

***"They don't care about us":***

**Voices from Kos exposing  
inhumane migration  
policies**





# WHO IS GLOCAL ROOTS

Glocal Roots is a non-profit organisation founded in 2017 to support people on the move. By operating grassroots projects in Greece, Switzerland, and Turkey, the organisation focuses on enhancing the resilience and independence of individuals with refugee backgrounds. Active in Kos since 2020, Glocal Roots is the only actor outside the Closed and Controlled Access Center (CCAC) addressing both basic needs and integration. Its Hub, located in Kos town, 15 kilometres from the CCAC, serves as a safe space providing hygiene items, food, clothing, language courses, creative activities, and CV workshops. Reaching over 1,500 people monthly, the Hub also offers support to individuals facing integration challenges, helping them to navigate their first steps in Greece.

For more information visit us at [www.glocalroots.org](http://www.glocalroots.org) and follow us at [@glocalroots](https://www.instagram.com/glocalroots).

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# METHODOLOGY

We conducted 17 semi-structured interviews lasting one to two hours with people on the move in Kos. While guided questions were used, respondents were encouraged to elaborate or introduce new topics, enabling the exploration of emerging themes and ensuring a comprehensive overview of the situation. These findings were further supported by daily feedback from Hub visitors, who highlighted ongoing struggles in Kos and a lack of support in the CCAC.

## **1. Participant Selection:**

A purposive sampling method ensured a diverse group of participants, including those directly affected, witnesses, and local stakeholders. Except for stakeholders, all interviewees' names were anonymised and replaced with pseudonyms (e.g., A or B) along with their country of origin.

## **2. Data Collection:**

Interviews were conducted in Arabic or English, translated when necessary and transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy. Bilingual translators ensured cultural nuances were preserved, and their invaluable contributions were critical to the project.

## **3. Data Analysis:**

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns by coding significant data points and refining themes to accurately capture key insights from the interviews.

## **4. Limitations regarding the scope of the report:**

This report does not include the experiences of individuals in the pre-removal detention center (PRDC) or unaccompanied minors in the CCAC's "safe zone" due to restricted access. Both groups face significant challenges, including inadequate healthcare and limited food provision, which should not be overlooked.

## **5. Acknowledgements**

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to this project. Special thanks go to the interpreters whose efforts made much of the data collection possible. We are also deeply grateful to the interviewees for trusting us with their difficult and often traumatic stories, despite the challenges and potential risks of speaking out about the current situation.

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the Dodecanese islands have been the main entry points for people seeking safety in Greece, with Kos emerging as a major hotspot.<sup>1</sup> Located just 4 kilometres from the Turkish coast, this popular tourist destination also serves as a landing point for thousands of asylum seekers fleeing human rights violations each year. Those who survive the dangerous journey are forcibly housed in Kos' CCAC until their asylum procedures are completed. Although promoted as the solution to the so-called "migrant crisis", these closed camps fall short of improving living conditions. Additionally, the expedited asylum process leaves recognised refugees without the necessary support, making integration into Greek society exceedingly difficult.

This report seeks to give a voice to people on the move on Kos, shedding light on the challenges they face. Through our close connection with the community, we invited visitors of the Hub to share their personal experiences of arriving to and living on Kos.

***"Let me tell you something. There's a difference between what you hear from officials and what you hear from the one who lived the experience himself. [...] you need just to ask those who lived the experience." - G, Palestine***

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Refugee Statistics: Trends at a Glance, September 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/112366>.



# PART I

## RISKING YOUR LIFE TO SEEK SAFETY

*“It’s really a death way. We have seen death in front of our eyes.  
[...] But we had no choice” - P, Yemen*

### DANGEROUS JOURNEYS

Located 4 km by sea from Turkey, most people attempting to reach Kos do so by boat. Forced into overcrowded dinghies, often sailing at night and in poor weather conditions, refugees frequently describe the crossing of the Aegean Sea as one of the most dangerous parts of the migration journey—sometimes even more traumatic than the persecutions or wars they endured in their countries of origin.

*“[The boat was] plastic. With 29 persons” - K, Palestine*

*“After fifteen to twenty minutes of driving in the sea, the boat started sinking and I found myself in an inflatable boat, in the sea, sinking. It was horrible and very scary. We started to take the water out the boat, and I thought at that moment, if they catch me and send me back to Turkey I’d never ever ever try to come again” - H, Palestine*

Based on the wounds they observed, doctors from the NGO Medical Volunteers International described these journeys as being inherently violent. They explained that some of the injuries they treat result from people falling off fast-moving boats or accidentally cutting themselves on rocks after jumping out.<sup>2</sup>

2. Information provided by Medical Volunteers International in an interview conducted by Glocal Roots on August 19, 2024





# PUSHBACKS OFF THE COAST OF KOS

When speaking to the community, however, the greatest harm people recall is often not the conditions of the crossing itself. Instead, it is the danger inflicted by the Greek Coast Guards during illegal pushbacks to Turkey.

***“The Coast Guard stopped in front of us. They said, stop the engine. They showed us their gun, [threatening] that they will hit us if we do anything. We stopped everything and the kids and women were crying the whole time - it was really bad. They jumped onto our rubber boat and they started to hit us directly. They shouted saying we had to go back. I tried to translate and I got beaten three times because of that. [...] I think it was the worst moment of my life. They called another boat with eight people onboard. They were fully equipped like an army and they were covering their faces with masks. They started to beat us again. They robbed the boat with two jet boats and they started to take us. They took off my clothes, all my clothes. I stayed with my boxer. And they threw all our stuff to the sea. Everything. They took us to their jet boat and they drove us to the Turkish border. They threw us and said the Turkish coast guard would come to us.” - P, Yemen***

***“We were almost 60 people in the boat. The Greek coast guard stopped us and they started to shoot our boat” - Q, Palestine***

Out of the seventeen individuals who participated in the interviews, only four managed to successfully cross into Kos on their first attempt without being pushed back. At the other end of the spectrum, one interviewee reported attempting to cross 18 times, another 15 times, and another 10 times. The testimonies collected revealed a consistent pattern in the operating methods used by the Greek Coast Guards to carry out these practices. Pushbacks are illegal as they violate the Geneva Conventions, which uphold the principles of non-refoulement and the right to seek asylum. These practices, often marked by violence, theft, and severe dehumanisation, have been extensively documented across Greece in recent years, with numerous similar testimonies emerging.<sup>3</sup>

3. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Greece Country Report 2023 Update, June 2024, [https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/AIDA-GR\\_2023-Update.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/AIDA-GR_2023-Update.pdf).



## PUSHBACKS ARE NOT A DETERRENT

Deterrence policies promoted by the European Union, the Greek government, and various political leaders to prevent people on the move from entering EU territories are often presented as the only solution to address the increasing number of arrivals. However, the implementation of such policies does not deter people from crossing, as people who flee persecution usually feel that they have nothing to lose anymore. Moreover, returning or remaining in Turkey is not a viable option for many, especially now that refugees are at risk of being deported back to their home countries—particularly Syrians and Afghans.<sup>4</sup> Many explained to us that they left Turkey in the first place due to the racism and mistreatment they experienced there.

***“It’s a very hard situation in Turkey, especially now with the racism being spread towards all the Arabs there. It doesn’t matter where you come from. Syria, Palestine, Kuwait, Saudi, it doesn’t matter.” - I, Palestine***

***“I stayed in Turkey for four years and not a single day I thought I’d throw myself in the sea. But then life there became very hard and I gave up on staying there so I decided to do it [crossing to Greece]” - H, Palestine***

Illegal pushback practices have only led to people taking greater risks in their attempts to seek safety in the EU—whether by trying again, exploring different routes, or employing alternative methods to cross. Extensive research demonstrates that deterrence policies are ineffective in reducing migration flows and often lead to increased human suffering while encouraging the use of more dangerous migration routes.<sup>5</sup>

***“We would just keep trying. We did not relax in Turkey. We would be released from the prison and just try again to cross to escape.” - B, Palestine***

4. Lighthouse Reports, "Turkey's EU-Funded Deportation Machine," *Lighthouse Reports*, accessed December 12, 2025, <https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/turkeys-eu-funded-deportation-machine/>

5. Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Pushbacks on Land and Sea: Illegal Measures of Migration Management, AS-MIG-2022-07-EN, 2022, <https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/MIG/Pdf/DocsAndDecs/2022/AS-MIG-2022-07-EN.pdf>



***“We know that [pushbacks] will happen. We know we can even lose our life. [...] but what we face in our country is more difficult than what we see here now. That’s why it’s not difficult because[...] Europe is a dream for us. You cannot give up on your dream. So we go forward. [...] The Greek police, they know what they are doing, but they do that because they need us to be afraid so we do not try to enter Greece again. [...] We try our best to come but they, they have guns, they have authority [...]. They forget about the law.” - N, Sudan***

## SWIMMING THE AEGEAN SEA

To reduce the risks and costs associated with travelling by boat, some individuals attempt to swim from Turkey to Kos. At its closest point, the island is 4 kilometres from Turkey, making the crossing approximately six hours swimming—often at night and with no specialised equipment other than flippers and a swimsuit. While the risk of being caught by the Greek Coast Guards may be lower, the danger remains extraordinarily high. Most individuals have never swum such long distances before, have no way to call anyone for help, and face highly unfavourable conditions.

***“I came by swimming [...] because I didn’t have the money. [...] I bought some stuff, some equipment like a swimsuit, some flippers, a bottle of water, a pack of biscuits and I swam. The distance was five kilometres.” - I, Palestine***





## NEW MIGRATION ROUTES

Over the past few years, new migration routes have also emerged in the southern Dodecanese islands as people attempt to evade the Coast Guard around Kos. Several individuals who shared their testimonies first arrived in Greece via Rhodes, Symi or Nisyros—locations that have not implemented CCACs. With no support systems in place on these islands, one interviewee who arrived on a small island near Symi described how the group faced extremely dangerous conditions, including being forced to climb a cliff to call for help. Some individuals sustained injuries, and it took the Coast Guard several hours to rescue them.

***“It was dark [...] we couldn't see anything, but we had to climb all the way to the top of the mountain. [...] We had families with kids, we didn't have water. We tried to contact the Coast Guard, but they refused to help us. We saw a guy [...]. He tripped and rolled over the mountain. He slammed on the floor and broke his hand. He injured his head, he was bleeding. That's when I started to talk to the UN. I told them we have someone who fell from the cliff, he's injured. We took a picture [...] but they said this is all acting, you're being dramatic” - O, Yemen***

Some participants who arrived on these southern islands reported being detained in local police stations, where they faced inhumane, degrading, and humiliating treatment. In some cases, they had limited access to food and water for several hours.

***“They took us to the prison. [...] The place was super dirty [...] they put us all together, women, kids, elderly, men, young, everyone together in one room. [...] The food was not enough, it was only twice a day but we couldn't eat it. It was not a good quality. They were giving us two small bottles of water per day which is not enough for each person. We asked them if they could fix the bathrooms, they refused [...] we had to use it with an open door.” - J, Syria***

No reception and identification infrastructure facilities are present on these islands. In Rhodes, in particular, new arrivals are often left without any assessment by the authorities. Those who attempt to travel independently from other islands to Kos by ferry, hoping to be registered in the CCAC, risk imprisonment for travelling without documentation.

***“When we heard them saying that they would transfer us to Kos we were happy as we thought the situation would be better, and when we got there actually it was worse than Rhodes.” - J, Syria***

When individuals are finally transported by the authorities to the CCACs in Kos or Leros, they are transferred aboard ferries, such as the Dodekanisos Seaways, which also carry tourists traveling between Rhodes and Samos. These transfers often occur in degrading and humiliating conditions. Individuals report being handcuffed, confined to designated areas of the boat, and prohibited from speaking. O, from Yemen, explains here how they were transferred from Symi to Kos.

***“So we went with the tourists, but the tourists sat behind, we sat in front [...]. Everybody was tired and quiet, they [the authorities] were not doing anything, because there were tourists. But when we got off the boat, they started to get violent.” - O, Yemen***

## SHIPWRECKS OFF KOS

Despite the immense risk involved, crossing the Aegean Sea under these perilous conditions remains the only option for many people to ask for asylum, as no legal and safe routes are available to them. Shipwrecks at the EU's borders, resulting from these inhumane policies, continue to be tragically common.





***“I tried four times to apply for a visa to study in Europe. And I got rejected three times. I have skills in many things. I have certificates, I have everything. I have a bank account. I wouldn't do that [crossing irregularly] if they accepted me officially. Even the tourist visa, it's forbidden for us. I don't know why it's just about us. I can work, I can do many things. But our visa applications get rejected all the time. So what can we do about this? I think this is the question now. This is why we took the hardest way. [...] It's really a death way. We have seen death in front of our eyes. We have seen everything really bad there. But we had no choice” - P, Yemen***

## **PUSHBACKS FROM LAND**

Unfortunately, the danger does not end once people reach Kos. Many still fear being pushed back from land and resort to hiding in the mountains or attempting to reach the CCAC on their own to avoid detection by authorities and ensure they are registered at the facility. At this stage, many suffer injuries, climbing mountains unprepared and unequipped while already dehydrated and malnourished following their journeys at sea.

***“When we got here, we had to hide in the mountains, it was a group of us, and then some people found us and the police came. They said they would push us back to Turkey” - L, Palestine***

***“We arrived and we walked because this is the only solution. Even if the police come and tell us “we will take you to the camp”, [...] Even if we find police with a rose, we don't stop. [...] This is the rule. Because they lie. They tell you we will take you to camp. [If] we trust them. Sometimes you find yourself in the bush.” - N, Sudan***

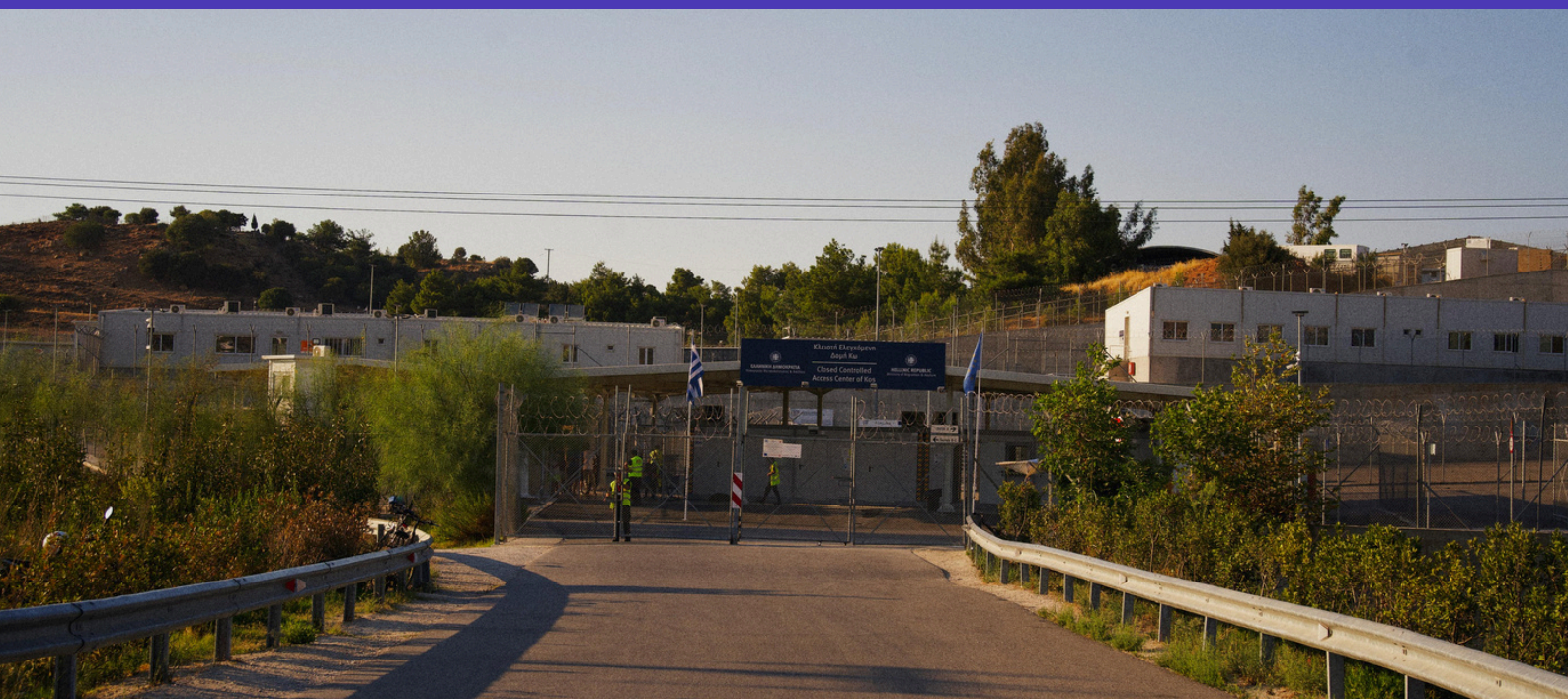
## **NEED FOR SAFE & LEGAL ROUTES**

The dangers displaced people face in attempting to reach Europe are undeniable. The numerous testimonies we have received, all highlighting similar issues, demonstrate that pushbacks, violence, or dehumanisation are not isolated incidents. They are part of a systematic approach designed to prevent people from entering the EU and Greece. Illegal pushbacks do nothing to deter irregular entry; instead, they force individuals to take even greater risks to reach safety. To date, neither the EU nor Greece has shown any commitment to stopping these illegal practices.

# PART II

# LIFE IN THE CCAC

*“It’s like a jail” - G, Palestine*



## THE LOCATION OF THE CCAC

Like other Greek hotspots, Kos’ former Reception and Identification Centre was replaced by the CCAC in 2021. The new facility is located in a remote area, approximately 14 kilometres from the main town. To access essential services in the town—such as the public hospital, the police station, international money transfer locations, or the services provided by Glocal Roots at the Hub—camp residents must pay 5€ for a round trip on a bus that runs only a few times per day.



***“I consider it as a jail. And it's quite expensive for the people. We are isolated from everything there, you can't find anything except the market. People want to go out to get some fresh air. Besides the racism in the city, they find that they want to go out, they still have the desire to see the world. But we are isolated, we can't meet people, we can't see people. It's like a small village, there is nothing. Because it's far, transportation is expensive. It's really hard to reach the city during the day, we only have 3 or 4 busses” - P, Yemen***

## LIVING CONDITIONS

Since the summer of 2023, Kos has been one of the Greek islands receiving the highest numbers of people on the move. While the population of the CCAC typically fluctuates between 1,000 and 3,000 individuals, the winter of 2023-2024 in particular saw particularly high levels of arrivals, with over 4,000 people living in the CCAC in December 2023 alone. Although Greece is legally obliged to provide adequate living conditions,<sup>6</sup> this severe overcrowding led to the degradation of facilities and a significant deterioration of the situation. Moreover, both camp management and asylum services have been understaffed and under-equipped to support such a large number of asylum seekers, further exacerbating the challenges faced by residents.

During periods of severe overcrowding in the CCAC, several individuals reported significant human rights violations. These included de facto detention upon arrival, with some held without the possibility of leaving for up to 60 days, and inadequate shelter during winter months, which forced many to live in non-residential areas such as canteens or outdoor spaces without proper protection. Fortunately, following the intervention of legal actors<sup>7</sup> on the island, detention upon arrival in 2024 has typically been limited to a few days at most.

6. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Greece: Reception Conditions – Conditions in Reception Facilities, Asylum Information Database (AIDA), last modified 2024, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/>

7. Equal Rights Beyond Borders, communication to directorates of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Hellenic Police, and Head of Unit for Greece in the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, November 29, 2024; Greek Ombudsman, *Intervention by the Greek Ombudsman*, document no. 345376/64069, December 29, 2023; European Court of Human Rights, *M.K. and Others v. Greece*, Rule 39, Interim Measures, application no. 42416/23, December 12, 2014; Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), *Absolutely Inadequate Conditions in the New Closed Controlled Access Center (CCAC) of Kos*, 2024.



***“We were sleeping in the kitchen. After a week, we were placed into rooms. These places were very dirty, the toilet water would flood the rooms. The bathrooms were awful. We would sleep on the tables in the kitchen for approximately 8 days. Some would leave, some would find another place, but there were approximately 150 people there - it was very crowded.” - B, Palestine <sup>8</sup>***

Although the camp is not currently overcrowded, its infrastructure has significantly deteriorated due to the constant flow of people and the lack of repairs. As a result, many containers now lack basic necessities such as mattresses, pillows and blankets. Additionally, the overall conditions in the camp remain precarious, with rooms frequently flooding and bathrooms often out of order. Notably, many toilets currently lack doors.

***“The second day, they brought us sleeping bags, but not for all, because they said we don't have a lot of sleeping bags. We had to share. Each one will take a corner and lie down with his friends. We were on the floor, there were no beds, just a big hall with everybody's lying down” - O, Yemen***

Additionally, camp residents all report unsanitary living conditions. They are not allowed to bring their own cleaning products into the camp, leaving them unable to clean residential areas themselves. The containers are infested with cockroaches, and flooding caused by the damaged pipework has created extremely unhygienic living conditions.

***“As much as I will describe to you how filthy the camp was, it wouldn't be enough. I could say simply, there were more cockroaches inside the camp than humans.” - J, Syria***

8. Interview conducted in June 2024, mentioning a situation experienced in the CCAC during the winter 2023-2024

***“In the room, there were as many cockroaches as there was water dropping from the ceiling, water dropping from the walls, from the sides from all over. There are more cockroaches than there is water. The water that was used to wash our hands was dirty, unclean, you couldn’t use it, you’d have to go and buy water from outside.” - L, Palestine***

## **ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL ITEMS**

Upon arrival at the CCAC, camp residents should be provided with essential items to ensure an adequate standard of living. Many arrive on the island by boat or swimming, often with nothing but the clothes on their backs, leaving them in desperate need of immediate support. However, some reported receiving no supplies, while others noted that the quantities provided were very limited. Critically, camp residents are not given any additional supplies beyond what they receive upon arrival, even though their stay typically lasts for months. The severe lack of blankets, hygiene items, clothing, and shoes is particularly alarming, especially as temperatures have begun to drop.

***“They didn’t actually give us any hygiene products so we found them in the centre [Glocal Roots] where we can get shampoo and soap and things like this because they didn’t give us anything in the camp.” - L, Palestine***

***“When we arrived at the camp, they gave us a sleeping bag, a towel, and a small bottle of shampoo which is enough for one shower, and a small hand soap. That’s all we got since we got to the camp.” - J, Syria***







## INADEQUATE FOOD SUPPLIES

The most common complaint from camp residents concerns the food, both in terms of quantity and quality. Many residents reported being provided with only one meal per day. While the camp claims that the single meal is sufficient to cover breakfast, lunch, and dinner, many feel it is inadequate to sustain them. In September, some individuals suffered food poisoning after eating a meal provided by the CCAC and had to be hospitalised for treatment, which they were required to pay for themselves.

***“We got one meal, but [...] it actually counts as two. It actually counts as lunch and dinner altogether. [...] Sometimes it’s good, sometimes not good. [...] And [we got] two bottles of water a day and an apple.” - E, Palestine***

***“The food was not ok, but we had to eat, we were hungry, we couldn’t complain. [...] Food was not enough, it was not good, we only had rice and beans. We were worried about the nutrition we were getting. We can buy food from outside but we worry about overspending, because we don’t have a lot of money, and we don’t know how long we’re going to stay. Also, they don’t bring food on time. Sometimes it’s at 3, sometimes it’s at 5, sometimes it’s at 6, you never know. And if you miss it, you’re not going to get another opportunity.” - O, Yemen***

***“The food was not edible, I could not eat it. [...] The rice was like plastic. I ate the food once and it upset my stomach, I fainted and was sent to the hospital in the ambulance. It happened to many people” - A, Palestine***

In Kos’ CCAC, camp residents are not allowed to cook. As a result, those without the means to buy prepared food from outside are forced to rely on the camp-provided meals. However, even those who can afford to buy food from outside often struggle to maintain a nutritious diet, as prepared meals often lack vegetables and other essential nutrients. Local markets in Pily exploit the situation by inflating prices, taking advantage of the presence of people on the move.

***“The food is not enough to eat [...]. When we arrived there, we suffered a lot because we didn’t have the money. But other people, they had some money. They could manage to bring some food from outside. There is a Greek woman, she used to sell food and groceries inside the camp with her car. It was double the price. We were in the closed part, and we couldn’t go out so we were forced to buy this but we didn’t have enough money..” - Q, Palestine***

In the CCAC, some parts are closed, and residents cannot exit them at all. This includes the safe-zone for unaccompanied minors and the area where people are held until they are registered. The pre-removal detention centre is another closed area within the CCAC that is completely isolated from the rest. For this reason, it is not included in this report, as access to individuals detained there is not permitted.

Restrictions on bringing goods inside the CCAC, combined with limits on residents' movement, have made many feel their freedom is severely restricted. It also seems that these policies are not applied equally at all times. Rather, they are based on the personal will of the security staff working inside the camp.

***“Once I brought a coffee, and they took it from me, they told me, ‘you are not allowed to bring coffee’. There are specific types of things that are forbidden. On other islands it’s allowed, so I don’t know why. And the irony is that many other friends were able to bring coffee. I asked them how? They say, ‘it’s ok, the employee saw it and allowed us’. So to be honest, sometimes there’s no policy for the work, it depends on the mood of the employee. If he’s in a good mood, he will allow you to do anything. If he’s in a bad mood, everything is forbidden.” - G, Palestine***

***“Perfume, anything, none of this [...] you are not allowed to bring it, and coffee is forbidden” - P, Yemen***

## DETENTION AND SECURITISATION

The CCAC is a prison-like structure surrounded by a double NATO-style security fence, equipped with magnetic gates, and requiring identity and fingerprint checks. The facility is under constant surveillance through a Closed Surveillance System (CCTV) monitored 24/7 by the Hellenic Police and a control centre in Athens.<sup>9</sup>As a result, leaving the residential sections—whether to exit the facility or to access services within the CCAC—is often challenging due to the numerous checkpoints residents must navigate.

9. Ministry of Migration and Asylum, "K.Y.T. Ko," Ministry of Migration and Asylum, accessed December 3, 2024, <https://migration.gov.gr/en/ris/perifereiakes-monades/kyt-domes/k-y-t-ko/>





***“Every big block has 3 blocks, and there is a wall all around, and you have to go to the main gate to ask for permission to exit your block. They take your name, the time you leave, your number, and everything. They write it down in the note, and they ask you where you are going. When you come back you have to give the paper back. If you don't have it, they will insult you for forgetting, because they have to go through the notes to check the information, so they feel tired about that. After the checkpoint, you have to walk to the main gate of the CCAC, and they check everything again, it takes almost 15 minutes. When you come back to the camp, you go through the x-ray machine to check your stuff, and you have to follow all these steps again, all the way back.” - P, Yemen***

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

If exiting residential areas is challenging for leaving the CCAC, it is equally problematic for accessing services within the camp, such as medical, legal and protection actors who should ensure that vulnerable individuals get<sup>10</sup> adequate support, or cash assistance, as many are located in separate sections. As a result, camp residents often remain unaware of their rights due to these access difficulties, and vulnerable individuals struggle to receive adequate protection.

According to the Joint Ministerial Decision 2857/2021, everyone awaiting a decision on their asylum applications accommodated in a state facility can benefit from cash assistance. However, with the asylum procedure moving more quickly on the island, many individuals never get the chance to access the support they need. In theory, each individual is entitled to receive monthly financial assistance: 75€ for single individuals, 135€ for couples or single parents with one child, and 210€ for families of four or more, until a decision is made regarding their asylum application. Unfortunately, many are unaware of this right, and by the time they learn about it, the complex administrative procedure and significant delays often prevent them from receiving the support they are entitled to. In addition to this, cash assistance has been suspended since May 2024.

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10. Joint Ministerial Decision 2857, Official Gazette B, 3120/29.09.2021, Greece.

11. Fenix Aid, "Provision of Cash Assistance to Asylum Seekers in Greece Must Resume Immediately," Fenix Aid, accessed December 3, 2024, <https://www.fenixaid.org/articles/provision-of-cash-assistance-to-asylum-seekers-in-greece-must-resume-immediately>.

***“Priority goes for families first, then you need to fill in a paper with your details and they look into it. [...] Many friends didn’t have money to get food, and no one helped them. No one gets anything from anywhere.” - G, Palestine***

## LACK OF MEDICAL SUPPORT

Access to healthcare for people on the move in Kos is severely limited, worsened by the extreme understaffing at the CCAC. With only one doctor and a few nurses available, the thousands of camp residents are neither adequately assessed nor referred to specialists, leaving many without the care they need. The situation is further compounded by the island’s general shortage of specialists. While some locals with financial means can access private clinics, this option is rarely available to people on the move. Additional barriers to healthcare include language difficulties, discrimination, lack of financial means and logistical challenges.

***“So the health system was very bad. We saw and witnessed that they don’t really care about what’s going on with the people inside the camp even if they were sick and even if they tried to see the doctor, they would say the doctor is not here. Unless someone got unconscious and people would gather and get angry at the police or the security guards around the camp. But if the situation gets really bad and the patient needs to go to the hospital, the only thing they would do is they would call the ambulance [...] Another friend got beaten on his foot which he couldn’t step on, we went to the police and told them this is the situation we need to see a doctor and they said the doctor is not here and they said they did see us taking him, holding him and carrying him to go to the bathrooms and [...] back to the room because he couldn’t walk, it was really bad and they didn’t care.” - J, Syria***

***“They wouldn’t let us see the doctors. I had a wound on my arm, and I requested to go to the doctor to clean the wound and put a bandage on it, but they didn’t treat me. You can even see the scar” - F, Palestine***

In emergencies, the camp management is expected to call for an ambulance. However, authorities within the CCAC are often reluctant to do so, leaving camp residents to arrange their own transport by taxi to the island’s only hospital, which is located approximately 14 kilometers away in the town. Additionally, with only two ambulances serving the entire island, response times to emergencies can be extremely slow.

***“What ambulance? They let him [someone who was injured] sleep on the floor, eat bad food, do you think they are going to bring him? They took him to the clinic of the camp, then they brought him back [to the container]. They gave him nothing, no medicine, they brought him as he was. If you go you don't get help.” - O, Yemen***

# LACK OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

The mental health situation is even more concerning, as there are no psychologists working directly within the CCAC. The only psychologist available is working for a protection actor focusing exclusively on accompanied minors and survivors of sexual and gender based violence, including SOGIESC<sup>12</sup> cases. This workload is far too overwhelming for a single person and falls far short of addressing the wide range of severe mental health challenges faced by most refugees. This situation has become even more concerning since the protection actors left at the end of 2024, with no additional staff deployed. Local actors are deeply worried that vulnerabilities are not being addressed at all.<sup>13</sup>

***“What people have seen in the sea, in the journey, and the war... We come from different places, from Gaza, from Syria, from Yemen, from Palestine, from everywhere [...] all of us need to be treated [...] and here there is no such a thing for that. [...] I have a trauma from crossing the sea [...] I feel afraid all the time” - P, Yemen***

***“No mental support. No awareness. Nothing. They dump you inside the camp. Go ahead. Do yourself. They don't even assist you.” - O, Yemen***

The lack of mental health support is not only alarming for people's well-being but it also undermines proper vulnerability assessments. When individuals are unable to openly express their mental health struggles, they may never receive the support they need. Beyond the challenges this creates in their daily lives, it can also hinder their ability to discuss past traumas, which are often critical to their asylum claims.

12. SOGIESC stands for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics

13. Border Violence Monitoring Network. "Balkan Regional Report - January 2025." January 31, 2025. <https://borderviolence.eu/app/uploads/BVMN-Monthly-Report-Dec-2024.pdf>



# POLICE VIOLENCE

Reports of police violence within the CCAC is another alarming concern. Complaints about abuse by authorities frequently came up during our interviews—regarding both security personnel and the police operating inside the camp. These behaviours are often described as racist, abusive, inappropriate, and at times extremely violent, both verbally and physically. Instances of police violence were particularly common among individuals accommodated in the CCAC during the winter.

***“For four days, out of this time that I was in the camp, I was detained, trapped and beaten and starved and treated very badly by the police.” - L, Palestine***

***“They would treat us without respect, inhumane, shouting at you constantly, like they hate you. They would just say ‘shut up, you are crazy’.” - B, Palestine***

In some instances, these abuses could be classified as inhumane and degrading treatment. Additionally, individuals also face racial profiling outside of the CCAC. In September, several groups of camp residents who were shopping in Pyli—the village near the CCAC—got arrested by police and taken to the main town’s police station for identification checks. They were released at 9 p.m. with no option to return to the camp other than by paying for a taxi. People on the move in Kos face widespread harassment, both within the camp and in the surrounding areas.

One interviewee described being violently removed from the camp one day without any warning.

***“They suddenly came while we were sleeping, it was early morning, and they expelled us. There was a chase from the security. They took us away and out of the camp. It was [done in] a bad way. They didn’t respect our privacy. They didn’t respect the sleeping person, who should be [treated like a] human. There’s a good way, even if he’s not allowed to stay here, just be nice. [...] They only gave us one minute to bring everything. [...] It’s unreasonable, unbelievable. So I started to pick up some things. One [security officer] came, took me and said, ‘get out’.” - G, Palestine***



# NEED FOR DIGNIFYING & HUMANE RECEPTION CONDITIONS

The shift toward detention and control of people on the move with the opening of the CCACs is not an improvement of living conditions but rather a means of exerting greater control over the displaced population on the island. This approach continues to perpetuate human rights violations.



# PART III

# LEFT TO SURVIVE

*"I don't have money to pay rent. I don't have work. I don't have anything. They don't care about us at all." - Q, Palestine*



## HOMELESSNESS ON KOS

Once asylum seekers are recognised as refugees, they are given only 30 days to leave the CCAC. However, the process of obtaining their official documentation typically takes much longer than this timeframe. Firstly, they must provide their fingerprints to receive their residency permits, a process that can take several months depending on the case. Following this, they must wait for an appointment to collect their travel documents, which cannot be done in Kos. Instead, they are required to travel to Thessaloniki, Athens, or Crete by boat or plane -destinations that are not only far away but also very costly to reach. As a result, refugees are often expelled from the facility, sometimes by force, without any support while they await their essential documents. During this time, they face significant challenges in finding work, securing accommodation, and traveling abroad until their documentation is finalised.





In the first half of 2024, vulnerable individuals –including elderly people, those with disabilities or illnesses, families, and babies– were forced into homelessness due to this lack of support. Fortunately, the efforts of the legal organisation Equal Rights Beyond Borders<sup>14</sup> and a protection actor on Kos have improved the situation for the most vulnerable cases.<sup>15</sup> However, many individuals continue to live in extremely difficult conditions.

***“They give you one month to leave the camp from the day that you receive your decision regarding your asylum procedure. Once you’ve been kicked out of the camp, you have to take care of yourself on your own without an ID [residency permit], or passport, or anything. People get to the island with no money and have spent everything on the journey. [...] Nearby the camp there is a small forest with a lot of trees. People who have been kicked out of the camp and cannot afford renting a place in the city are sleeping there until they get their residency permit, but we don’t know how long it takes. Depending on your luck it might take days, weeks, or months.” - J, Syria***

Throughout the year, many individuals who visited the Hub faced significant difficulties during the process of obtaining their documents. Authorities made numerous mistakes, such as losing people’s fingerprints –sometimes even several times– without ever acknowledging their mistakes. This forced individuals to redo their appointments, resulting in additional months of waiting. During this time, they were unable to work or travel and remained in extremely challenging situations.

***“Because I helped the police with translation when I arrived, they told me: ‘you were very helpful with us, we would like to thank you so we will help you with your procedures to be fast’. The irony was that it was very slow and I was stuck.” - G, Palestine***

14. European Court of Human Rights, M.J. and Others v. Greece, decision on interim measures lodged July 23, 2024, application no. 20399/24, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yxwtxrsj>; Equal Rights Beyond Borders, Vulnerable Recognized Refugees Remain Homeless on the Island of Kos (June 30, 2024), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/2ezvpk9n>; Equal Rights Beyond Borders, Kos: The Greek Ombudsman Intervenes on the Systemic Issue of Long Delays in the Issuance of Residence Permits for Recognized Refugees and the Exposure of Two Refugees to Precarious Living Conditions (September 12, 2024), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mtyucler>.

15. Equal Rights, Kos’s Unseen Housing Crisis, Equal Rights, accessed December 3, 2024, <https://directus.equal-rights.org/assets/99c857bb-837b-4e62-9527-2d9e06b7299b>



As explained in our article, “The homelessness crisis facing refugees in Kos”<sup>16</sup> and in our video series, “The Face of the Homelessness Crisis in Kos”,<sup>17</sup> one of the biggest challenges faced by people on the move in Kos is the lack of housing. Accommodation is typically reserved for the large numbers of tourists who visit the island each year, leading to a drastic increase in rental prices. Furthermore, many people on the move report experiencing racism from potential landlords.

***“Yesterday, I slept on the beach. The mosquitos were all over my body. For the simplest thing, such as going to the bathroom, you don’t have access to a bathroom so you have to find your way [...] at the beach or in the forest or parks [...] I am disgusted by this life.” - H, Palestine***

***“Why haven’t we managed to find a place to live in? Where are all these tourists that have come from Belgium, Germany? They’ve managed to find an accommodation for them, why haven’t they managed to help us? When I say I’m from Palestine they’d just turn their head and say go away and then we have nowhere to stay. What options do we have? Do we have to go to Germany, to Belgium, to Holland, is it better for us?” - L, Palestine***

16. Glocal Roots, "The Homelessness Crisis Facing Refugees in Kos," Glocal Roots, accessed December 3, 2024, <https://glocalroots.org/en/the-homelessness-crisis-facing-refugees-in-kos/>.

17. Glocal Roots, "The Homelessness Crisis Facing Refugees in Kos," Instagram video, posted October 4, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/glocalroots/reel/DAtMK1nCLEL/>

# UNSANITARY LIVING CONDITIONS

For those who manage to find accommodation, it is often in poor conditions, sometimes in abandoned, unregulated buildings.

***“I found a place, it's like a store. Someone recommended it to me, he said this is the only option for you. My expectation was higher but I found the same situation as in the camp. It's a really dirty place. It's 4 by 6 meters for 10 people. We share the same bathroom, there is no door, no kitchen. We pay 160 euros each. This is the offer that you can find, and people accept because they have nothing [...] the owner is using the people.” - P, Yemen***

***“We found an old abandoned school with no rooms in. Everyone lay down, put a blanket that we found from the street, and we slept on the floor. There were cockroaches everywhere and it was really dirty. I spent one month in this place and another one in a closed down restaurant. Sleeping in the streets is better than sleeping in these abandoned places” - L, Palestine***

Poor living conditions, similar to those in the CCAC, significantly increase the risks of health issues. As a result, skin infections such as scabies are a common problem among refugees on the island. MVI stated:<sup>18</sup>

***“The pathologies are basically the same ones that we see in the camp, but also from people living in town, because most of them are related to the way people are living, and it's overcrowded places with lack of sanitation and access to clean water or good food. So a lot of problems come from that, and for example, scabies or lack of vitamins or constipation, this also comes from just lack of access to food and basic sanitation.”***

18. Information provided by Medical Volunteers International in an interview conducted by Glocal Roots on August 19, 2024





## EXPLOITATION AT WORK

Many individuals who find work on the island face exploitation. A significant number work without contracts while waiting for their official ID, often drawn in by promises that their employment will eventually be legalised – a promise that rarely comes to fruition. Even those working legally often have a portion of their wages undeclared, and it is not uncommon for this portion of their salary to go unpaid at some point.

***“Wherever you go here on this island, you’ll find racism and discrimination. I signed a contract at the hotel. [...] I have 8 days off and I have to work 40 [...] hours a week. [...] That’s what it was on paper. That’s what I signed. But they told me, if you would like to work with us, you only have 2 off days and a different salary than what you just signed, and you don’t have any accommodation - while it was included through my contract. Everything illegal, everything under the table. They’re taking advantage that you’re in need for money to help your family there in Gaza. [...] You even have to work extra hours for free. It’s, obligatory. If you say no, they will say, ‘get out and don’t come back and you don’t have anything here’. [...] Racism is everywhere. You have to work 9 hours, while the Greeks have to work 8 hours. All of them take 2 days off a week [...]. They got accommodation. They got three meals.” - G, Palestine***

Because no guidance is provided on the procedures to follow, the required documents, or how to navigate the process – and no translation services are available – individuals struggle to obtain essential documents such as a social security number, tax number, and bank account to work legally. While larger companies may have human resources departments to assist with this process, smaller employers often do not. This lack of support leaves workers vulnerable to further exploitation.

***“They will delay your money if you don't have a bank account. [...] You will stay like this [for] two months, three months. If you don't find a bank account, your money will stay there until you have one. How do I survive? If you ask about your money, they tell you, ‘we cannot pay you now, if you don't have an account, we don't pay you’” - N, Sudan***

Language barriers make bureaucratic tasks, such as opening a bank account incredibly challenging and also leave people vulnerable to exploitation when looking for work. Refugees are often unaware of their rights, and even when they are, they are afraid to speak up for fear of losing the jobs they rely on to survive and support their families. This dynamic contributes to a troubling normalisation of human rights violations faced by people on the move in Kos. Over time, victims become resigned to their rights being disregarded, allowing these abuses to persist without change.

***“Sometimes they give you the most difficult work. They don't tell you the truth because you don't understand Greek. You will sign the contract but you don't know what is in the contract. [...] So what will you do? You know it's your right, but no one will come to defend it. [...] Why would I go to the court and run every day to the police station. Because of this little money? It's okay, let them take it. I give up. Sometimes we surrender. Many times we surrender about this. We know we have rights, but we surrender.” - N, Sudan***

## **POLICE RACISM & VIOLENCE**

Racist behaviour is not limited to the local population—our interviewees also described instances of racism from the authorities. The harassment experienced in the CCAC often continues even after people move into the town.

***“There is one guy here, it was his birthday, and we went out to give him a cake and celebrate it. We celebrated in the street, we didn't shout, we were dancing like everyone here, it's a touristic place, it's a public street, it was 11 or midnight, and people around the city are drunk and singing all the time. But they stopped us, only us, ‘you are here in Greece, it's not an Arab country, no dance, no celebrating, no birthday here’.” - P, Yemen***

Reports of police brutality in the town have surfaced multiple times in 2024. Unfortunately, victims of such abuses often feel powerless to report these incidents, fearing that doing so could worsen their situation. Glocal Roots refers individuals who experience these human rights violations to one of the two Greek legal organisations operating primarily within the CCAC, which then report the incidents through national mechanisms.



***"I know I have this trauma from the police, I can't talk freely with them, even if I have the right, because we got beaten for nothing. What do you expect me to do against them?" - P, Yemen***

Facing all these daily challenges requires immense courage, and not everyone is able to cope with them. Many people are left without support, carrying deep trauma from their journeys to Kos and their experiences on the island. While some individuals are determined to learn about their rights and confront the difficulties they face, others struggle to do so. The lack of access to mental health support further complicates the situation, making it even more difficult for those who have been traumatised to rebuild their lives and adapt to their new reality.

***"I'm trying to heal myself as much as I can. I read the information about what is my right, what is not, the rules, everything to rebuild my character, and be brave to face everything again, because we don't know our rights here, because the people are just shouting." - P, Yemen***

People who came seeking a better future are disillusioned by their circumstances and express frustration over the lack of rights they experience.

***"Even if I stay here for 8 years I will not get the nationality. This is a very big problem. It's very difficult. I have skills, I want to help this community. But if you don't give me this opportunity, I can't use them." - N, Sudan***

## **GENERAL LACK OF SUPPORT & OBSTACLES FOR INCLUSION**

People on the move face a general lack of support throughout their time on Kos, both within and outside of the CCAC. Once recognised as refugees and forced to leave the camp, many find themselves completely abandoned, with no assistance for integration. Those who choose to remain on the island are mostly single men who manage to find seasonal work during the summer. Others stay only to wait for their documents before moving on in search of a better future in places where life appears more manageable and affordable.

# CONCLUSION

The situation on Kos for people on the move is dire. At every step of their journey, they face new and preventable problems that pose a threat to their well-being, their fundamental rights, and in the most extreme instances, their lives. The increasing levels of dehumanisation and human rights violations resulting from EU migration policies is concerning, and this is only likely to worsen going forward.

EU and Greek policies have made it impossible for people to enter Greece safely, so they are forced to put themselves at risk in order to claim their right to asylum. Pushback practices are a clear demonstration of the level of dehumanisation people face, and safe routes must be implemented immediately to prevent further deaths from happening in the Aegean Sea.

Whilst the asylum procedure has accelerated in recent months, the number of people arriving on the island has been increasing toward the end of the year. According to visitors of the Hub in October and November of 2024, conditions have further deteriorated since we began writing this report. The negative effects of poor living conditions both inside and outside of the camp, cannot be overstated. The mental health of displaced people is rapidly declining across a significant portion of the community. If people cannot find jobs or adequate housing after having their asylum applications approved, how can they be expected to integrate smoothly – if at all?

In response to the situation, many individuals have expressed how the hopes they had pinned on Europe as a place of safety have been let down. Despite fleeing often life-threatening situations in their home countries, the treatment some people have received since arriving to Greece has been so appalling that it has left them deeply disillusioned.

***“Even though there is war and conflict in Gaza I wish I had stayed there. Because no one will love you like your people. Regardless of the politics, no one will treat you with love and care like in your own country, the way your own people would treat you. There is no love in Europe. We used to hear it is beautiful, it is kind. But the reality is different. When we left, we did not leave because we do not love our country. We left for safety, to establish ourselves, to work. But we found that the reality is much worse outside of our country.” - B, Palestine***

Nonetheless, the community in Kos demonstrates remarkable courage and resilience everyday, consistently coming together to address these challenges however they can. This is why our Hub is so essential. It is the only space in Kos where everyone is welcome and can access the support networks they need to navigate their first steps in Europe. Despite the difficulties, the community continues to strive for the better life they once dreamed of, even if they have not yet found it in Kos. However, it cannot fall solely on them to shoulder this burden alone, nor to the NGOs to be the only providers of support services that the authorities fail to ensure. It is the responsibility of the EU and Greek government to implement safe routes, provide social support services, and treat people with dignity and care as they enter their territories—ensuring that their fundamental rights are upheld at all times. While we wait for these changes to materialise, it is our collective responsibility to offer the support needed to help people rebuild their lives. One of our interviewees, 'N', from Sudan, stated, '**With unity we can build something**'.

Glocal Roots will continue to advocate for the implementation of safe and legal routes, dignified housing, and proper inclusion programs for as long as Greece and the EU fail to fulfill their responsibilities to asylum seekers. No one leaves their home unless they have no other choice, and we must support them, regardless of where they come from.







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