



02/2021

# NO MORE CAMPS

## MONTHLY UPDATE

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This is the first edition of Europe Must Act's **monthly update on the planning and construction of closed-controlled centres** intended to replace the current hotspot camps on the Aegean islands.

Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centres (MPRICs) to house asylum seekers are being planned or constructed on five Aegean islands: Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros. This coincides with the closure of alternative forms of reception and accommodation, such as apartments under the ESTIA program and the community-led PIKPAs on Lesbos and Leros. Once completed it will be mandatory for all asylum seekers on the islands to live in the MPRICs.

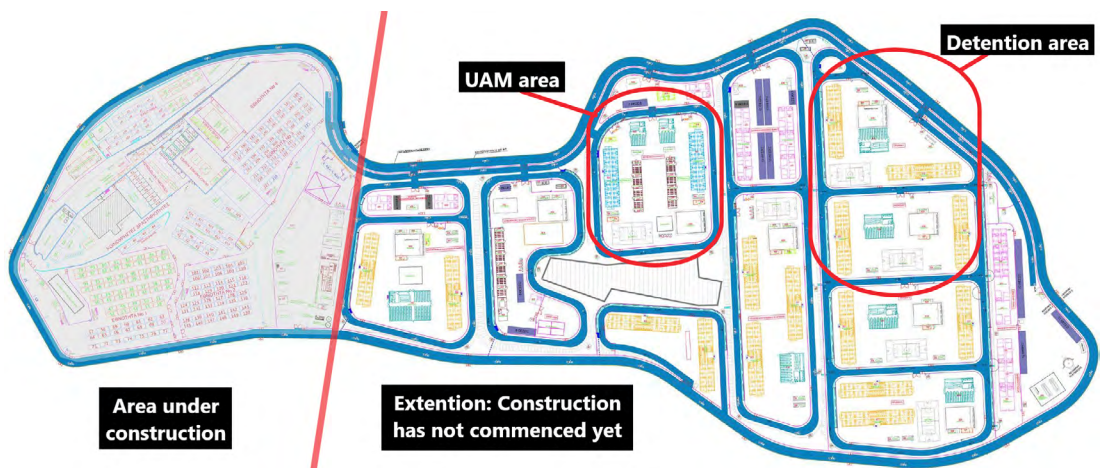
for local islanders. Yet, the lived-experience of people on the ground - refugees, grassroots aid-workers and local islanders - does not align with this rose-tinted picture. Rather than a decisive break with the past the MPRICs threaten to exacerbate the suffering and polarisation witnessed since 2015.

## PRISON-LIKE LIVING CONDITIONS

The MPRICs are being presented as THE solution for the protracted humanitarian crisis that has unfolded over the past 6 years in the Aegean. Both Greek and EU policy-makers promise dignified accommodation to asylum seekers and a return to 'normal'

Up until the pandemic, asylum seekers were able to move relatively freely in and out of the hotspot camps where they resided. This provided asylum seekers with the agency to cover some of their needs, access essential services and briefly escape the harsh

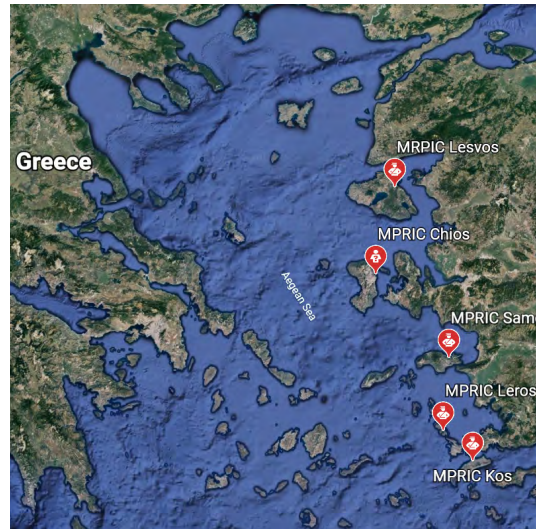
Camp design for MPRIC, Samos [MoMa, 2021]



living conditions of the camps. The MPRICs will be different. Their design and location will limit asylum seekers' mobility and agency, resulting in prison-like conditions for its residents.

Although the [designs of MPRICs](#) include separate spaces for vulnerable groups (minors, families, etc.) and common recreational spaces, the overall picture is that of prison-like structures. The MPRICs will be surrounded by two military type NATO fences, with 6 meters between them to allow for effective guarding and patrolling of the centre's perimeter. Iso-boxes (accommodation within freight-like containers) will serve as living quarters and, at max capacity, they will provide 4m<sup>2</sup> of living space per individual. The centres' perimeter and interior will be under camera surveillance with motion analysis algorithms monitoring the behaviour and movement of centre residents.

The MPRICs are designed to be 'closed-controlled'. The 'closed' portion of each centre will detain new arrivals undergoing pre-screening procedures (that can take up to 25 days) and asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected and await deportation. They will have no right to leave the MPRIC. Registered asylum seekers



Location of new MPRICs [google earth, 15.02.2021]

and vulnerable groups fall under the 'controlled' category meaning that authorities will have a high degree of control over residents' mobility. There will be quotas limiting the number of people who can leave the centres at any given moment. Electronic cards will be issued to track asylum seekers' movements in and out.

Those of the 'controlled' group able to leave the centre will still struggle to access essential services or find much needed reprieve from life under strict surveillance as the MPRICs will be located in remote locations, far from commercial and population centres. You can see the exact locations of the new MPRICs [here](#).

## LIMITED ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

According to the EU Commission and Greek government the MPRICs will provide dignified accommodation

[“in line with relevant standards and Union law”](#), while boasting a wide range of services such as non-formal education for children, vocational training, languages classes for adults, adequate legal aid/information, medical care and psycho-social care. Greek government representatives have indicated that there will no longer be a need for NGOs to provide such services.

The undignified living conditions asylum seekers have faced for years in the hotspot camps are testament to the fact that ensuring adequate and sustained provision of essential services on the small and remote Aegean islands is not feasible. Local service providers are not equipped to handle the complex and fluctuating needs of asylum seekers while external qualified staff is hard to attract and retain. There is no indication that the MPRICs will fundamentally change this reality and be able to adequately provide essential services to their occupants. In fact, their remote locations, outside of the urban fabric, and strict limitations on occupants’ mobility will stymie asylum seekers’ ability to access essential services outside of the MPRICs.

## OVERCROWDING

The relatively low projected capacity of the MPRICs (approximately 13890, excluding Chios) is small compared to the 40,000 asylum seekers that resided on the Aegean islands before the pandemic in February 2020. This suggests that, in order to prevent overpopulation of the centres, the EU Commission and Greek authorities are counting on a quick turnover of asylum seekers through deportations and relocations. They assume that asylum claims will be processed swiftly (between 2 and 6 months) and that most arrivals aren’t “genuine” refugees with protection needs.

These assumptions do not correspond with the reality on the ground. Protection needs are high. In February 2020 [85% of asylum seekers on the Aegean islands](#) came from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, DRC and Palestine, all countries where protracted conflicts have uprooted lives and communities. Asylum and return procedures are complex, lengthy and, as we have seen several times in 2020, can be easily disrupted by unpredictable events such as fires, unrest and the pandemic. In 2019 the [average processing time in Greece between pre-registration and the issuance of a first instance decision was 10.3 months](#).



As actors in the field we believe that these flawed assumptions combined with the closed nature of the centres will inadvertently trap people for long indefinite periods of time inside increasingly overcrowded prison-like centres.

## HUMAN RIGHTS BLACK BOXES

The remote and closed character of the MPRICs holds the risk that the centres will become black boxes, with little information about what occurs inside reaching the public. Keeping actors in the centres to account for eventual human rights non-compliance and violations will be difficult under such conditions.

This risk is exacerbated further by the fact that the human rights monitoring mechanism proposed in the New Pact only covers the pre-screening process, lacks the involvement of independent government agencies and NGOs and has no clearly defined accountability mechanism. Another factor increasing the likelihood of the MPRICs becoming black boxes is a Greek government [confidentiality regulation](#) enacted in November

2020 that prohibits all staff, including volunteers, from publicly sharing any information related to the operations or residents of refugee camps both at the time as well as after they have stopped working there.

## HOST COMMUNITIES UNDER PRESSURE

The EU Commission frames the MPRICs as ‘European solidarity in action’, demonstrating that the people of the Aegean islands can count on the EU. Meanwhile the Greek Minister of Migration promotes the MPRICs as guaranteeing maximum ‘security’ to the island communities and argues that they will serve as an effective ‘deterrent’ to people considering irregular entry into Greek territory.

This is not how local islanders perceive the MPRICs. The experiences of the past 6 years have had a highly polarising effect on the Aegean island communities. Resistance to the new centres comes from citizens across the political spectrum. There is a general sense of being unheard and ignored by national authorities and the EU.

Islanders are fed up with having to shoulder the responsibility of hosting

large groups of asylum seekers in their small, remote and economically vulnerable communities while not having a say in the matter. Resistance to the new centres has

been expressed through peaceful demonstrations, violent protest (in February 2020) and legal action.

## FUNDING

Funding for the MPRICs is provided by the EU Commission. On November 12th 2020 the Greek Ministry of Migration and the EU Commission announced [€130 million](#) under the Asylum, Migration and Integration

Fund (AMIF) earmarked for the centres on Samos, Kos and Leros. For the MPRICs on Chios and Lesbos, tenders for €16 million each have been published, yet total costs remain unclear.

**Capacity:** 5000, 600 acres  
**Location:** 8km from closest village Nea Kydonia,  
 30km from island capital Mytilene,  
 next to Lesvos landfill  
**Operational:** September 2021

# LESVOS

## 02/2021

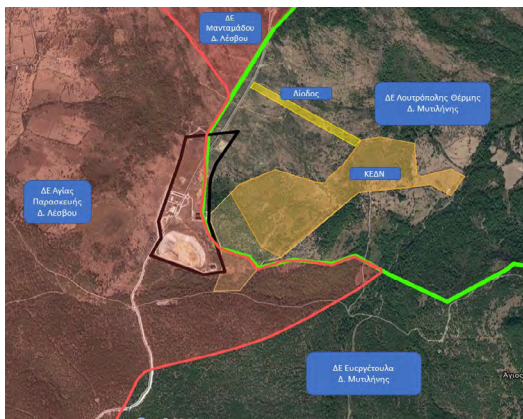
Plans for the Lesvos MPRIC were announced in late November 2020 and confirmed on December 3rd with the publication of a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the EU Commission, several EU agencies and the Greek Ministry of Migration. The undertaking has been framed as a joint pilot project symbolising ‘European solidarity in action’ and a first step towards putting the principles of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum into practice.

The MoU clearly states that the MPRIC must “be placed in a location that is safe in terms of health”. Nevertheless the decision of Greek authorities to locate the new centre next to Lesvos’ landfill raises health concerns and could as such be

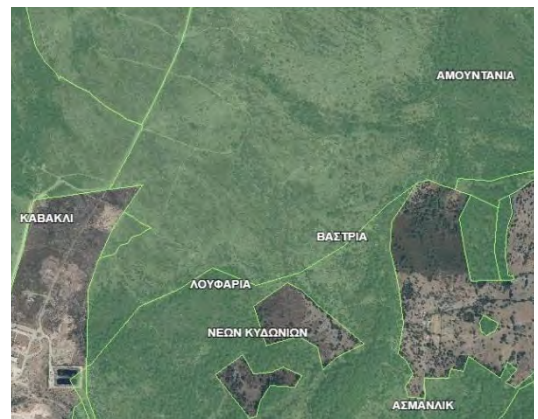
regarded as a violation of the MoU. There are further concerns over the environmental impact as the planned location covers an area that is for a large part designated as ‘[forest area](#)’.

Initial responses to the new centre ranged from (1) [humanitarian objections](#), (2) [decrying a decision going against popular will](#) over to (3) [xenophobic and conspiratorial thinking](#). On February 3rd 2021 the Lesvos Municipal council narrowly voted in favour (16 to 15) of a new closed-controlled centre. The representative of Nea Kydonia, where the new centre will likely be located, was not allowed to cast a vote. Local council members and press decried the decision as undemocratic.

Location of MPRIC, Lesvos [Google Maps, 2021]



Forest Area, Lesvos [Politika Lesvos, 2021]



**Capacity:** 1500, or more  
**Location:** Site not confirmed  
**Operational:** End of 2021

# CHIOS

## 02/2021

Plans to build a new centre at Epos were put on hold in March 2020 after violent protests. In its place the Ministry of Migration decided to turn the existing VIAL hotspot at Chalkois into a closed-controlled centre. But on December 31st 2020 the [Multi-Member Court of First Instance of Chios](#) ruled that the Ministry of Migration is obligated to return use of VIAL back to the local municipality of Chalkios. This prompted a hasty scramble to find a new site to accommodate a centre. On January 28th the Minister of Migration announced that a new centre would be built at Akra Pachy.

While the Minister enjoys the support of the Mayor of Chios, Chian civil society was hostile to the new centre at Akra Pachy. Two deputy-mayors of Chios municipality resigned in the wake of the decision, and February 3rd marked the start of peaceful protest at different locations across Chios against the new centre, which culminated on 6th of February with a motorcade of protesters driving into the island capital. Local businessmen and civil society organisations also spoke out against the construction of a new camp.

The decision to build the new centre is generally regarded as unilaterally

imposed on the island by the national government and therefore not accepted. Chians propose a small centre, capable of accommodating up to 500 asylum seekers, where new arrivals are registered and screened before being relocated to the Greek mainland.

In response to the public outcry, the mayor of Chios proposed a new site at Babakies (Μπαμπακιές), 20km from the centre of Chios city. Yet, Chians were equally opposed to this new proposal. During a municipal council meeting on February 15th there was a failed attempt to sideline the representative of Anavatos, where Babakies is located, in a vote on the new centre. As people protested outside, the council voted 29 to 13 against a new centre on Chios.

Protests in February, Chios [Europe Must Act, 2021]





**Capacity:** 3100 - 3500, 146 acres  
**Location:** Zervou, closest village Mitilini at 5km,  
 7km from island capital Vathy city centre  
**Operational:** March 2021

# SAMOS

## 02/2021

The Samos MPRIC was built to be the first of its kind, with promises of a simultaneous opening of the MPRIC in Zervou and closure of Vathy RIC abounding from mid-2019. The complex currently under construction will accommodate 1,500 asylum seekers (less than 50% of the present population of the Vathy RIC and Jungle). The [latest projection](#) of the government stipulates that the MPRIC will open and the current Vathy Camp will close by the middle of 2021. If this deadline is reached it will make the Samos MPRIC the first to become operational. Another section, still in early stages of construction, will include a safe space for unaccompanied minors and a pre-deportation centre. When finished it will boost total capacity by another 1600.

Greek authorities have made assurances that the new centres will include a shop and non-formal education facilities. There would also be a shuttle service, for which asylum seekers would have to pay, to Vathy, the island capital. Conversely, statements by locals in late 2020 expressed opposition to any involvement in the new structure, raising questions about how such facilities could operate without NGO presence.

MPRIC, Samos, January [Europe Must Act, 2021]



MPRIC, Samos, January [Europe Must Act, 2021]



**Capacity:** 1800 - 2000, 63 acres  
**Location:** Lakki bay, near the existing camp,  
 exact location unknown,  
 approx. 4km from island capital Lakki  
**Operational:** October - November 2021

# LEROS

## 02/2021

Resistance to the new MPRIC on Leros has many dimensions. The island has a history of detention. During the rule of the Military Junta (1967-1974) political dissidents were imprisoned on Leros in the same area where the current hotspot camp is located. For the people of Leros the construction of a closed centre symbolises a return to a past they wish to leave behind. In January 2021 the municipality of Leros called for a [judicial review](#) of the decision to construct an MPRIC with the Council of State (Greece's supreme administrative court).

value. (2) With a projected capacity of up to 2000 it will heavily impact the local community of Leros which counts just under 8000 inhabitants. There are concerns that the local water, sewage, electricity and communication infrastructure will not be able to handle such an increase in population. (3) No environmental and urban planning studies have been conducted.

The municipality bases its case on three arguments: (1) Lakki bay, where the centre is to be built, is a protected area of unique cultural and natural

Construction site, Leros [Europe Must Act, 2021]



**Capacity:** 3290, 67 acres  
**Location:** Next to existing hotspot,  
 an expansion rather than new centre;  
 1.2km from nearest village Pyli,  
 14km from Kos city centre  
**Operational:** May 2021

**KOS**  
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Unlike the other Aegean islands, the MPRIC on Kos is an expansion of the current hotspot camp, not an entirely new camp. It will bring the capacity of the structure on Kos up from 813 to a projected 3290. In February

last year a petition launched by Kos locals called for the evacuation of the hotspot and demanded no new closed-controlled centre would be built on Kos.

MPRIC, Kos [Europe Must Act, 2021]





# #NO MORE CAMPS CHOOSE ALTERNATIVES

check out our campaign here: [www.europemustact.org](http://www.europemustact.org)

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Lesvos Legal Center

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