



More and more Syrians are taking to boats to try to reach Europe after construction of the wall and increased border patrols over the last 16 months. Greek statistics show more than 7,600 Syrians have been arrested for illegal entry or stay during the first 11 months of this year.

With more Syrians reaching the shores of Europe, "no one expects Greece to take on the entire burden," says Laurens Jolles, UNHCR regional representative for Southern Europe. "UNHCR is making every effort to remind the European community of the need to show some solidarity and responsibility sharing with countries at the external borders of the European Union."

He adds that Syria is "the biggest humanitarian emergency at this moment" and despite the challenges, the solution is not to turn away asylum-seekers.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres has also expressed concern about serious gaps in the protection of Syrians arriving in Europe and has urged a more generous and consistent approach to Syrians seeking shelter and asylum in Europe.

"Syrians can apply for asylum in Greece but feel it is pointless as they do not want to stay here," says Dr. Maarouf Alobeid, a Syrian doctor who has lived in Greece for 30 years and who has treated little Leima. Along with others in the Syrian community, the doctor brings food and medicine to the family.

He says Greece's five-year economic crisis discourages many Syrian refugees from staying here. They get little government support, he says, and many prefer to move on to other European countries where they may have relatives.

This, however, can be a problem, says UNHCR's Jolles. "It is very difficult for these people to move around legally in Europe," he says. "European family reunion policies must be more flexible, particularly at times of emergency like the one we are living in relation to the exodus from Syria."