

CHIOS

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



Photo: Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum

VIAL, Chios CCAC

In Chios, there was also an increase of arrivals in the last months of 2022 compared to 2021. Vial's former Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), which has been operating since 2016, was renamed in November 2022 to Chios' Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC). It is located 8 km from the city of Chios, bordering the village of Halkios. The structure was built in an older, abandoned aluminium plant, where half of the factory has been used in recent years as a waste separation and recovery centre, resulting in severe stench during the summer months. Until November 2022, the newcomers were transferred to the quarantine structure in the Lefkonía area for a period of 14 days, as part of the protective measures for non-spreading Covid-19. The quarantine structure in Lefkonía was finally closed on 31 December 2022.

Chios CCAC	
Distance from the island's urban center (km)	8
Transport ticket cost per person per route (euro)	1,5€
Taxi transport cost (euro)	13€



Recently, the number of residents has decreased substantially^[1].

CHIOS CCAC

Arrivals January 1 to April 2	244
Nominal capacity	1014
Residents on March 31, 2023	411
Men (%)	56%
Women (%)	29%
Children (%)	15%
Somalia	30%

Palestine	18%
Sierra Leone	14%
Democratic Republic of Congo	8%
Soudan	7%
other	23%

“Safe area” for children - nominal capacity 72

Unaccompanied minors 39

Children residing in the “safe area” 39

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



● A Flourish table

According to the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum^[2], on March 9, 39 unaccompanied minors were in Chios CCAC, all of whom lived in the “safe area” with a nominal capacity of 72 children. In mid-March, there was no longer a Commissioner for unaccompanied minors on the island, as the contract of the lawyer with that duty expired. At the same time, the Governor of the CCAC, whose term officially expires at the end of April, has stated his resignation. In Chios, the number of organisations active in the field has also decreased, with significant impacts on the provision of basic services and goods.

Alternative forms of housing for vulnerable adults and families no longer exist on the island. According to the UNHCR^[3], METAdrasi operates a transitional accommodation structure for unaccompanied minors, the Ark of the World has a shelter for children whose parental care has been removed upon a prosecutorial order, while there are also some persons who have found housing with their own resources (self-accommodated).

Non-formal education courses for minors and adults residing in the CCAC are provided by METAdrasi.

Without a doctor and a social worker

The main problem in Chios during the RSA research period was the lack of a doctor within the structure as well as the deficiencies in psychosocial support, even for unaccompanied minors. Since April 2021 there has been no stable presence of a doctor within the structure. Also, there has been no social worker for a year, so, when an incident must be looked into, normally carried out only by a social worker, psychologists conduct the procedure. The vulnerability evaluation procedure seems to be inadequate, as in an attempt to find a solution to the serious shortage of medical staff, nursing staff is called upon to fill the gap, by asking asylum seekers questions. Then, the relevant documents are signed by a doctor who visits the structure from Chios’ hospital or from a National Public Health Organisation Unit. This procedure excludes from medical examination those who are considered not meeting the vulnerability criteria, since they are provided for with a medical examination appointment and a medical card only in case of doubt.

In mid-February, Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario (SmH), which covered serious deficiencies in medical care within the CCAC, and was registered in the previous Registry of the Administration, had to cease its operation due to non-registration in the NGO Registry of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. SmH had been on the island since 2015 with doctors and nurses, also providing ultrasound for the residents. Due to the withdrawal of SmH, which was cooperating together with the German organisation Offene Arme for the transport of emergency incidents to the hospital by taxi, and for supporting scheduled appointments, there was a large gap created, which has not been filled until now. The emergencies that arise in the structure must be served by the single National Emergency Centre (EKAV) vehicle on the island, which cannot already serve the existing needs of the local population, thus losing human lives. After the departure of SmH, residents – even pregnant women – must also address private doctors or the hospital (with significant delays) to make an ultrasound.

Shortages of basic goods

There is a significant improvement in the sense of security compared to the past. However, people who work inside the structure talk about containers in very poor condition, which need extensive maintenance to be habitable, and in most of which air conditioning does not operate, resulting in winter residents buying halogen stoves to warm up. Also, disinfestations are carried out, because of the many cockroaches in the spaces. The food is of low quality, and there are reports of food poisonings.

There are also serious problems with the schedules for transporting students from Vial to the public school. Clothes and shoes are provided by very few organisations outside the structure, such as Offene Arme. Employees report that there are shortages of basic goods at times, even for unaccompanied minors living in the structure.

Interpretation and legal support

In mid-March, the structure had three Arabic speakers, a French-speaking and a Somali interpreter, who were called to meet needs in other services as well, as at that time no other service had interpreters. The General Hospital of Chios “Skylitsios” no longer has interpreters, which makes it often extremely difficult for patients to communicate with staff. When an emergency arises, interpreters by telephone are provided by the CCAC.

According to the UNHCR^[4], legal assistance is provided within the CCAC by METAdrasi, with a full-time lawyer, as well as by PRAKSIS for legal proceedings of children in families, with a part-time lawyer. The organisations Equal Rights Beyond Borders, A.Ss.i.S.T. and RSA also provide legal support, but have no presence within the CCAC.



Obstacles to the construction of the new superstructure in the Tholos area





The Ministry's goal was to open the new closed structure in April 2023, but a new deadline has been given for September 2023. Satellite lite Imagery: 9/7/2021

Despite the fact that the local society has expressed in various ways and repeatedly its total opposition to the construction of any superstructure in Chios and in particular in the Tholos area, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum insists on its construction. The Ministry's goal was to open the new closed structure in April 2023, but a new deadline has been given for September 2023. The construction of the 100% financed directly by the European Union closed structure in the Tholos area proceeds neither with the acceptance of the local society nor lawfully, with the Ministry's request for access of the machinery to the disputed area being challenged in four consecutive court decisions. Last December, Chios' single-member Court of First Instance, which discussed the Ministry's request for interim measures in order to secure access to the Tholos area in question, refused issuing an interim order for the fourth time. The rediscussion of the interim measures is expected to take place on July 5, 2023, before the Chios' single-member Court of First Instance. The Minister of Migration and Asylum has extended by amendment the possession of Vial (of municipal property) until December 31, 2023 for its use as a Reception and Identification Centre⁸.

Notes

1. According to the UNHCR weekly snapshot for Chios, as of April 2, 2023. ↑
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. Information from the UNHCR written response to RSA on March 16, 2023. ↑
4. Ibid. footnote 2. ↑
5. L 5003/2022 FEK 230/A/14.12.2022, Article 136. ↑

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