to people stranded on the Greek side of the border and help them move towards reception facilities away from the border," the statement added.

UNHCR said it was ready to provide assistance to both governments with these challenging tasks.

"We also reiterate earlier calls on the European Union to step up support for countries affected and impacted by the movement of refugees in south-east Europe, including through the robust implementation of the EU Agenda on Migration and increased legal pathways of admission to Europe," the statement said.

It called for Europe to act together in response to this growing crisis and help overstretched countries like Greece, FYR Macedonia and Serbia.

By Leo Dobbs, Geneva