

# Unprotected, Unsupported, Uncertain

RESCUE

COMMINDER



Recommendations to improve  
the mental health of asylum seekers on Lesbos

**September 2018**

From Harm to Home | [Rescue.org](https://rescue.org)





## 1. Lack of protection

Officially, there are currently more than 8,500 people in Moria, which has capacity to host 3,100<sup>1</sup>. Overcrowding strains all services and staff and creates tensions and feelings of unsafety.

### **Security**

Living at Moria causes stress and fear, which exacerbates trauma and can trigger mental health problems

with their perpetrators. Too often, the medical treatments they require post these traumatic experiences are not available or accessible to them on the islands.

### Basic needs

In Moria, one has to fight for everything. Access to food is precarious: the queues are long so many people sleep there to ensure that they get food and water. Many vulnerable people cannot stand in the long queues or are afraid because of the violence that frequently starts at the food line and as a result, end up hungry. Due to these challenges, many residents have to cook their own food but, as there are no cooking facilities, they end up using dangerous methods, such as lighting open fires or cooking inside their tents. Conditions have not improved since November 2016, when a woman and her granddaughter were killed in Moria, because the gas canister they were using for cooking exploded in their tent<sup>5</sup>.

There are not enough latrines and the septic tanks consistently overflow. In the main area of Moria camp and in the adjacent overflow camp known as Olive Grove, there are 72 people per functioning toilet and 84 people per functioning shower. This is well below the recommended humanitarian standards in emergency situations<sup>6</sup>, while there are frequent water cuts, causing long queues, health concerns and tensions.

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seeking help for mental health both in terms of therapeutic needs and vulnerability status, as this would explicitly exclude them from alternative accommodation outside Moria.

To make things worse, the Municipal Council of Lesvos has adopted a decision<sup>8</sup> not to accept any women asylum seekers or refugees to the Safe Shelter for Women Victims of Gender-based Violence except in extreme circumstances and for a maximum of two days'. Although the decision is based on the premise that survivors of gender-based violence are vulnerable and should be transferred to the main [redacted] based on the p

### **Mental health**

Severe budget cuts in public health, at a time when the economic crisis generated an increase in the need for certain medical care, especially mental health care, have adversely impacted everyone on Lesbos: host communities and refugees alike<sup>14</sup>.

Lack of interpreters means that the psychiatric department of the public hospital in Mytilene has very low capacity in receiving patients from the refugee population, while there is currently no child psychiatrist. Shortage of doctors at the public hospital means that receiving an appointment takes a long time and hospitalisation is practically impossible. As a result, asylum seekers with mental health problems and survivors of sexual violence cannot find the care they need on Lesbos. Still, they have no choice but to stay there, in conditions that exacerbate their mental health.

### **3. Lack of any certainty about the future**

Most of the asylum seekers who have visited our mental health services feel like they are living in limbo as they don't understand the asylum procedures and what their future holds. As time goes by, this uncertainty, compounded by the appalling living conditions in Moria, exacerbates or even triggers mental health issues.

Geographical restrictions force asylum seekers to stay on the islands until they get refugee status. People deemed 'vulnerable' as per Greek Law and certified by KEELPNO's medical screening, have to stay until their first asylum r ment0033>4003100

## Recommendations

The International Rescue Committee has been responding to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers on Lesbos since July 2015. Based on our experience, and our clients' feedback, we have the following recommendations to improve the mental state of refugees and asylum-seekers living in Moria:

### **To the Manager of the Moria RIC**

Assign more working space to KEELPNO, so that psychologists, nurses and social workers can





**Acknowledgements**

Written by Martha Roussou

[Martha.roussou@rescue.org](mailto:Martha.roussou@rescue.org)

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Cover picture:

Young man who attends the IRC's mental health centre: *"At night I cannot sleep. I hear a voice in my*

*Photo credit: Lucy Carrigan, IRC*

**International Rescue Committee Hellas**

64 Louizis Riankour st.,  
Athens 11523,  
Greece

Disclaimer: The information in this briefing was correct at the time of writing, in August 2018.