As we began the new year in Greece, so too did we mark Action for Education’s second birthday. Yet we did so at a time when conditions on the islands have grown worse than ever before.

Since August 2018, the population of asylum seekers on the islands has more doubled, from 20,000 to over 42,000. Yet apart from the promise to build yet more camps, there has been no direct response by EU or Greek governments to ensure timely asylum procedures and humane reception conditions.

In February, with the bitterness of winter still keenly felt in the camps, widespread violence spread across the islands. Turkey announced a temporary opening of its borders to Europe, the Greek government placed a ban on new asylum applications and island populations took to the streets when the Greek prime-minister announced the construction of new hotspot camps.

This led to a series of attacks on police forces, NGO buildings and humanitarian aid workers and saw the temporary closure of NGO centres (including our own). Just two weeks later, all centres were closed once again as a preventative measure related to COVID-19. The culmination of these political, humanitarian and health crises has created a perfect storm, depriving asylum seekers of their most fundamental rights and civil society of the ability to monitor human rights concerns in the camp.

Yet amidst these challenges, we have taken great steps. Aside from our existing projects, we have renovated a new centre on Chios that stands ready to welcome hundreds of new teenagers and young adults, and we have launched a European-wide campaign, Europe Must Act, calling for an end to this geopolitical stalemate.

In the following pages of our first 2020 Quarterly Report, we explore, examine and reflect upon social and organisational developments in light of a series of unsettling and unforeseen circumstances.
These past months have brought its fair share of unforeseen challenges, even before the onslaught of COVID-19.

March began with the divisive decision by the Greek government to ship materials to Chios for the construction of a highly-disputed and controversial prison-like detention centre for asylum seekers, accompanied by cohorts of armed security staff. This was met with a widespread sense of betrayal, anger and despair. Local protests took a surprisingly violent turn, targeted at the Greek authorities.

These uprisings became the breeding ground for right-wing sentiment, led by a small but effective minority, who carried out a series of targeted attacks on Chios and forcing us to the close our centres for several days.

Despair at the ever-worsening conditions was aggravated by events on the Turkish-Creek border, where thousands of migrants approached the European border following news that Turkey would no longer uphold the EU-Turkey agreement, and leading to a spate of landings on the Aegean islands in a very small window of time.

These events, compounded now with the looming threat of COVID-19, which Greece’s island hospitals are ill-equipped to manage for its own people, let alone the thousands of asylum seekers, are finally beginning to draw the attention of the media and politicians of Europe.
THE SITUATION ON SAMOS

A new year brings few changes for thousands of asylum seekers stuck in Vathy Hotspot Camp, Samos

For many, a New Year means new resolutions. For more than 7,500 refugees and asylum seekers on Samos, it means an upcoming year of uncertainty. 2020 has brought a new Greek asylum law, which prioritises new arrivals, making procedures much faster and therefore, less time to prepare or to gain a clear understanding on how the system works. Meanwhile, there have been people left waiting for an answer for over two years.

Trapped between desperation and loss of trust in European human rights policies, Action for Education continues consolidating its path. After one year on Samos, our projects continue to offer holistic support in education, life skills, psychosocial support, community-building, and access to basic nutrition and hygiene facilities. Alongside other organisations, we are committed strengthening the humanitarian network on Samos through collaboration and communication with both local and refugee communities.

The constant pressures to shut our projects, growing local discomfort and the construction of a new camp have posed foreboding challenges, we nevertheless keep on, committed to relentlessly providing a secure, caring and steady space where routine means safety.

Even the latest COVID-19 outbreak has not stopped us. We remain on the ground, supporting our projects and other projects with our skilled team. We are determined to continue our work, ameliorate this situation, and help to overcome these even more difficult times.

7,505 Number of asylum seekers present on Samos (31/3/2020)

792% The percentage by which Samos camp is overcapacity

EVERY REFUGEE, WHEN THEY ARRIVED HERE, WAS HAPPY. BUT WHEN THEY SEE THE CAMP, THEY CAN’T BELIEVE THEY HAVE TO LIVE THERE.

Fatima, volunteer teacher and asylum-seeker residing on Samos Island, Greece.

Demographic breakdown by country of origin, Aegean Islands, UNHCR, February 2020
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Vial camp is in complete 'lock-down' – only one member of families is permitted to leave per day, and aid organisations are absolutely prohibited from supporting the camp.

Our team is therefore investing their time, energy and expertise into furthering the recently launched Europe Must Act campaign, advocating for a change in EU policy, gathering signatures to support a petition addressed to EU presidents and daily engaging with media to expose the neglect and abuse of human rights in the hotspots.

Though it has been thoroughly disheartening and a huge adjustment for our whole team to take a step back from the community we serve, we are still working, morning to night.

Drawing on our team of experienced teachers, youth workers and community volunteers, we are revising our non-formal education curriculum. It is a welcome luxury to be able to dedicate the much-needed time to review and re-construct a more accessible, dynamic and comprehensive curriculum, which we hope can be a valuable and easily transferrable shared resource for other projects.

We are also working to encourage cooperation and support from international organisations and companies. We are very fortunate to have an extensive support-base who send us material donations and financial support. We are keen to expand this network, promoting collaboration between ourselves and the many solidarians across Europe and the world, realising their support in tangible and meaningful ways.

Our latest and very exciting project is taking the form of a teacher-training program. Before the closure of our centres, we advertised in the camp for interested candidates to join our volunteer team in the new centre we are creating in Chios. More than just asking volunteers to join an existing team, we envision a new, more sustainable, community-led program which empowers volunteers to lead and deliver a curriculum of language classes and project-based lessons and workshops. Starting from the beginning with our new centre gives us precisely this opportunity to be able to pioneer an innovative, empowering and quite simply, far more sustainable program which we are currently in the process of developing.
The provision of a free space that we want our participants to feel ownership over, with a routine and freedom for creativity, is even more needed in times when the camp conditions are worsening.

**The Youth Centre**

The Youth Centre regained capacity quickly after the short break over the holidays.

In response to the growing number of women on the waiting list to join the youth centre we opened a second female-only group. Another 30 young women now have access to our service. Engagement has been consistent. The atmosphere is always positive and energetic, as the young women from different cultures get to know each other, learn new skills and express their creativity in projects, cook alongside each other - and of course, the session always finishes with dancing. We are pleased to be able to provide a much-needed monthly pack of sanitary products to each of these women, thanks to our generous donors.

We also welcomed back to the team many returning volunteers alongside some new volunteers. This mixture brought together the experience of the returning volunteers and the ideas of the new team members which created a consistent but fresh start to the new year.

**TOPIC OF THE MONTH**

Every month, we focus on a different topic in the Youth Centre, an opportunity to discover new ideas and embrace creativity. In January we learnt all about ‘space’. We used virtual tours to travel to the edges of the universe, organised evening stargazing trips, and took inspiration from the colours and sharps to make beautiful artwork and jewellery. We also learnt about the people who make space exploration possible, using plastic bottles and water pressure to experiment with the physics of launching a rocket ourselves.

In February, we took on the theme of ‘Health’. With the weather dry and not yet too hot, we took the opportunity to get outside and play some team sports. We learnt first hand about the physical, mental and community benefits that sports can bring. Back at the Youth Centre we learnt about healthy and balanced diets, we created health plans and had an inter-group fitness competition.

March has brought with it COVID-19, causing us to close our centre to adhere to government recommendations and assist in the vital prevention of the virus.
Learning Centre

In June 2019 Action for Education and METAdrasi started a partnership to provide non-formal education to 15 to 18 year-olds in Vial. In January 2020 we renewed our Memorandum of Understanding with METAdrasi to continue this successful collaboration.

In this Learning Centre, we provide a broad curriculum that emphasises both academic development and the emotional well-being of our students. We are continuously striving to improve our curriculum, learning from best practices of other projects and our own experience.

In each session we dedicate one period to project-based learning wherein we encourage our students to explore new interests like music, geography, culture and science. Through arts projects we also give students opportunities for self-expression.

Since January we have piloted a Self-Directed Learning programme for our most advanced students. The SDL-students receive guidance to develop a self-study plan, set their own goals and explore their own interests. Using laptops, the students are enabled to find resources and online lessons that help them to achieve their goals.

“It is inspiring to see how dedicated the students are, and how fast they progress through the levels” says volunteer teacher Julie. “The eagerness to learn among our students is stunning, throughout my career as a teacher I have never met such determined students as here in Vial.” says Coordinator Matthias Mertens.

The outbreak of Covid-19 forced us to temporarily close this centre. Yet, this crisis underlined the need for our work, and only resulted in strengthening our resolve to guarantee our students with opportunities to learn. In collaboration with METAdrasi we provide paper self-study packs to our students in the camp. To further extend learning support for our students we have developed simple and easy to access online resources.
A NEW PROJECT ON CHIOS
Meeting greater demand

In February we started working on our new project in Chios as a response to the deteriorating conditions in Vial camp and declining services available outside of the camp. Together with Be Aware and Share we decided to react to the situation in Chios and set up a new project.

The former warehouse we rented is a 20 minute walk from Vial and will allow us to offer many more spaces for young people to learn, rest and explore. So far this is the most ambitious project taken on by us, this former warehouse space being massive and needing a lot of preparation work.

Over the past weeks, we’ve re-cemented the floors, built and painted new walls, and turned this space into a welcoming centre in collaboration with a highly motivated team of community and international volunteers.

Now with 4 classrooms, a barbershop, tailor-shop, computer lab, three showers, a solar heated boiler on the roof and a large entrance area, the project is beginning to take shape. What started as a simple desire to respond to the unacceptable situation where young refugees are denied their basic human rights has quickly become a new, fully-fledged youth centre with the potential to give 200 additional participants access to basic needs and a variety of learning opportunities.

A huge thank you goes to Help Refugees for funding the start up cost of the project as well as to CESRT for supporting us with helping hands from their volunteer team, to The School Bus Project, and our implementing partner Be Aware and Share.
SAMOS REFUGEE CENTRES
Education centres on Samos

Our projects on Samos are now entering their second year. Amidst widespread tensions and a greater demand for our services than ever before, we are working as hard as possible to meet a wide range of needs.

THE BANANA HOUSE

The Banana House offers a safe, learning environment on Samos, where the basic needs of nutrition and hygiene are met. It operates at full capacity, reaching almost 200 participants a day, to provide the indispensable language and life skills needed to build a future. Empowering the refugee community has been a main goal; for this reason the support of our refugee community volunteers as teachers, activity leaders and staff, has been crucial to achieve it. Focused on young adults, our service expands towards women, children and unaccompanied minors on Sundays. This day constitutes a relief for the most vulnerable, offering access to basic hygiene facilities, hot and nutritious food, and opportunities to relax and socialise.

THE COMPUTER LAB

The Computer Lab, run in partnership with Glocal Roots, remains an extremely popular centre providing digital literacy courses, an open-access ‘Internet Café’, and online language learning courses. With over 3000 visitors since its opening in June, this digital space is run 100% by community volunteers who bring expertise from their computing backgrounds and language skills. The classes are taught mainly in English, with the possibility of Farsi, Arabic and French translation. This ensures an accessible safe learning space for all users. A tailor-made curriculum has been developed where the most essential digital literacy skills for this context are practised. This Computer Lab is an opportunity for many to have a rare moment of escapism from Samos, and a window onto the world.

THE NEST

In partnership with The Pedagogical Institute of Los Angeles (PILA), The Nest is a dedicated play-space for children and parents; an essential space amid the absence of any similar provision for the youngest refugees. Sadly, government restrictions forced us to close in mid-January under the false premise of being a kindergarten. We are keen on reopening the space, hand in hand with our lawyers, to bring back the joy and laughts so much needed during this tough period. Apart from the psychosocial benefits of socialisation and play, through this space we’ve been able to promote health and hygiene through workshops.
HAPPY 1ST BIRTHDAY
CELEBRATING 1 YEAR OF BANANA HOUSE | MARCH 2019 - MARCH 2020
A NEW CAMPAIGN
A social movement demanding a new and humane policy on migration

Over the past months, Action for Education has led a new and bold campaign in response to the humanitarian and health-related crises on the Aegean Islands. On 2nd March 2020, we published an Open Letter to EU Leaders, demanding the immediate decongestion of the Aegean Islands. Within days, it drew overwhelming support from across Europe. Over 160 NGOs, 90,000 individuals and many MEPs signed our statement.

In this letter, we also called on Europe to correct five years of negligent policy-making, to own up to its chronic shunning of this international burden and to recognise that good policy can fix this man-made catastrophe.

Our 3 key demands included:

1) Immediate action from all Member States to decongest the Aegean Islands of Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros through fair relocation of asylum seekers across European countries for the sake of universal human rights.

2) The immediate provision by EU states of support to, and oversight of, the Greek government’s Reception and Identification Centres, to ensure access to a safe and legal asylum process in accordance with humanitarian law, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights.

3) The creation of a shared European register of legal, medical and protection staff to support the Greek government through rotational placements in the Aegean in processing asylum applications in a humane, dignified and legal way.
A GROWING CAMPAIGN

Since then, we held a videoconference with EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, demanding that her Commission takes immediate steps to uphold basic humanitarian and health standards in light of COVID-19. We also asked her to look beyond the EU-Turkey statement to establish a truly legal and humane EU migration policy.

To mark the 4 years of the EU-Turkey statement, we ran a 10 Days of Activism campaign, bringing attention to the woeful failure of this approach to tackling migration. Thousands of people got involved with our efforts, taking part in our 10 Day Photo Challenge and Silhouettes of Solidarity initiatives. The results of this campaign have been published as a book, sent to EU heads and available to purchase.

The coalition of NGOs involved in the Europe Must Act movement is as inspiring as it is critical. After 4 years of political failure, addressing the root causes of the humanitarian crisis on the Aegean is essential. Europe Must Act marks an exciting new advocacy project for Action for Education.

Find out more at www.europemustact.org
FINANCES
QUARTERLY OVERVIEW OF SPENDING

We pride ourselves on being financially lean, responsible and transparent. As such, our budget lines are tight, focusing on covering core programme costs and eliminating overheads as far as possible.

INCOMING FUNDS

Over the past quarter, we received a total of €63,762 in donations. 27% came from individual private donors, with the remaining 73% from granting organisations and trusts.

26% of received funds were unrestricted funds. 74% of funds were restricted as follows:

- 31% for Chios Youth Centre
- 21% for Samos Banana House
- 15% for the new Chios project
- 3.3% for The Nest, Samos
- 1.2% for Europe Must Act

Major donors (January - March 2020):
1. Help Refugees (€23,500)
2. Their World (€14,095)
3. Captain Stefanos Kollakis Family (€2,700)
4. Be Aware and Share (€1,500)

PROJECT EXPENDITURE

Over the past quarter, we met our budget lines in all project locations. €13,339 was spent on Samos projects, €26,682 on our existing Chios projects and €10,556 on start-up costs for the new centre on Chios.

Expenditure by location (January - March 2020)

- Chios 53%
- Samos 26%

In March, costs were less than expected due to the temporary closure of centres in response to COVID-19.

EXPENDITURE BY THEME

Across our projects, we spent 31% on infrastructure, including utilities, centre and apartment rent and 8% on food costs for participants. We spent 4% on education costs, such as teaching materials and 16% on transportation. We spent 22% on volunteer cost, primarily on monthly expenses for our coordination team. 19% was spent on start-up costs for our new centre on Chios.

NEW PROJECT START-UP COSTS
WE DON'T DO THIS ALONE
A thank you to our partners & supporters

As a 100% volunteer-run organisation operating in Chios and Samos, we can only achieve what we do with the help of our many wonderful partners.
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