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# CONDITIONS IN THE CLOSED CONTROLLED ACCESS CENTRE OF SAMOS

**SAMOS SITUATION REPORT - MARCH 2022**

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## SITUATION IN THE CLOSED CONTROLLED ACCESS CENTRE (CCAC) OF SAMOS IN MARCH 2022



Current population: 380 people (source: UNHCR weekly Snapshot, 23 January 2022. No more recent data from UNHCR is available).

Population breakdown: 55% men, 24% women, 21% children.

Nationalities: Somalia 40%, Afghanistan 10%, Syria 7%, DRC 6%, Camerun 5%, other 32%.

Total capacity of the CCAC: 2,040 people.

## ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

The EU-funded Philos program, a healthcare program for asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, was scheduled to [expire](#) at the end of February 2022. Following [political pressure](#), the programme was [renewed](#) until the end of 2022. Nevertheless, as of 29 March 2022, no doctor from EODY, the National Public Health Organization, has been operating in the closed facility of Samos since the end of February. It remains unknown when a doctor will be available again.

Not only does the absence of a doctor in the camp prevent residents from accessing basic healthcare, but it also hinders the vulnerability assessment and forces many asylum seekers to undergo the asylum procedure without proper prior identification of vulnerability, which is necessary to obtain the lift of the geographical restriction and a transfer on the mainland.

Referrals from EODY in the camp to the local hospital do not offer a proper solution, as it is already overwhelmed and referrals create significant backlogs which will further impact the health of asylum seekers on the island.

According to Greece's International Protection Act ([Law 4636/2019](#)), vulnerable asylum seekers' asylum procedures must be evaluated through the regular procedure and transferred to the mainland if it is proven that no appropriate health care regarding their medical issues is available on the island they reside. Therefore, the absence of a doctor and the numerous delays at the hospital imply that vulnerable migrants should be exempted from the fast track procedure, if not transferred to the mainland.

In addition, access to the local hospital is also hindered by the lack of dedicated transportation, forcing camp residents to arrange and pay for their transportation between the camp and the hospital. The same applies to those asylum seekers who have to travel to the Greek mainland to access adequate healthcare but must arrange and pay for their transfers.

Finally, even when a doctor was available in the reception facility of Samos, important health issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM) for instance were not recognized and addressed due to the lack of knowledge and training of the medical staff.

# THE SITUATION OF CAMP RESIDENTS WITH REJECTIONS

There is a lack of official and certain data about how many residents of the Samos CCAC currently have been issued a rejection to their asylum claim. However, estimates of non-governmental actors operating on site suggest that between forty to fifty residents fall within this category.

## MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

Since mid-November 2021, camp residents with a negative decision on their asylum claim are subjected to entry and exit restrictions, as their asylum applicant ID card is deactivated. The practical implications of such restrictions consist of the impossibility for those residents to access public services and NGO support services outside of the facility; being locked 24/7 in a facility that has been [described by residents as prison-like](#); having access exclusively to services provided inside of the facility, which is extremely limited. The same movement restrictions also apply to all those newly registered camp residents who are still waiting for their ID cards to be issued, for which the administrative waiting time can last up to several weeks.

The Greek Council For Refugees issued a [statement](#) on the unlawfully ongoing detention in the Samos C.C.A.C. by referring to a [court ruling](#) in Syros in December 2021. This unprecedented decision of the Administrative Court of First Instance of Syros ruled the current exit ban illegal. No substantial reply nor acknowledgment has been issued by the relevant national or EU authorities.

Europe Must Act, the Samos Advocacy Collective, and ten other organizations working on Samos interrogated the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the European Commission regarding the legal basis of said movement restrictions. The replies from Beate Gminder, Deputy Director-General in charge of the “Task Force Migration Management” in DG Migration and Home Affairs (HOME) of the European Commission, [reveal](#) that the Commission is aware of the situation on site. The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum has never replied to our inquiry. The correspondence between civil society groups and the European Commission can be found [here](#).

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

An important point emerging from the above-mentioned correspondence is that people with rejections to their asylum claim are allowed to leave the facility but, once out, will not be able to re-enter it. As officially out of the asylum process, people with rejections who do not live in State facilities will have no access to any form of state support such as housing, healthcare, cash assistance, food, and other basic needs, and will thus be at high risk of homelessness and destitution. People with rejections who decide to continue to live in the CCAC despite the restrictions imposed continue to have access to services provided in the facility such as food distribution and healthcare, although the situation varies greatly from one facility to the other.

## TURKEY AS A SAFE THIRD COUNTRY

A specific category of asylum seekers who are subjected to movement restrictions is those who have received a rejection to their admissibility interview, during which they have to prove that their asylum claim is admissible by providing evidence that Turkey is not a safe country for them. This is a consequence of the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal, which divided the asylum process for Syrian asylum seekers into two stages: admissibility, namely why Turkey is not a safe third country for them, and merits, namely what are the reasons why they need protection in Europe. The recent [Joint Ministerial Decision](#) of June 2021 by Greece declared Turkey as a safe third country for asylum seekers of five nationalities: Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Somali, Afghan, and Syrian asylum seekers represent more than half of the current population of the Samos CCAC; most of them receive a rejection to the admissibility interview, and until an appeal is filed their ID cards are deactivated and they are subjected to restrictions.

## **FILING A SECOND SUBSEQUENT APPLICATION**

Another relevant category of residents is those who wish to file a second subsequent application, for which an administrative fee of €100 has to be paid through an online platform. For many, filing a second subsequent application is the only way to re-enter the asylum process following a negative decision to their asylum claim. Not only does the payment of a fee hampers many from applying due to lack of financial means, but most importantly the above-mentioned online platform was not working for several months from July 2021 until January 2022, thus making it impossible for asylum seekers to submit a second subsequent application.

## ACCESS TO THE CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The competence over the EU-funded program of cash assistance for asylum seekers was taken over by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum from UNHCR in [October 2021](#). This caused delays in the payment of cash assistance, which in turn left thousands of asylum seekers across Greece without any money.

In Samos, while food was distributed to all camp residents of the CCAC, the lack of cash assistance meant for many residents the impossibility of paying the 3,20€ for a bus return ticket that would take them to town, where they can access the services provided by NGOs.

In November 2021, the Greek Ministry signed an [agreement](#) with the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for the implementation of the cash program. The payment of the monthly cash assistance was supposed to be resumed in December, although the program has been implemented unequally across the country and people stated that they were not given the whole amount of money they should have received in the past months.

There is a lack of exact data in Samos and Greece. However, these are the estimates of the situation in Samos as of March 2022:

- Cash cards started to be distributed in December.
- Most of the people eligible to receive cash assistance have received a cash card and have been able to withdraw money.
- At least ten people have not received a cash card at all, despite being told to wait for a long time.
- The CRS' helpline on the Viber app does not offer adequate support to people, as many requests have been left unattended.
- Some residents had to wait for longer than a month to receive the money after the registration.
- Some residents have only received a part of the amount of money they were eligible for in the last months of 2021 when the cash program was stopped.

Another alarming nationwide development is the fact that asylum seekers who were eligible for cash assistance while the program was not operational and have then received a rejection of their asylum claim, are now unregistered and excluded from any monetary compensation.

## AUTHORS

**EUROPE MUST ACT** | Europe Must Act (EMA) is a growing grassroots movement, bringing together volunteers and NGOs to campaign for the humane, dignified, and legal reception of refugees in Europe. EMA was established in March 2020 by a group of volunteers on the Greek Aegean islands of Chios and Samos in response to the ever-worsening situation of the hotspot camps. For more information about EMA, please visit <https://www.europemustact.org/about-us>

**SAMOS ADVOCACY COLLECTIVE** | The Samos Advocacy Collective is a collaborative project of individuals, NGOs, and human rights groups operating on Samos. The collective advocates for fair and dignified migration policies, especially focusing on reception conditions and the current situation on the island for displaced communities. <https://twitter.com/AdvocacySamos>