Project Armonia

Annual Progress Report

2020/2021

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Executive summary

On 29 July 2021, we celebrated Project Armonia's second birthday.

Serving over 270,000 meals and working with more than 150 volunteers from a total of 36 nationalities, the last two years have been more than we could have expected.

This report shares the challenges faced and our achievements over the past year on Samos.

Our Year in Numbers

36 nationalities brought together in the restaurant

1,485 hours of volunteer time given

146,829 meals served

3,377 food packs distributed

25,200kg of rice cooked

15 target groups covered

109 people volunteered

The Situation on the Ground

The past twelve months have been challenging and unpredictable globally, with COVID-19 placing severe restrictions on the ways in which we live our lives. Samos has been no exception to this, and the refugee community, in particular, have faced additional restrictions, being unable to leave the inhumane conditions of the camp, even during the height of the pandemic.

> *Life for the refugee community on Samos has become more uncertain and precarious than it has ever been.*

COVID-19 has not been the only challenge faced by the community on Samos. This year presented multiple fires in camp, wildfires on the island, storms, riots, earthquakes, aftershocks, a tsunami, and pushbacks which lead to deaths across the Aegean Sea.

On top of this, life for the refugee community on Samos has become more uncertain and precarious than it has ever been. Over the past year, a new camp has been constructed on a remote hillside on Samos. The facility is a considerable distance from any other settlement and, at present, there is limited information if transport will be provided and whether it will be sufficient for the number of residents. As it stands, the camp resembles an open-air prison, with movement restrictions, curfews for residents, no shade, no social spaces, and tightly packed rows of containers able to house 8 people each, behind high barbed wire fences.

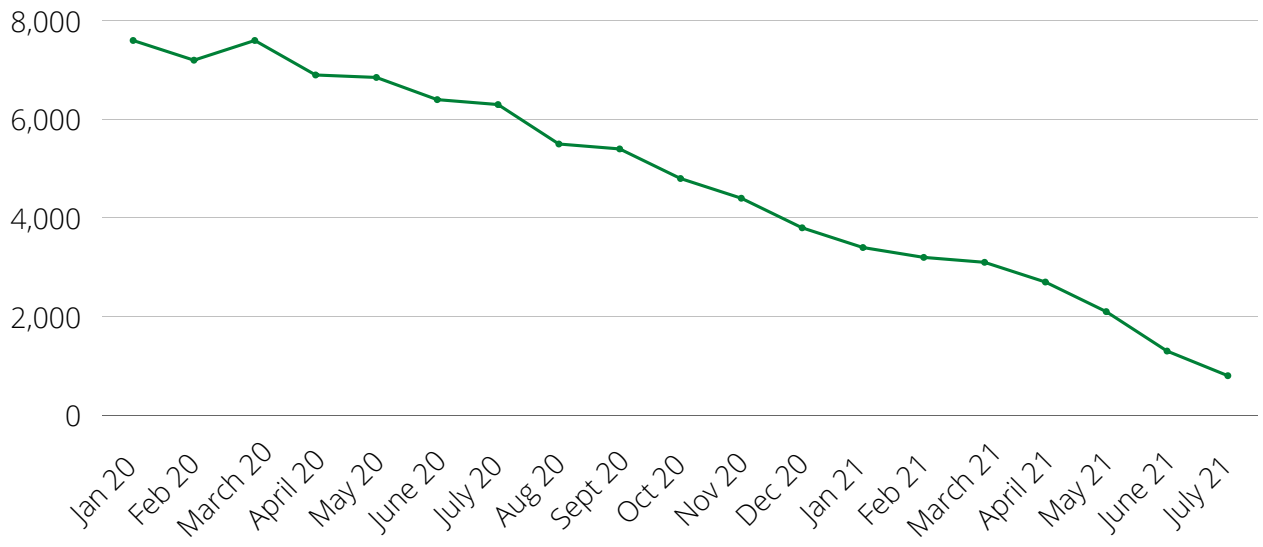
In recent months, it has been drawing ever closer to completion, sparking much discussion among locals, NGOs and the refugee community. Since information remains scarce about the new camp and when the existing camp will close, anxieties and tensions have escalated over the course of the year, especially with it being likely that this new isolated facility will be a closed one. According to current information, the camp is now ready to house 1,200 people and the move will begin in September 2021.

As part of this transfer and following a concerted effort by the Greek Government and the EU, the number of refugees and asylum seekers present on Samos has decreased by 89% since the start of 2020 - from 7,600 in January 2020 to 864 at the end of July 2021 (UNHCR, 2021). This number continues to decrease as summer progresses.

Reasons for this decrease in population include accelerated decisions being made on people's asylum claims. Additionally, throughout 2021, camp management has increased the number of transfers of people to mainland Greece in a concerted effort to reduce the number of refugees on Samos. With the move to the new camp imminent, more and more people are continuing to leave the island of their accord due to the situation being so unclear as to what it will mean for them and their lives.

On top of this, there has been an increase in the frequency and severity of 'pushbacks' across the Aegean Sea since March 2020. As a result, there has been a dramatic decrease in new arrivals. Over the course of 2021, there have been 1,545 arrivals to Greece by Sea (until 8 August 2021). In comparison, there were a total of 9,714 new arrivals during 2020 and 59,726 people in 2019 (figures according to the UNHCR), a decrease of 97%.

The statistics below (taken from UNHCR), illustrate the dramatic shift in the number of refugees on Samos over the past year:



According to the Aegean Annual Boat Report, in 2020, 1,071 boats attempted the crossing from Turkey to the Aegean Islands, carrying a total of 33,775 people. From this, just 293 boats and 9,619 people safely made the trip - the rest were arrested, 'pushed-back' or left abandoned at sea in flimsy vessels with their motors cut by the Greek Coastguard. In 2021, 344 boats had been stopped on their way towards Greece and 10,440 people had been arrested (as of July 2021, source: Aegean Boat Report).

> *The last 12 months have given us a lot to look back on with pride...*

Through all of this, Project Armonia has stood firmly in solidarity with the refugee community, providing support wherever we can. Whether it was providing food-packs for our team during the worst months of lockdown, or serving 1,200 people a day in Spring, the last 12 months have given us a lot to look back on with pride. Food is a basic human right, and we have done our utmost this year to ensure that those who are most in need have access to healthy, nutritious and delicious food.

Achievements this Year

Our Restaurant

> *With much hard work and commitment from our amazing team of volunteers, we were able to rapidly increase our capacity, hitting impressive milestones as we went.*

Having been shut from mid-September until the end of November 2020 due to Greek COVID restrictions, November saw us welcome guests once again to the Armonia restaurant. Our service was temporarily adapted to offer takeaway only and minimise the risk of virus transmission. With much hard work and commitment, we were able to rapidly increase our capacity, hitting impressive milestones as we went.

> *We are now capable of serving 1,200 meals a day, with a team of 50 volunteers.*

We are now capable of serving 1,200 meals a day with a team of 50 volunteers. In reaching this amazing landmark, we are working with a larger team of head chefs and have recruited more volunteers, predominantly from the refugee community itself.

It is thanks to them that Armonia is able to provide our guests with a taste of home in an unfamiliar place. For instance, Harriet our head chef from Gambia introduced a spinach peanut stew to our menu, which was greatly enjoyed by our guests; Masoumeh from Iran has regularly been serving up her famous 'Quaboli'; Murtadha from Iraq has been providing many amazing salads throughout the hot summer months.

A highlight of our year was Ramadan. To commemorate this holy month in the Muslim calendar, we cooked a series of special meals for our guests to enjoy when breaking their fast in the evening.

One memorable meal was Goat Stew ('Ans' in Arabic) prepared by the kitchen team to celebrate the end of Ramadan (Eid). It was flavoured with an array of spices including ginger, fresh lemon, turmeric and bay leaves; served with potato, rice, black olives and green peppers.

In addition to our meals, throughout the month, we distributed sweet treats for all our guests and food-packs for our volunteers who worked incredibly hard, despite the majority of them fasting as well.

The impressive skills of our chefs from the refugee community have provided a sense of comfort, diversity and enjoyment for our guests this year. Whether it was serving up a special series of meals for Ramadan, diversifying the food we serve with a wider range of fresh ingredients or implementing larger portion sizes, our kitchen team has been outstanding in their dedication. We are enormously grateful for all of the work that they do. An enormous thank you must be paid to them, for we simply would not function without them.

Vocational training

Running alongside our improvements in the kitchen and restaurant, we have begun to expand upon the vocational training and additional support that we offer to all of our volunteers from the refugee community. Our ultimate intention with all of this is to provide them with a firmer foundation from which they can look for employment opportunities.

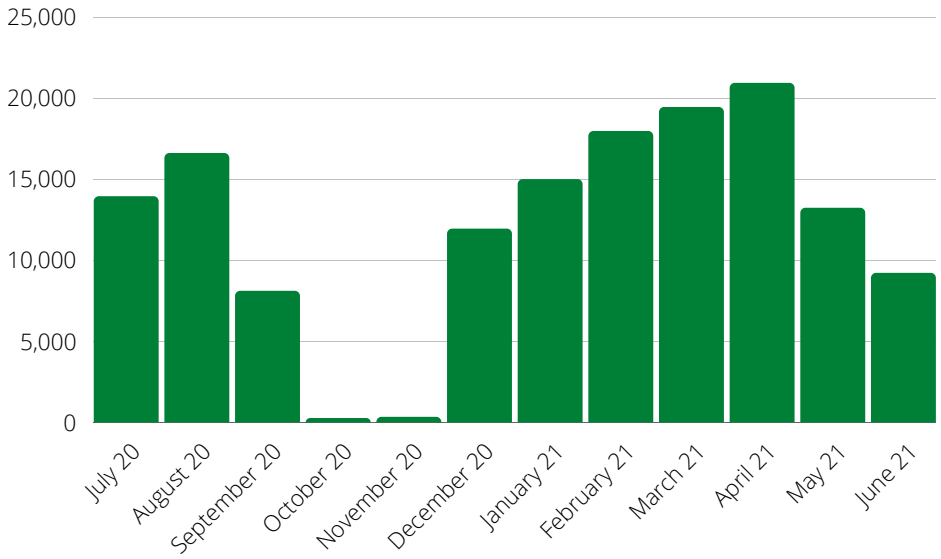
> *We are also building on the existing skills within our community, providing bread baking workshops, HACCP certification and First Aid Training.*

As such, we are now providing essential workshops and classes to improve general employment opportunities, such as English classes, computer classes, CV writing sessions, helping with the necessary paperwork to enable legal employment and assistance in searching for jobs. We have also built on the existing skills within our community of volunteers, providing bread-baking workshops, HACCP certification and First Aid Training.

Adapting to the Situation on the Ground

Outside of our restaurant, the situation on the ground has continued to evolve, and we have responded with diligence and dedication.

The aforementioned effort to decongest the refugee camps on the Aegean Islands has resulted in a decrease in our number of daily servings. Between the end of March and July 2021, our number of servings dropped from 1100-1200 to 400-600 portions per day. The graph below illustrates the total number of portions served per month over the past year:



(Please note: the Armonia restaurant closed between Mid-September and End of November 2020 due to COVID restrictions).

As part of the population decrease on Samos, there has also been a significant increase in the number of final decisions made on people's asylum-seeking applications (1). People who have had a final decision made on their case are no longer eligible to receive any assistance, including shelter, financial support, which also means they are not allowed to get food in the camp. Consequently, people in this position have no means to support themselves or their families unless they are independently wealthy.

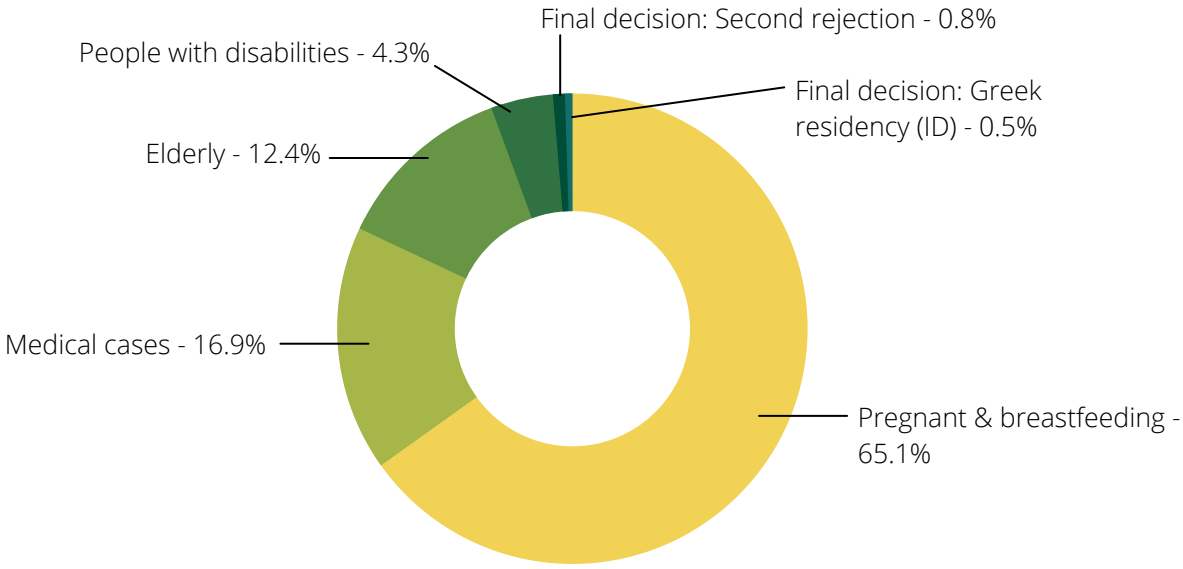
> *People with a final decision made on their case have become our main demographic... now accounting for 83% of all registered guests.*

1 An asylum seeker will either be granted asylum and receive Greek residency, or have their claim rejected. In the case of a rejection, there is the opportunity for a second application if the person feels that new, relevant information about their case may change the outcome. However, if they are not successful in their appeals, they can be deported to Turkey.

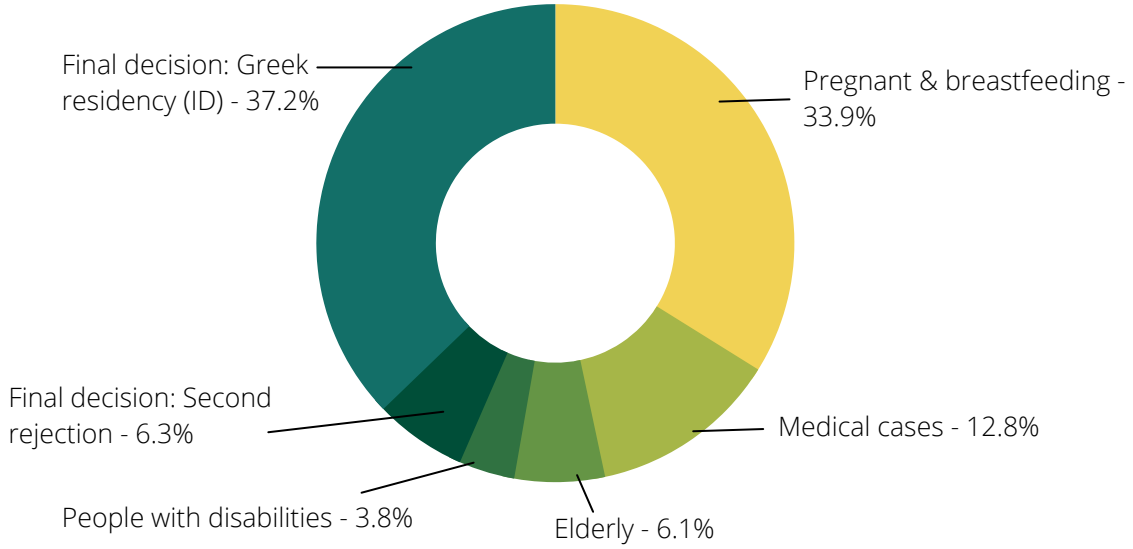
Rapidly, the number of people in this position multiplied, and we welcomed them to our restaurant accordingly (2). Over the course of 2021, this target group has become our biggest guest demographic, now accounting for 83% of all registered guests in Armonia.

In comparison to Summer 2020, our largest demographic was pregnant and breastfeeding women. However, as part of the decongestion of Samos' refugee camp, these vulnerable demographics received priority in being transferred to mainland Greece. The impact of these situational developments on our guest demographics are illustrated by the quarterly charts below:

Summer 2020

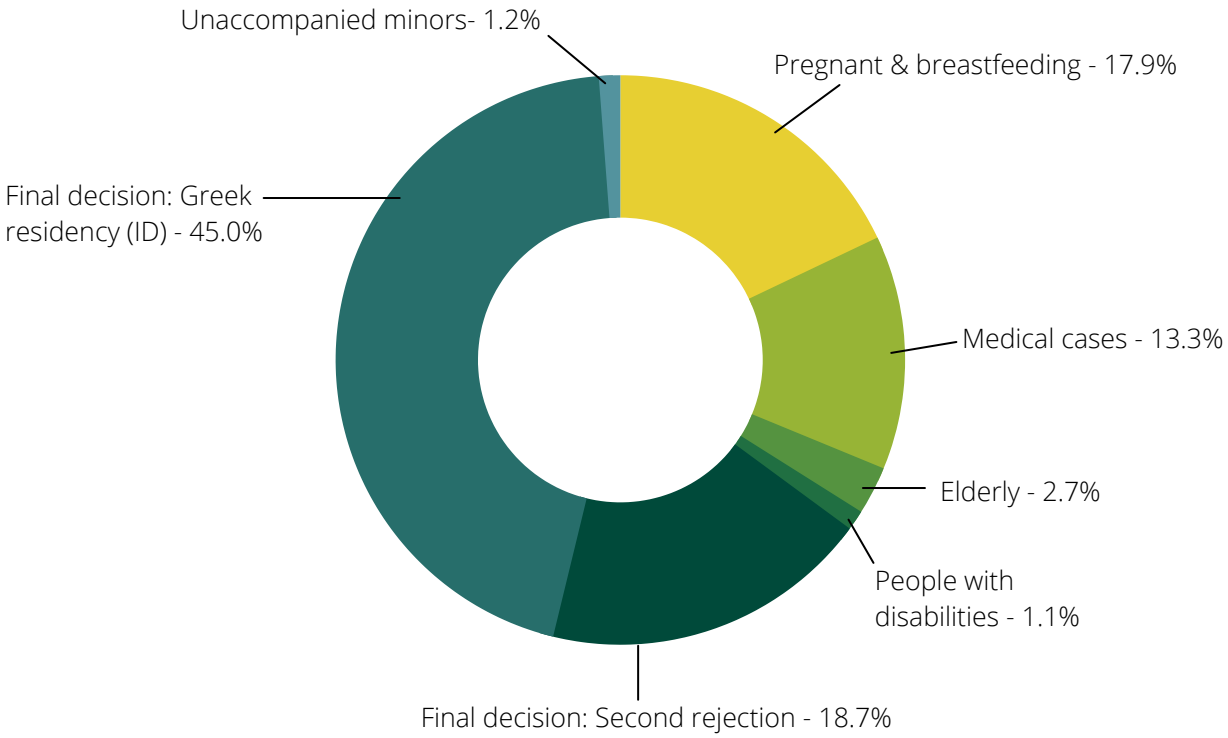


Autumn 2020

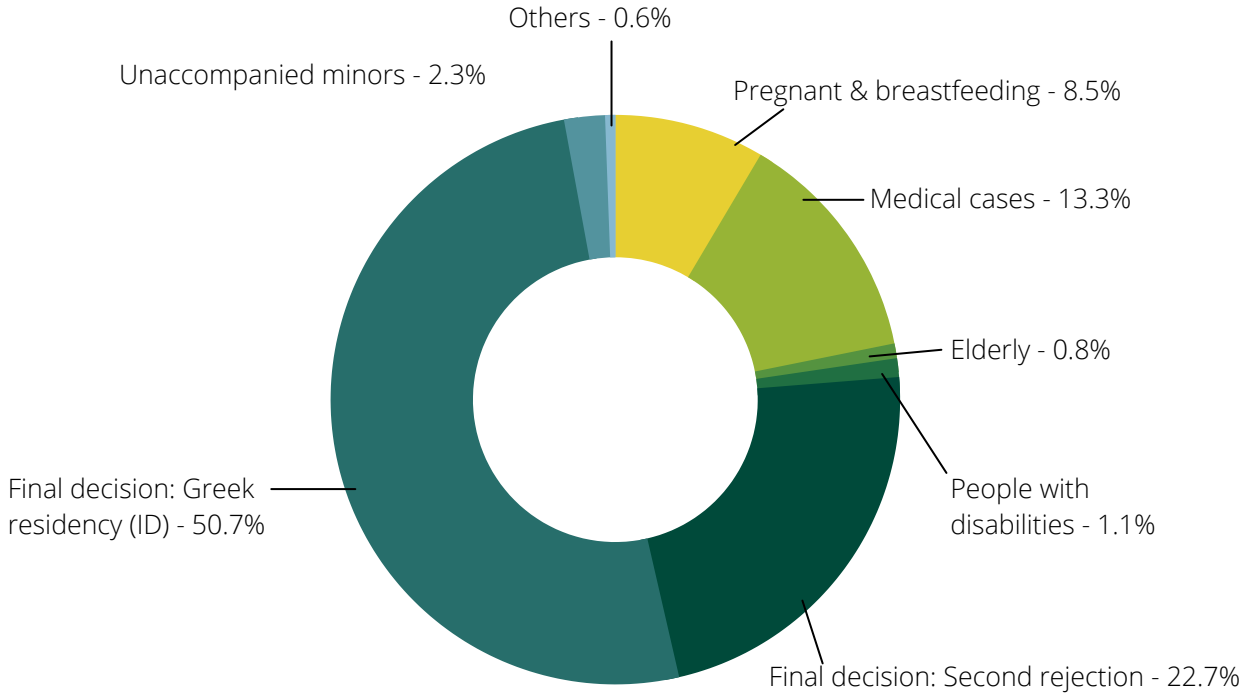


2 We serve people who have received a second rejection on their asylum appeal and those granted Residency/ Greek ID documents.

Winter 2020/2021



Spring 2021



Partners

> *We were able to work with one another to ensure all those with a final decision on their asylum case had what they needed.*

As always in situations of great distress and difficulty, it is reassuring to see the ways in which we band together to make a difference. With this in mind, we were extremely proud to announce our partnership with fellow Samos-based actors, Just Action. Sharing our knowledge and understanding, we were able to work with one another to ensure all those with a final decision on their asylum case had what they needed; receiving daily meals at the Armonia restaurant, and fortnightly food packs at the Just Action distribution centre.

In addition to this, we have newly partnered with other Samos-based actors to support and protect the rights of the refugee community such as Diotima, IRC, Med'EqualiTeam and MSF.

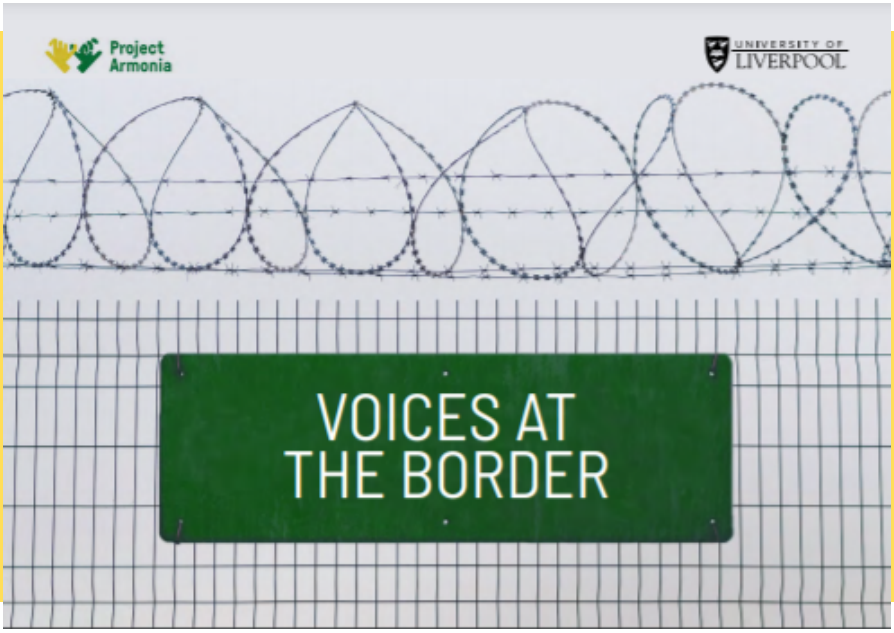
Running parallel, there has been an ever-increasing anxiety about infringements upon the human rights of refugees, with reports of Frontex and the Hellenic Coastguard enacting pushbacks in the Mediterranean. To stand up against this violation of people's right to seek asylum and against the transfer to the new camp, we have stood in unity with local groups from Samos, such as the Pan-Samian Collective, to make our collected voices heard in protest.

Advocacy: Voices at the Border

Building on the connections that we have made across the island, we were lucky enough to have Dr. Gemma Bird, from the University of Liverpool, producing an advocacy report, 'Voices At The Border'.

> *This report speaks to numerous volunteers across Project Armonia documenting their stories from their time on Samos, as well as outlining a series of policy recommendations...*

In this report, we hear from numerous volunteers across Project Armonia, as well as other individuals on the island, documenting their stories from their time on Samos. This report shares human stories, rather than numbers and in doing so we advocate for policy change on a European level. Needless to say, we were very happy to have contributed to this important piece of work, and to add our support to advocate for change. You can read the full report here.



Fundraising

"Additionally we have managed to further our reach outside of Samos, attracting more awareness to our cause."

Additionally, we have managed to further our reach outside of Samos, attracting more awareness to our cause. We have been aided in this with the launching of a new website and numerous successful fundraising campaigns.

After the devastating magnitude 7.0 earthquake in October 2020, and the two successive camp fires that followed shortly after which destroyed hundreds of people's make-shift homes, we launched a campaign to support our volunteers in this particularly challenging time. Our aim was to provide them with mobile phone data and a powerbank so that they might keep in touch with loved ones and be up to date with any safety information shared by the authorities.

A few months later, we launched our Christmas fundraising appeal, with the ambition to supply all of our guests with a food-pack, filled with special ingredients for them to enjoy during the holiday period.

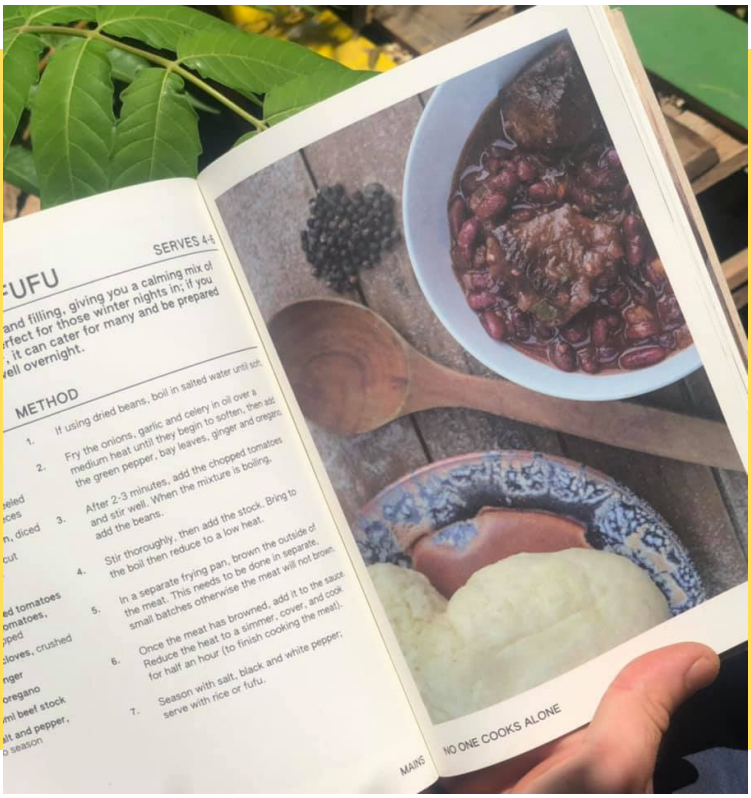
Both of these ambitious targets were easily met, thanks to the kindness and generosity of the people in our network; a heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone who donated during these periods, and to those who continue to support us.

'No One Cooks Alone'

> *This recipe book brings together the stories and recipes from our amazing community of volunteers that they believe best represent their respective home countries.*

Our fundraising work continues on a rolling basis, with the publication of the Project Armonia cookbook: 'No One Cooks Alone'. This book brings together the stories and recipes from our amazing community of volunteers, showcasing the meals they have brought with them in their hearts and minds, and which best represent their respective home countries.

The recipes within are as diverse as our team, spanning continents from the Central Asian Steppelands to the West Coast of Africa. We have been very pleased with the excitement and enthusiasm with which this book has been met.



Donors

Whether they have been providing us with essential kitchen equipment, or fundraising to supply our guests with special Ramadan meals, our donors have breathed life into Project Armonia.

We would, of course, be remiss not to mention our amazing donors who have been of the most crucial support for us throughout this past year. Whether they have been providing us with essential kitchen equipment, or fundraising to supply our guests with nutritious meals, our donors and partner organisations have breathed life into Project Armonia with their exceptional generosity.

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Thanks to our donors, we have been able to make the following adjustments:

Kitchen equipment (chopping boards, knives, trays)

Industrial food storage

Industrial kitchen sink

Car

Industrial cooking pots

Air conditioning

New extractor fan

Industrial fridge

Chopping machine

Industrial oven

Money for passports +IDs

New kitchen stoves

Blast chiller

Uniforms for our volunteers

Outlook for the Future

It has been an intense year, with many changes and a lot to look back on with pride. With the move of the Samos camp scheduled to begin in September 2021, things will continue to change as we look forward to the next year.

The isolated and equipt nature of the new camp aims to discourage the movement of refugees and asylum seekers on the island. The new camp is an active step to marginalise refugees on Samos. With the camp located 7km away from Vathy town and likely to be a closed facility, we cannot guarantee that our guests nor our volunteers will be able to access the Armonia restaurant. Furthermore, with containers in the new camp having kitchen facilities, the need for the community will shift from cooked meals to uncooked food items.

Whilst we will continue to keep you updated as we move on, you can see an outline of our main aims and goals for the next 12 months below.

Providing food for all camp residents

To kickstart the next year, from August 2021 we will begin to provide nutritious meals for all residents of the current camp until its closure, which we predict will double our current number of servings.

Moving with the need

With the decongestion of the Aegean Islands, the people we serve, along with the need for our services, has shifted to mainland Greece.

This is the result of the aforementioned official transfers to the mainland or people choosing to leave of their own accord out of fear. If the latter, people must live without governmental support (shelter, cash assistance) and as a result severely struggle to support themselves in Athens.

In June 2021, we visited Athens to carry out a needs assessment. During our visit, we spoke to numerous organisations operating on the ground and potential beneficiaries. From our visit, we concluded that there is a crucial need for nutritious food and for the sustainable integration of recognised refugees into communities.

As a result, we will open a free-restaurant, similar to the Armonia Restaurant on Samos. Simultaneously, we will focus on education and vocational training to enable recognised refugees to learn and develop important skills specifically from the hospitality and gastronomical sectors. Through this, we aim to increase employment prospects and provide the chance for participants to become autonomous and self-sufficient.

We are currently working on a written outline of our plans for the Athens project. You can sign up to receive the project proposal when it is completed by scrolling to the end of this linked webpage.

Voices from our Community

As we look to the future, there are many lessons we can take with us, and much that we are excited to build on. Whilst the current context is uncertain, we know that Project Armonia has the strength to face it all thanks to the courage and resilience of the people that make up our community:

> *Being able to learn new things everyday and exchange with people from different countries makes Project Armonia a very special place.*
>
> (Germain, Congo)

> *I really love the work we do here, and I am very happy to be a part of this great group and work with these amazing people.*
>
> (Murtadha, Iraq)

> *Since working here I have come to see the goodness in life, and that we create our own meaning by helping people.*
>
> (Abdali, Yemen)

> *I'm very happy to be part of the Armonia family and to work closely with such an amazing and diverse community of strong courageous humans; I get inspired everyday.*
>
> (Margherita, Italy)

I love working with our team. We are like one big family; it does not matter where you are from, what colour you are or what your religion is; everyone works well together - we are one in the kitchen.

(Mohammed D., Togo)

For me, humanity is the most important thing in life, and at Armonia, I am surrounded by kind, sincere people; they are like family to me - I never feel lonely when I work here.

(Asadullah, Afghanistan)

I love cooking very much. This is a very beautiful place. The family of Armonia are all good and loving people. We are all united here.

(Newsha, Iran)

I like working with this team because they are people with human compassion... their culture is one.

(Razak, Sierra Leone)

Project Armonia

Project Armonia
60-62 Lykourgou Logotheti Ekatis
83100 Samos I Greece

www.projectarmonia.org
info@projectarmonia.org
+30 694 09 51 300

CHF-ACCOUNT:
Cardholder: Project Armonia
IBAN: CH12 0840 1000 0640 0487 2
BIC: MIGRCHZZXXX
Address: Unter dem Hölzli 17,
4102 Binningen, BL,
Switzerland

EURO-ACCOUNT:
Cardholder: Project Armonia
IBAN: CH34 0840 1000 0640 0486 4
BIC: MIGRCHZZXXX
Address: Unter dem Hölzli 17,
4102 Binningen, BL,
Switzerland

https://www.projectarmonia.org/donate/