

UN: Europe's Closed Borders Creating 'Humanitarian Crisis'

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A rapid build-up of migrants on Greece's northern borders risks creating a humanitarian disaster, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said Tuesday.

The agency called for better planning and accommodation for at least 24,000 people stuck in Greece, including 8,500 at Idomeni, where hundreds of refugees stormed the border Monday, prompting Macedonian police to fire teargas to disperse them.

"Europe is on the cusp of a largely self-induced humanitarian crisis," Adrian Edwards, spokesperson for the U.N. refugee agency, said at a news briefing. "The crowded conditions are leading to shortages of food, shelter, water and sanitation," he said. "As we all saw yesterday, tensions have been building, fuelling violence and playing into the hands of people smugglers."

Many refugees have been stranded in Greece after Austria and other countries along the refugees' migration route imposed tough border restrictions.

The UNHCR is urging all European Union member states to reinforce their capacity to register and process asylum seekers. "Greece cannot manage this situation alone," Edwards said.

Despite commitments to relocate 66,400 refugees from Greece, EU states have so far only pledged 1,539 spaces and only 325 people have actually been relocated, according to the U.N.

Some 131,724 refugees crossed the Mediterranean in January and February, more than in the first half of 2015. At least 410 refugees died at sea.