

The detention camps on the Greek islands of Kos and Leros

Episode 6/7. Leave the island ?

Podcast: <https://audioblog.arteradio.com/blog/197819/podcast/200087/episode-6-quitter-l-ile>

Photographic report: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/legisti/albums/72177720305810297>

Presentation of the report: <https://www.gisti.org/article6950>

Video editing (audio + slideshow + subtitles): <https://indymotion.fr/w/v9zwVRn4JJP4YaBNNp2AmK?subtitle=en>

- **Speaker 1** (in french) : All I can say about this whole system is... the fault lies with Europe, because all European countries are well aware of what is going on here. Because where do you think the money is coming from ? The European Union is financing the new camps.

- **Voice-over 1** (in french) : “Detention camps on the islands of Kos and Leros in Greece” a podcast from the Migreurop network and the Gisti edited by the radio studio la Parole errante. You can listen to the 7 episodes with subtitles on the migreurop.org and gisti.org websites

After two visits to the hotspots of Lesbos and Chios in 2016 then to Samos in 2019, the Migreurop network and Gisti went to the islands of Kos and Leros in 2021.

This podcast gives voice to exiles stranded in these islands, and to those who work or stand alongside them, in order to highlight and denounce the hotspot system.

In the previous episodes we heard reports about conditions of detention in the camps of Kos and Leros, as well as about the operation of asylum procedures. This new episode discusses what happens after the end of the procedure.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : When the asylum procedure comes to an end, options available to exiles in the hotspots are uncertain and extremely precarious. Whatever the outcome of the procedure, the authorities completely abandon their obligations. Some people, having got asylum, leave the island for the mainland. And then, there are those who have no other possibility than to stay on Kos, and to stay left to fend for themselves, without any support.

Wayne, who works on the island of Kos, tells us what happens for those people who succeed in travelling to mainland Greece.

- **Wayne** (in french) : We will give you a document that authorizes you to leave the territory. It will allow you to leave the island. It says: leave Greece, leave the territory. But with this, they let you travel by boat and go to Athens. So when you go to Athens, there, if you want, you start a new procedure. If you don't want to, you try, like other people, to buy a false document or you try your luck on the road.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : Leaving Kos is one thing, but leaving Greece is something else. Laura, who works on Kos, explains what is in store for exiles after they leave.

- **Laura** : I do know that all the people who are leaving from here, they go to Athens, and if they are linked with smugglers, and passport makers or whatever, they go to the countries they want to go to. Most of them, they do keep this money, they have money and they keep it for this purpose. They will not spend it on Kos, for example to buy cigarettes. They keep their money, to use it in a proper way. Many guys I knew, they're out, went to Athens, « God bless them », I don't

know what happened afterwards. Because they stopped communicating because they're afraid. Even though I'm trying, I leave them alone and wish them the best.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : Kos Solidarity activists confirm that the refugees do not want to stay on Kos because they have no assistance. They also explain that it is extremely difficult to leave the island, even when the exiles have a document that obliges them to do so.

- **Kos Solidarity activist** : For refugees it's difficult because nobody helps them. Now, at this exact moment, they don't even have the card, not even the 90 euros per month. Not even that. They don't take anything. You have 15 days to leave the island. But to leave the island, because you cannot walk you have to go by air-plane or by boat. But you can't go in the boat because you are not vaccinated. But you can't get vaccinated. We give you the first dose but the second dose is after 28 days. But you have to have left before. You can't go by plane because... no.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : For people who have been granted asylum but cannot afford to leave Kos, assistance is very limited.

Raja, a Palestinian refugee, says that when she was granted refugee status, she and her child had nothing to survive.

- **Raja** : When my asylum was accepted, when they said « we accept you as a refugee », they got us and told us to go. I wanted to go to the open camp, but they said no. Because you can't go back. They said in the asylum, in the papers that said « we accept you », that we would get help at least one month, for home and food. No they didn't give us this month. They fired us, « go out », to Kos, go to a hotel, we don't care.

- **Interviewer 1** : No help ?

- **Raja** : No. Even though you have a child ? I said, what can I do ? He said, take a taxi. So I asked if he could call a taxi for me ? No he said. Really they didn't help us in any way.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : People who have been granted international protection are obliged to leave the camp or accommodation in which they were staying, on average within one month.

For these people, the ESTIA program has been set up. It is managed on both islands by the Greek association Arsis, but the latter decided to leave the island in 2020.

This program then became the Helios program, managed by the IOM: the International Office for Migration. It consists mainly of paying the rent or part of the rent of the refugees for 6 months.

However, the lack of accessibility and the inadequacies of the Helios program have been denounced since the beginning. In order to benefit from the program, one must be able to prove an acceptable level of Greek language and have found an individual apartment of sufficient size. It is also necessary to be able to pay three months of rent in advance.

Moreover, there are few houses on Kos, and landlords are reluctant to rent to refugees.

- **Interviewer 1** : What about the Helios program, run by the IOM ?

- **Speaker 2** : There is this program that provides the refugees, that got the refugee status, with a home for a year I think. They pay their rent, but not for very big houses of course. The refugee, since he has his ID, has to go by himself to open an account, make a social security number, and all these bureaucratic procedures. Then they will give him a housing contract, they can stay inside, and the rent is paid. But not forever, only six months. Oh six months I think, yeah it's not one year it's six months.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : A person from the organisation Glocal Roots confirms that it is difficult to benefit from this program.

- **A person from Glocal Roots** : So what I've heard is that it's very difficult for them to find a place. There are a couple of people who don't have an accommodation, for sure. For me this is a huge gap. The Helios program supports with accommodation, financing accommodation, but it's very difficult, it's very slow. And now in Kos specifically, what I've heard is that there are many apartments that are actually not eligible for the program, because it has to be a house, like an individual house. And in Kos it's not easy to find. So it's very difficult now for people to even be part of this program.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : Ali, a refugee from Togo living on Kos, benefited from this program. He tells us about how hard it is to live, even with this assistance.

- **Ali** (in french) : When I got the residence, firstly I could no longer get any financial assistance. You need to go through a procedure with an organisation called Helios. You get accommodation with your money, you pay the rent for 3 months before Helios gives you 300 euros. If the place costs 250 euro, that's 750 euro per month without counting electricity and water. You need to eat, and you still need to pay for 3 more months before Helios send you the remaining 300 euros. So that's 600 euros. You have to sign up for Greek lessons. If you take lessons online, every month you are entitled to 162 euros. If you pay 250 euro for your accommodation, with the aid you can't do anything. Some even refuse the help, to get along by themselves.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : Then there are those whose asylum application is rejected. Some have no choice but to return to their country of origin. These exiles have the possibility of benefiting from financial assistance for their journey. It is the IOM that manages this return assistance, as the organisation Kos solidarity explains to us.

- **Kos Solidarity activist** : IOM, what does it do ? If someone wants to go back to his country, the IOM buys the tickets and give him some money I think. But the IOM doesn't do it for Syria, for Lebanon, for Afghanistan, for Palestine... They don't help at all. And information on so-called "voluntary" return assistance is unreliable.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : Laura explains what happens in practice.

- **Laura** : When the new arrivants go the registering, we're supposed to go and tell them "Hi, we can take you back home". But me and my colleague, we don't do it. Even for asylum. We let them come to us, if they want. Maybe we will hand out some leaflets, if we really have to do so. But not at that moment.

Most of the time, after spending some months, he will say it to the police officers, the police will call us and say "this guy wants to hear what you have to say" Then we go and give again information and do the registration.

- **Interviewer 1** : Can you remind us of the conditions to apply for voluntary departure ? Because as you said there are nationalities that cannot apply. What else ?

- **Laura** : Of course they cannot have a criminal record. And the "privilege" let's say is only once in a lifetime. So if someone has used it from another country one time before, he cannot do it again. Totally unfair.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : Rumours say that where the rejection decision is appealed, it is impossible to benefit from the so-called voluntary return program.

- **Interviewer 1** : Why I have in mind that if you appeal of your rejection, you cannot apply for voluntary departure ?

- **Laura** : This is bullshit. You can apply for a voluntary return literally anytime. I don't know who's saying this bullshit to the guys. The person from UNHCR from the pre-removal told me the other day that guys are telling her that the police is telling them that they have 5 days to apply for

the program, to intimidate them and push them to that direction. Me and my colleague we were listening to this bullshit and we told them "No no no ! Who told you this ?"

Anytime. If you applied for asylum or not. If you applied and got rejected once or twice, still you have the right to apply, at all time. In old times you could not apply if you had gotten a double rejection, but now they changed that.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : And then, there are those who are refused asylum and who are condemned to roam the island.

A person from the organisation Glocal Roots tells us.

- **A person from Glocal Roots** : Exactly, there are some people sort of stuck here in that way. Or they have to leave or they have to find another way.

- **Interviewer 2** : How it's happening inside ? No vaccination and when they go outside if you are not here, how do they do ?

- **A person from Glocal Roots** : It doesn't make sense. This is a huge gap. The impression that I'm getting is that the camp when they put someone out they don't care. It's finished. There's no next step. Nothing is working in a logical supportive way unfortunately, and that's why there are so many issues. Some of these people make it to Athens, and maybe do something else. But a lot of them are afraid if they get a second rejection. They are not going to walk into and ask "Can I have a vaccine appointment please ?" It's very tricky and I don't have an answer.

- **Voice-over 2** (in french) : It is this kind of situation that Amina, a Cameroonian asylum seeker. We met her, with her son, in a café away from the center of Kos.

- **Amina** : After my second rejection, they took me to the closed camp. I stayed there for one day and then I was put in quarantine section. And then I called Corina [pro bono lawyer] the next day I was released.

- **Interviewer 1** : So they notified the rejection, they put you in detention, but you got the right to call someone ? They provide you with a phone ?

- **Amina** : I was having my phone because I was never in detention. I was in the quarantine section. So I was able to call Corina, to tell her that I'm there in quarantine. So the next day I was released. Then they put me back in the camp. The decision that they gave me, it was written that I need to leave the country in ten days, or I need to appeal again, in thirty days. So Corina took the case again.

- **Interviewer 1** : When was that exactly ? I cannot remember.

- **Amina** : It's difficult, I am sorry. So I've been in the camp. They didn't give me any money or any food for my baby. He had to eat the general food, it was disturbing. I was leaving the camp every morning at 5am to look for work. I was authorised to do this by the camp director, but then he was stressed so I left the camp. So I am here in Kos, frightened. I want to get to Athens now but I don't know how, and I don't have any papers.

- **Interviewer 1** : Monica with your english, did you find a job here ?

- **Monica** : Yes I was working in a hotel but I had to stop because I didn't know where to keep the baby. Someone took the baby once, but it was a step in... so I quit. I was working because they don't give me money, so it's difficult. We have the capability to improve the economy, people like me, but they don't give me the opportunity. Because at least I could work, pay taxes, but they don't give me documents. They cannot even sponsor me back to school. I've gone to school at a level of masters, but I'm like this, so at least I want to work.

- **Voice-over 1** (in french) : During the Migreurop and Gisti visits in October 2021, all the people interviewed told us about new camps that were soon to open. Camps much more closed and controlled than those we were able to visit, which will be the subject of the next and final episode of this podcast.

“Detention camps on the islands of Kos and Leros in Greece”, a podcast in 7 episodes from the Migreurop network and Gisti, edited by the radio studio la Parole errante.

You can listen the episodes with subtitles on the migreurop.org and gisti.org websites