

KOS

What is happening today in the refugee structures on the Aegean islands



Kos CCAC

On the island of Kos arrivals were increased since the end of the year compared to 2021^[1]. The Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) of Kos is located in an area of about 90 acres, at the site of the former camp "Makrygianni", on a hill in the village of Pyli, 15 kilometres from the city of Kos. The CCAC was inaugurated in November 2021 despite opposition from local residents and stakeholders against the expansion of the existing structure. It is designed to run an office infrastructure for around 270 jobs.

Kos CCAC	
Distance from the island's urban center (km)	15
Transport ticket cost per person per route (euro)	2,1€
Taxi transport cost (euro)	20€



According to the General Secretariat for Asylum Seekers of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum^[2], on March 9 in the CCAC of Kos there were 53 unaccompanied minors, 34 of whom lived within the "safe area", which has a nominal capacity of 170 children.

According to a recent publication by Equal Rights Beyond Borders and Terre des Hommes, conditions in the "safe area" for unaccompanied minors are miserable and extremely inadequate, as unaccompanied minors have limited access to schools, recreational or child-friendly activities and are guarded by the security staff at all times. Even very young children and babies separated from their mothers have been brought into the safe area. According to the publication, unaccompanied minors are not allowed to leave the safe area and remain restricted there for the whole duration of their legal procedure, which may take several months. Although there is a basketball court and a net, children sometimes cannot even use it, as the organisations report. "I was inside the safe area for two months along with other unaccompanied minors. We weren't allowed out of there. There were no activities and the food was of bad quality; we felt like we were in a prison" says Khaled*, 17 years old, who is living in an space for adults along with his adult cousin who is in charge of his guardianship^[3].

KOS CCAC

Arrivals January 1 to April 2	620
Nominal capacity	2040
Residents on March 31, 2023	876
Men (%)	59%

Women(%)	19%
Children(%)	22%
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Palestine	52%
Democratic Republic of Congo	9%
Cameroon	9%
Somalia	7%
Syria	6%
other	18%
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“Safe area” for children - nominal capacity	320
Unaccompanied minors	50
Children residing in the “safe area”	44
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Pre-Removal Detention Centre (PROKEKA) - nominal capacity	440
People held on 31/3/2023	37

UNHCR (+weekly snapshot 2/4/2023), Ministry of Migration and Asylum, March 2023. Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in Greece, March 2023 - Demographic data for the Dodecanese are undivided



A Flourish table

According to the UNHCR^[4], there is no alternative accommodation other than self-housing in an urban environment on the island.

Volunteers provide Greek courses in places outside the structure. Volunteers also provide clothing and other essentials and try to help with medicines when needed.

As regards the non-formal education of children, based on the ARSIS data^[9], in mid-March 70 children, of ages 4-17, attended the Centre for Homework and Creative Activities – KEDU, in Kos, which is part of the programme “All Children in Education”. Courses in Greek, English, natural sciences, art, as well as social skills development workshops are provided. According to the UNHCR^[4], based on the most recent data available at the end of March (there may be deviations), approximately 40 children participated in the DYEP classes (Reception Facilities for Refugee Education – in kindergarten, primary and secondary school). Enrollment procedures have been normalised, while the number of children attending DYEP classes has increased.

Small amounts of food and problems of living

Refugees report poor food quality and very small amounts of food and also drinking water^[7]. “We were given food once a day, and sometimes we received only one orange in the morning. We had reached the point where we were starving,” says Karim*, a 21-year-old Palestinian who is granted asylum status^[8]. According to information provided by organisations working on the island, the catering company provides the three meals of the day (lunch, dinner and next morning’s breakfast) in one delivery every day at noon. There are also major shortages in the provision of essential food for children. “Previously, they were giving us a litre of milk a day for each child, now they give us only a glass of milk for each child; we have not received our monthly allowance and we have no money to buy food” emphasises Mahmoud* from Palestine, father of a small child^[9].

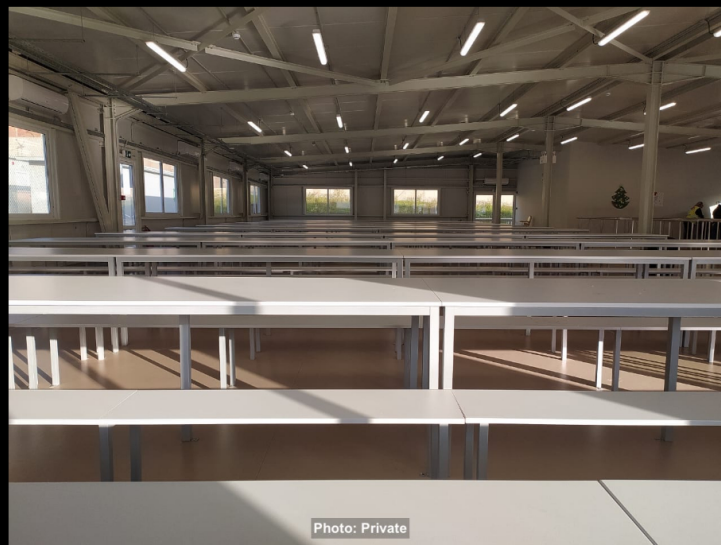


Photo: Private

Communal dining room, which while ready, has not been commissioned

Also, according to residents and organisations’ testimonies with whom RSA spoke, the washing machines and communal kitchens, while their construction is completed, are not put into service. There are also reports of shortages in clothes and shoes. “I arrived in September, and I’m still wearing the same clothes that I arrived with. When we arrived they only gave us soap and a sleeping bag” Ahmed*, a young Palestinian man, told us.

Finally, as is clear from refugees and solidarity groups’ testimonies, an extremely urgent housing problem arises for those who are granted international protection status and are forced to immediately leave the structure. They are mostly single men who are actually homeless, trying to either find an emergency solution by living together with several people in the hard-to-find apartments of Kos and looking for a job, or move to another Greek city with the same purpose. “Most people manage to find a job in the hotels when the [tourist] season starts in late April/early May, in poor working conditions (same as for local workers), mainly because of the exhausting working hours. Until then, they find themselves in a very bad state and even in conditions of homelessness, if they do not manage to find a solution through friends and acquaintances” a volunteer on the island points out to us.

Reported strict controls resembling imprisonment

Increased surveillance measures are prevalent also in Kos. In particular, the turnstiles with card readers placed in the separate sections of the structure result in certain categories of residents (such as those not registered or those whose asylum request is rejected) having their liberty restricted even within the CCAC, as we were told. There are also bad and dismissive behaviours

towards residents and a severe shortage in interpreters, which significantly impedes communication between employees and residents and leads to tensions. Because of the exhaustive controls, many residents avoid leaving the structure at all. Residents told RSA that they had undergone intra-body controls upon their return in the evening to the structure, in search of drugs. In fact, we were told that this control has been implemented to female residents as well, with female police presence. "We do not have the money to buy food, would we buy drugs?" says Karim¹⁰. We met him in the centre of Kos while he was waiting for his family from Gaza to send him money, in order to buy a ferry ticket and move to the mainland. The presence of the police is particularly intense around the CCAC and also in the city of Kos.

Further, there is tension in the area where the structure is located, with part of the residents and official representatives developing aggressive reflexes. In late March, the president of the Municipality of Pyli, [declared](#) in a publication that the anger of the residents for the whole situation is so great that they tell him that, unless something changes soon, they will take the guns and the law into their own hands.

Next to the CCAC is the Pre-Removal Detention Centre (PROKEKA). This is the only PROKEKA that operates on the islands of the Eastern Aegean, while transfers are made there from Kos and Leros CCAC. According to the testimonies we collected, the authorities ask newcomers to [destroy the cameras](#) on their mobile phones upon their arrival at the CCAC in order to prevent filming inside the PROKEKA.



Photo: Private

Deficiencies in medical care and legal support

At the end of March there was neither a doctor nor a psychologist within the structure. Palestinian refugees told RSA that there are women even in late pregnancy who have not received the necessary medical help. "My wife is pregnant. (...) We went to the hospital and she had a blood test; when she asked for an ultrasound she was told to go to a private doctor. All we want is for a gynaecologist to see her (...) I don't want her to give birth here (...) Since she hasn't conducted an ultrasound, we don't know exactly what month she is in, we count on ourselves" a resident in the structure told us¹¹.

Staff [shortages](#) in the hospital of the island are significant, with all that this entails for the local population and refugees in need of medical care. The fact that Kos' hospital does not have an interpreter makes communication with patients significantly more difficult. Interpretation is extremely inadequate as it is conducted either by a compatriot accompanying the patient, or by another emergency solution. Due to the lack of a psychiatrist in the hospital of Kos, psychiatric cases involving those administratively detained are transferred, with the escort of police and even handcuffed, to the Leros Mental Hospital. In addition, there have been cases where severe psychiatric cases in the reception procedures in the CCAC, instead of being referred, have their "geographical restriction" lifted and are obliged to seek medical care elsewhere on their own.

According to the UNHCR¹², the organisations METAdrasi, Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and PRAKSIS provide legal assistance within the CCAC: METAdrasi with two lawyers (one position is currently vacant), GCR with one lawyer and PRAKSIS (providing legal assistance to unaccompanied minors in the "safe area") with another. In addition, Equal Rights Beyond Borders operates in the CCAC with four members.

*Names have been changed for privacy and security reasons.

Notes

1. During 2022, 30% of total arrivals [arrived](#) in the Dodecanese. This is the largest percentage compared to the other islands. [↑](#)
2. Written response to RSA on March 16, 2023. The discrepancy between all unaccompanied minors and those living in a safe area refers to minors separated by a temporary custody act. [↑](#)
3. Interview in Kos on March 21, 2023. [↑](#)
4. Information from the UNHCR written response to RSA on March 16, 2023. [↑](#)
5. Written answer of ARSIS to RSA on March 15, 2023. The programme is co-funded by the European Union with the support of UNICEF and is implemented by ARSIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth. [↑](#)
6. Written answer to RSA on March 23, 2023. [↑](#)
7. The information about the small amount of food and water is confirmed by reports that the UNHCR has received from residents of Kos CCAC. [↑](#)
8. Interview in Kos on March 22, 2023. [↑](#)
9. Interview in Kos on March 22, 2023. [↑](#)
10. Interview in Kos on March 22, 2023. [↑](#)
11. Interview in Kos on March 22, 2023. [↑](#)
12. Ibid., footnote 4. [↑](#)

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