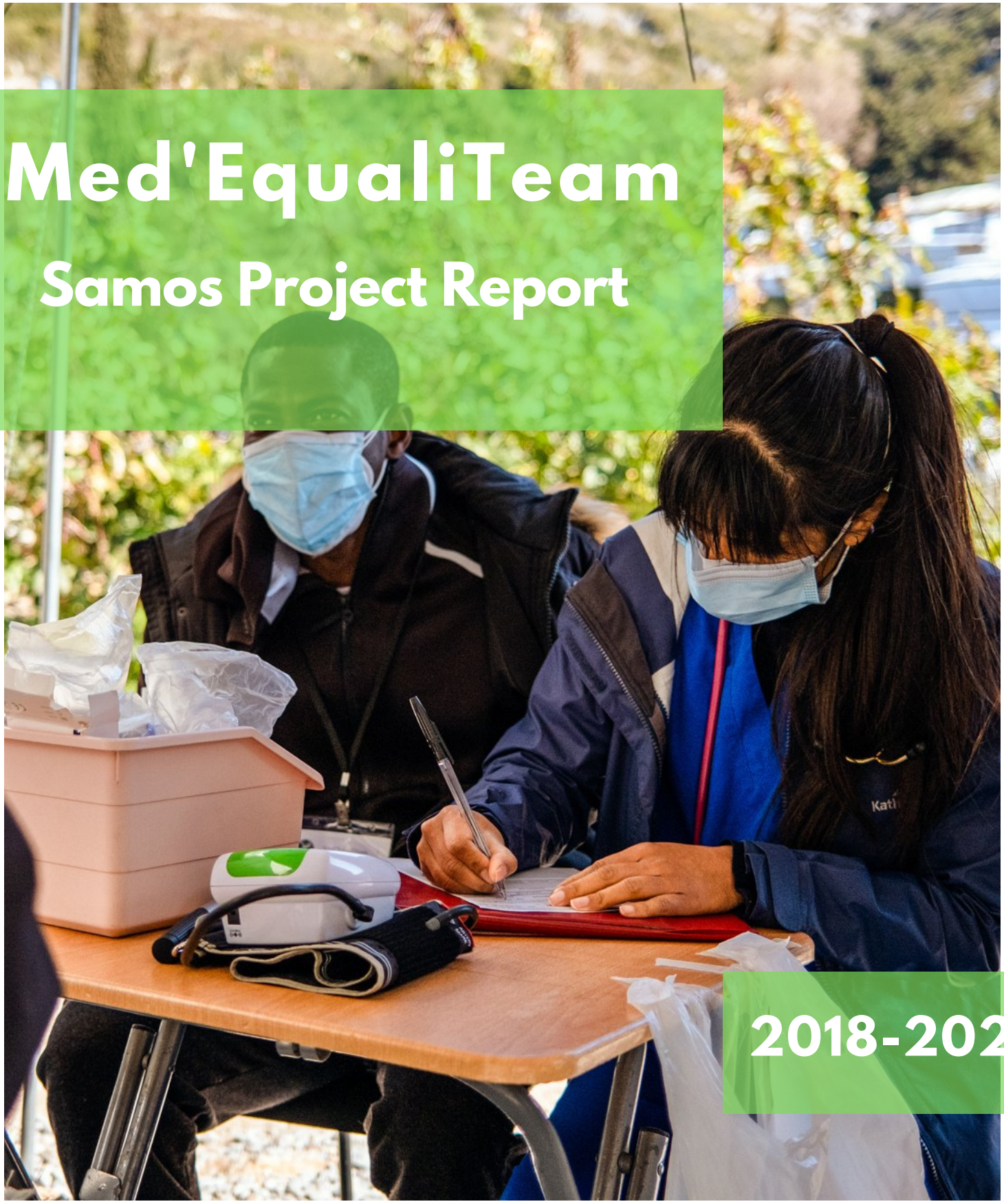
Med'EqualiTeam

Samos Project Report



2018-2021

Med'EqualiTeam

INTRODUCTION

THE SITUATION ON SAMOS

Since 2016, the island of Samos has been home to one of the Aegean island's five Reception and Identification Centers (RIC). Intended to receive asylum-seekers crossing from Turkey, **the Samos RIC was originally built with a capacity to house 650 people, however at its peak was populated by over 9,000 displaced people**. Though originally intended to be only temporary asylum processing centers, RICs on Samos, Lesvos, Chios, Leros and Kos quickly became permanent camps. As the number of people arriving to the shores of Samos increased, the number allowed to proceed to mainland Greece waned.

This has resulted in thousands of people being trapped living in makeshift tents and forced to live in highly unsanitary conditions, which **not only exacerbated physical health problems but also led to a dangerous rise in mental health problems**, which increased pressure on local services and NGOs which were often already at capacity.

Since 2020, the population of the camp began to decrease gradually, both as a result of boats being pushed back to Turkey - which nearly halted arrivals - as well as a large number of asylum seekers and refugees being transferred from Samos to the mainland. These transfers were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with those deemed most vulnerable to the disease being prioritized for transfers.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continued globally and Samos faced several lockdowns, the restrictions hit the population of the camp severely. Most actors on the island, governmental and nongovernmental, had to limit operations and many NGOs were forced to close for a long period. This left the refugee community with restricted access to educational and recreational support, and a limited access to town and services.

By September 2021, there were less than 400 displaced people living in the camp in Vathy.

OUR CLINIC

Since 2018, Med'EqualiTeam has been active on the island of Samos, providing **free primary health care to displaced people** living in the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) and the adjacent town of Vathy.

Prior to the opening of our clinic, displaced people were reliant on the Greek healthcare system which quickly became overloaded due to the increasing number of arrivals. It was common for people living in the camp to wait several days to see the doctor present there, to often no avail. Many were even sleeping in front of the camp clinic to increase their chance of being treated. The situation created by the asylum process, in which having a medical document would increase the chance of getting transferred, made the burden on the local healthcare system even bigger.

As a response to this situation, a French General Practitioner who was volunteering in Greece at the time founded Med'EqualiTeam, in cooperation with the governmental health actor in the camp and the hospital.

The NGO has operated for the past three years, 6 days per week with no interruption. The main clinic is in Vathy town, with a second temporary clinic near the camp during Covid-19 lockdowns.

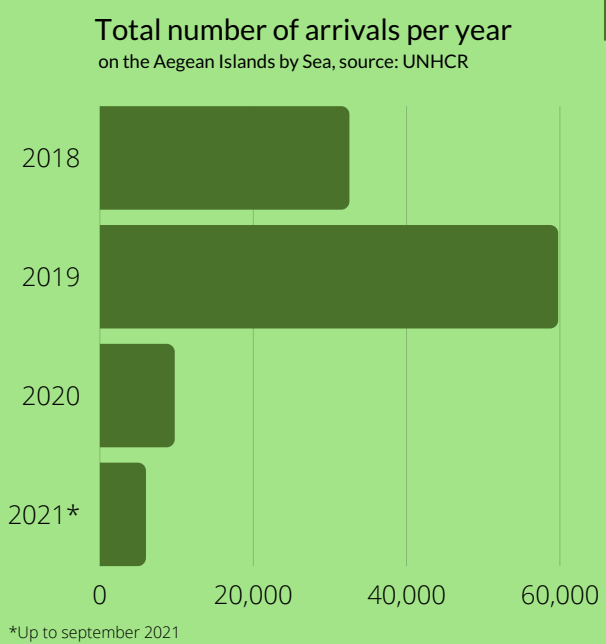
It is functioning entirely on crowdfunding, donations and support from other NGOS, and has treated over 80,000 patients with the help of more than 500 volunteers. Since the very beginning up until the current day, the NGO has aimed to uphold the values of providing care free of charge, treating each patient with dignity and respect, abiding by the concept of "do no harm" and providing a non-discriminative clinic where everybody is welcome.

THE NEW RECEPTION AND IDENTIFICATION CENTER

Announced in 2019, **a new Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centre was built on Samos in response to the migration crisis**. With five new camps planned to open on the Aegean Islands and 250 million euros worth of EU money delegated for these structures, these new closed controlled camps are part of a European-wide policy to manage migration.

The new camp on Samos was inaugurated on 18th September 2021, with refugees and asylum seekers being transferred in the following days. Costing 43 million euros, **this centre has the characteristics of a high security prison**, with rows of containers surrounded by barbed wire, controlled entry and exit and heavy police presence.

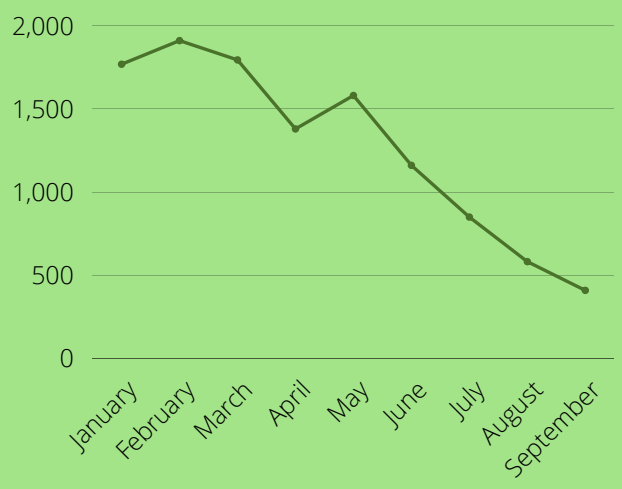
It is also farther away — one hour walk from the town of Vathy — and hidden from the view of the local population and tourists. The refugees feared being transferred there, but had little choice. While the living conditions are of course better, it is yet to be seen what will remain in terms of freedom of movement, access to essential services and duration of stay. Some NGOs will stay to monitor and advocate in this new situation.



PUSHBACKS ON THE AEGEAN

The practice of pushbacks have become widespread on the Aegean sea since 2020. It involves displaced boats being forcibly pushed back from Greek to Turkish territorial waters, with refugees being left to float in the water, or delay in rescue — contrary to all international regulations. The Greek Coast Guard, with the help of the EU border agency Frontex, engage in these practices to ensure refugees are unable to arrive on the Greek islands.

Sometimes these pushbacks also take place on land: refugees who arrive on the islands are arrested by the police and sent back out to sea in life rafts, without being able to submit an asylum application. Multiple media sources led a months-long investigation to report these practices happening across Europe, but since the publication in October 2021 this has yet to be addressed seriously by EU politicians.



Monthly number of patients visiting our clinic in 2021

However, we remain hopeful that people will continue to fight for a welcoming, tolerant and multicultural Europe. Values which the European Union was originally founded upon.

This report aims to summarize the progress and impact of Med'EqualiTeam's operation in Samos and events that have shaped our work since we began operating in 2018.

THE CLOSURE OF OUR PROJECT ON SAMOS

Despite uncertainty over the medical situation within the new camp, **as an organisation it felt impossible to integrate into a structure which is so far from our values**. Therefore, after much consideration we made the decision to not work inside the new camp, and after an extensive evaluation of the current needs which are now very low, and the possibilities of continuing our work outside the camp, we have decided not to continue the project on Samos.

We prepared for our exit as much as possible in order to decrease the impact on our patients. We provided our chronic patients with enough medication for three months, assessed all children for malnutrition and ensured that people with mental health conditions receive the necessary care and referrals to the remaining actors on the island. Furthermore, we have donated equipment and medicines to the camp and the hospital, and spoken with all the medical actors to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

Though we are leaving the island, this does not mean we are not very concerned about the current situation in Samos, the neighbouring Aegean islands and across Europe. As pushbacks continue to go unnoticed by the wider media and population, walls are systematically constructed and borders are becoming increasingly securitized. The words "refugees welcome" and "human rights" seem to be forgotten and empty.

Project Overview

2018 - 2021

July 2018	Med'EqualiTeam clinic opened in Samos
September 2018	Triage system put in place
January 2019	Opening of our women's only space in Alpha Center (Samos Volunteers)
May 2019	Extension of the clinic with four more consultation rooms
October 2019	Large fire in the camp, thousands of people fleeing in town
March 2020	First COVID-19 Lockdown in Greece, start of outreach project in the camp
July 2020	First cases of COVID-19 on Samos
September 2020	First cases of COVID-19 in the camp, opening of our upper clinic
October 2020	Earthquake on Samos and Turkey
February 2021	Exponential number of cases of Covid-19 on Samos, 2nd lockdown
July 2021	Closure of our upper clinic
September 2021	Opening of the new Reception and Identification Centre on Samos
October 2021	Closure of our project on Samos

ACTIVITIES AND CARE

(AND IN VIDEO HERE)

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Until September 2019, we provided specialized women's healthcare : family planning, contraception (including pills and IUDs), STI treatments.
This was essential as the capacity on Samos for this care was limited, until MSF fully started and we handed these duties over to them.

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

When the Covid-19 pandemic started, we designed a position of a referent "Covid doctor" who would draft our protocols for hygiene and infection prevention, social distancing, quarantine, testing - according to the latest scientific data and EODY guidelines.

Thanks to our strict measures, no volunteer got contaminated with Covid-19 during their stay with Med'EqualiTeam.

EMERGENCY CARE

We organized an emergency response for fires or other critical events which were happening regularly in the camp. It was designed with 3 phases, with an emergency triage system and priority levels.

We did regular simulations to test this system and make sure all volunteers would know their role, as well as trainings for emergencies at the clinic.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

THE BASE OF OUR WORK, PROVIDING FREE MEDICAL HEALTHCARE TO ANYONE COMING: ADULTS AND CHILDREN FROM ANY COMMUNITY, FOR ANY HEALTH ISSUE.
WE DESIGNED A TRIAGE SYSTEM TO ALLOW A QUICK ASSESSMENT OF EACH PATIENT BEFORE CONSULTATION.

CHRONIC CARE

WE BECAME SPECIALIZED IN HANDLING CHRONIC DISEASES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CAMP: HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, DIABETES, THYROID DISORDERS, CARDIAC CHRONIC DISEASES, PULMONARY DISEASES (COPD, ASTHMA) WITH SPECIFIC PROTOCOLS FOR EACH

ULTRASOUND & MICROSCOPY

THANKS TO DONORS, WE WERE EQUIPPED WITH AN ULTRASOUND MACHINE AND A MICROSCOPE, WHICH ALLOWED US TO MAKE MORE PRECISE DIAGNOSIS AND REFERRALS FOR PATIENTS.

MEDICINES

MEDICINES PRESCRIBED BY THE CAMP DOCTOR OR THE HOSPITAL WOULD HAVE TO BE PAID BY THE PATIENTS THEMSELVES, SO THEY WOULD OFTEN COME TO US TO GET THEM FOR FREE

TESTING

WE SELECTED SEVERAL QUICK TESTS WHICH WOULD ADD TO OUR PATIENTS CARE, AND DESIGNED PROTOCOLS FOR EACH OF THEM: PREGNANCY HEMOGLOBIN, HBA1C, HELICOBACTER PYLORI, HEPATITIS B/C, HIV, STREP A, ETC.

WOUND DRESSING

A BIG PART OF OUR DAILY WORK, WE HAD UP TO 3 NURSES TAKING CARE OF ALL SKIN ISSUES : WOUNDS, BITES, INFECTED LESIONS, CHRONIC WOUNDS ETC.
PATIENTS WITH SCABIES WOULD ALSO RECEIVE TREATMENT WITH THE RELEVANT EXPLANATIONS AND LAUNDRY ADVICE.

PHYSIOTHERAPY

THROUGH TOUCH, EXERCISE, AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF THEIR OWN BODY, PATIENTS CAN BE EMPOWERED TO FIND NEW WAYS TO DEAL WITH THEIR PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS AND PAIN. OUR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS ADDED AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT TO THE CARE OF OUR PATIENTS.

PSYCHOMOTOR THERAPY

FOR ADULTS SUFFERING FROM STRESS OR CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

MALNUTRITION

WE DEVELOPED PROTOCOLS FROM THE WHO GUIDANCE FOR SCREENING AND TREATMENT OF MALNOURISHED CHILDREN

WALKING AIDS

WE HAD A CONSISTENT STOCK OF WHEELCHAIRS, CRUTCHES, ZIMMER FRAMES, AND OTHER DEVICES TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE TO PATIENTS IN NEED – WHETHER AFTER A FRACTURE OR DUE TO A CHRONIC CONDITION

GLASSES

THANKS TO LUNETTES SANS FRONTIERES, WE PROVIDED BASIC VISION CHECKS AND CORRECTIVE GLASSES. THIS WOULD BE AN INVALUABLE HELP FOR PATIENTS WITH MYOPIA OR HYPERMETROPIA

ADULT DIAPERS

PROVIDING PADS TO ADULTS SUFFERING FROM INCONTINENCE DUE TO A MEDICAL CONDITION OR SIMPLY DUE TO AGE INCREASED THEIR HYGIENE AND DIGNITY.

VOLUNTEERS

50
COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

450
INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS

Since opening in 2018, we have had over 500 volunteers from more than 30 countries dedicating their time to Med'EqualiTeam. Coming from many different backgrounds, **these volunteers merged their skills to provide free and dignified primary health care** to displaced people on Samos.
From an initial team of 3 volunteers, **we grew up to a team of 40 volunteers** in 2020 including coordinators, then reduced in 2021 as the workload decreased.

COMMUNITY

Without the continuous dedication, commitment and hard work of our volunteers from the refugee community, none of the work we did on Samos would have been possible. Translating from French, Lingala, Arabic, Farsi, Somali or Urdu to English, they acted as an essential channel of communication and mediation for our patients.

INTERNATIONAL

"International volunteers" came to Samos to give their skills, energy and time : doctors, nurses, pharmacists, medical students, physiotherapists and psychomotor therapists, translators, logisticians and administrators coming from many places across the world, for a period ranging from 2 weeks to 1 year!

Team meeting, 2019

WE ALSO HAD THE INVALUABLE HELP OF OUR "HIDDEN HEROES", PEOPLE FROM SAMOS WHO DECIDED TO SUPPORT US WITH THEIR TIME AND SKILLS FOR NO MONETARY BENEFIT, JUST BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO. AND WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT THEM.

5,000+ Patients

Between July and December 2018

2018

ACTIVITIES IN 2018

OPENING OF OUR CLINIC

In July 2018 Med'EqualiTeam opened in Samos.

BLOOD TESTS

In partnership with Keelpno and the local hospital we began to facilitate blood drawing to our patients.

NON-FOOD ITEM DISTRIBUTIONS

Distribution of warm clothes, tents, tarps and sleeping bags to the most vulnerable patients in the camp as no NGO was operational on this field at that time

YOGA

We were able to offer yoga classes to patients in order to improve mental wellbeing, movement and flexibility

2-3 PRACTITIONERS

1 NURSE

1-2 MEDICAL STUDENTS

2 COORDINATORS

3+ CULTURAL MEDIATORS

2019

24,482
PATIENTS SEEN IN OUR CLINIC

516
PHYSIOTHERAPY SESSIONS

524
PAIRS OF GLASSES

3163
WOUND DRESSINGS

114
CONSULTATIONS IN OUR NEWLY OPENED WOMEN'S ONLY SPACE

The population of the camp almost doubled in 2019, from 3,500 people at the start of the year to 7,000 by the end of 2019.

When our clinic opened at 7am, often more than 100 patients would be waiting in line to ensure they received an appointment for a consultation!

We built the Extension, another space in our clinic with four more consultation rooms to accommodate the increasing daily number of patients.

MAIN EVENTS OF 2020

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The pandemic impacted our activity deeply, with changes in the clinic system to avoid contamination, more restricted access to the hospital, and national lockdowns impacting the town and the camp. Getting new volunteers was difficult due to travel restrictions and mandatory quarantine.

HOME MEDICAL VISITS

As the most vulnerable patients were transferred by UNHCR into 2 hotels to avoid contamination with Covid-19, we provided medical care by doing on-site weekly visits and support with medication.

FIRES IN THE CAMP

The month of April saw three incidences of fire within the camp, destroying the structures and belongings of many people. Towards the end of the year in November , two more fires also impacted the camp.

ON-SITE CLINIC

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions making it more difficult for asylum-seekers to exit the camp, we boosted access to care by opening a second temporary clinic at the entrance of the camp.

EARTHQUAKE

On 30th October 2020 a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Samos followed by a tsunami, impacting the island significantly. 2 teenagers were killed and hundreds of buildings and houses damaged.

32,762 PATIENT RECORDS

540 PHYSIOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOMOTOR THERAPY SESSIONS

501 PAIRS OF GLASSES

4,102 WOUND DRESSINGS

2,000 CONSULTATIONS THROUGH OUTREACH

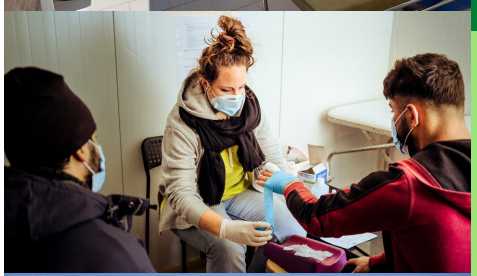
2020

New Year at the clinic, a normal day!

2021

11,438
PATIENT RECORDS

564
PHYSIOTHERAPY SESSIONS



297
PAIRS OF GLASSES

781
WOUND DRESSINGS

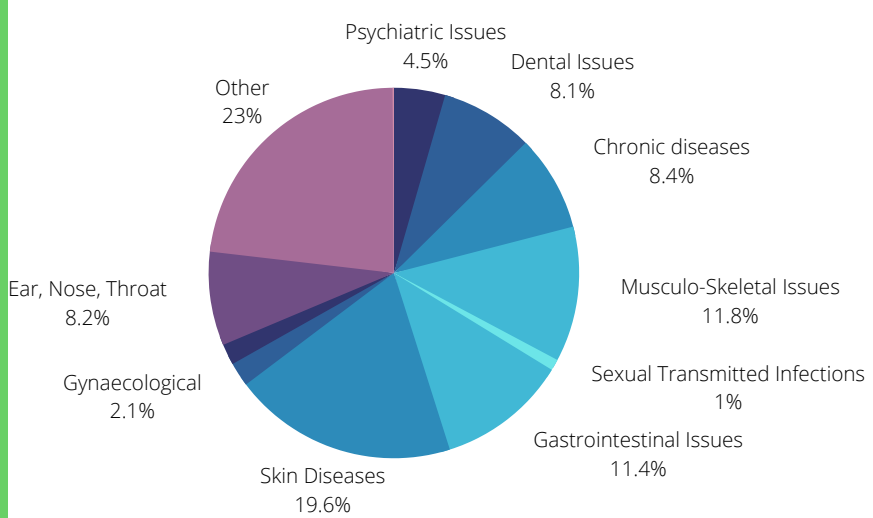
815
CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN

DIMINUTION OF THE MEDICAL NEED

As our number of patients gradually decreased and the lockdown restrictions lifted, we closed our upper clinic in July 2021, and made the decision to stop our project on Samos after the opening of the new camp.
The last weeks were focused on emptying the clinic and the volunteers houses, donating most of the items and renovating, with a final closure in October 2021.

We are still deciding where we will go next!

PRESENTATIONS AT OUR CLINIC IN 2021



OUR COLLABORATIONS ON SAMOS

Over the last 3 years on Samos the number of NGOs providing non-food items, psycho-social support, food, education and many other services has expanded, creating a network of organisations that work together to support displaced people. **The collaboration and communication between NGOs working on Samos allows beneficiaries to have easier access to the many services being provided** - many have said that the cooperation was exceptionally good on Samos and we are proud to have been part of it.

We partnered with many organisations on Samos, attended bi-weekly coordination meetings to share plans, ideas and visions for our work on the island. Below are some of the collaborative projects we are very grateful to have been a part of:

HEALTH WORKSHOPS

Since 2019 we have offered health workshops on different topics to members of the refugee community. These workshops involved meeting in small groups for medics to teach different topics ranging from sexual health workshops, nutrition or dental hygiene workshops, to information sessions on the COVID-19 vaccination.

FIRST AID TRAININGS

We provided first aid training for volunteers of many of the organisations. Our team of doctors and nurses have taught practical CPR, wound and burns management, management of choking, head injuries, asthma, panic attacks and allergic reactions - or other situations depending on the needs of the organisation.

EMERGENCY CORE TEAM

The team was created in October 2019, to offer support and collaboration in response during emergency situations. Composed of coordinators from several NGOs, it acted as a focal point during emergencies, coordinating other actors on the island and keeping everyone up to date with the situation. Our participation, notably on providing Covid-19 protocols and emergency medical care, was appreciated and valued.

MENTAL HEALTH TELECONSULTATIONS

As the gap in mental health care increased in 2020 with some patients having to wait several months to access a psychologist or psychiatrist, we partenered with AASIA and Terrapsy to provide remote consultations with psychologists based in France, from March to September 2021.

CAMP DOCTOR

We always communicated closely with governemental healthcare actors in the camp (KEELPNO then EODY). This collaboration was invaluable to ensure continuity of care for our common patients, and sharing concerns regarding special medical cases or situations.

LOCAL HOSPITAL

Our collaboration with the hospital in Vathy meant we could discuss complex patients cases, organize follow-up and special exams when needed, and discussing Covid-19 testing. We supported them by opening our clinic on weekends (so patients would come to us instead of going to the hospital for minor issues) and by donating medical supplies.

NGOS AND PARTNERS

INDIGO VOLUNTEERS

THEY SUPPORTED US FROM THE BEGINNING WITH RECRUITMENT OF MEDICAL AND NON-MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS. ALSO FACILITATED WELL-BEING TRAININGS FOR OUR COORDINATOR TEAM.

SAMOS VOLUNTEERS

WE HAVE WORKED VERY CLOSELY WITH SV FROM THE BEGINNING. THEY HELPED US WITH OUR INITIAL SET UP, PROVIDED THEIR LAUNDRY SERVICE FOR OUR PATIENTS (NOTABLY FOR SKIN ISSUES AND SCABIES) AND DURING COVID TIMES FOR OUR SCRUBS AFTER OUR CLINIC SHIFTS.

SWISS CROSS

THEY SUPPORTED PATIENTS AT THE HOSPITAL FOR TRANSLATION AND GUIDANCE IN 2019, THEY ALSO PROVIDED FOOD IN THEIR BAOBAB COMMUNITY CENTER

ACTION FOR EDUCATION

COMMUNITY CENTER AND SCHOOL FOR YOUNG ADULTS, WERE OFFERING SHOWERS FOR DISABLED PATIENTS

MOVEMENT ON THE GROUND

INTERVENTION IN THE CAMP TO IMPROVE THE LIVING CONDITIONS AND FIX THE UTILITIES.

STILLIRISE

SAFE SPACE AND SCHOOL FOR TEENAGERS FROM THE CAMP

JUST ACTION

PROVIDED FOOD PACKS TO OUR MOST VULNERABLE PATIENTS AND OUR COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS, WHILE ALSO SUPPORTING THE GREEK COMMUNITY. THEY ALSO HELPED US COMMUNICATE WITH THE MUNICIPALITY AND AUTHORITIES TO CREATE OUR UPPER CLINIC.

DROP IN THE OCEAN

INITIALLY COMMUNITY CENTER WHERE WE RAN SOME HEALTH WORKSHOPS,THEY ARE NOW PROVIDING NON-FOOD ITEMS TO THE ENTIRE REFUGEE POPULATION ON SAMOS

REFUGEE4 REFUGEES

FROM 2019 TO 2021, THEY SUPPLIED NON-FOOD ITEMS TO THE ENTIRE REFUGEE POPULATION OF SAMOS.

GLOCAL ROOTS

SAFE SPACE AND SCHOOL FOR WOMEN FROM THE CAMP. WE HELD MANY HEATLH WORKSHOPS IN THEIR WEAREONE CENTER

LEGAL TEAMS

REFUGEE LAW CLINIC BERLIN

AVOCATS SANS FRONTIÈRES FRANCE

HUMAN RIGHT LAWYER PROJECT

PROJECT ARMONIA

FROM 2019 TO 2021, THEY PROVIDED HEALTHY MEALS DAILY. WE WERE ABLE TO REFER PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC DISEASES AND FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH MALNUTRITION TO THEM.

Outreach during Covid-19 lockdowns : a collaborative project with MSF

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, we conducted **remote consultations** from March to December 2020 to help patients living in the camp to access medical care. This involved MSF volunteers and health promoters inside the camp connecting remote volunteer medics from Med'EqualiTeam, to do basic triage, wound dressing or referrals to appropriate health actors.

COVID-19 Vaccination Information Campaign

When the Covid-19 vaccination became available to all in June 2021, we carried out **information sessions and created leaflets** designed for members of the refugee community and volunteers. **By explaining the benefits and side effects of the different vaccines**, people could make informed choices about whether they wished to receive the vaccine or not. Samos Volunteers facilitated access to registration for vaccination afterwards, as well as driving to the health center.

NB : PICTURED HERE ARE ONLY THE SO-CALLED "GRASSROOT NGO'S". WE ALSO PARTNERED DURING OUR TIME ON SAMOS WITH OFFICIAL ACTORS SUCH AS PRAKSIS, ARSIS, DIOTIMA, INTERNATION RESCUE COMMITEE, IOM, UNHCR, ETC.

DONORS AND SUPPORT

Since the beginning, we have relied entirely on donations and crowdfunding, **never depending on governmental funds or European grants. This has allowed us to preserve our autonomy and to provide the highest quality of care.** From small fundraisers to yearly grants, without financial support, no matter how big or small, none of the work we were able to do on Samos would have been possible!

Below are some of the main donors who have supported our project:

These organisations and donors have supported Med'EqualiTeam on Samos with medicine, financial support, material support or practical help. We would also like to say a **big thank you to all the individuals who have donated** to our organization over the last 3 years.

Samos

500
VOLUNTEERS

"PATIENTS FEEL THAT MED'EQUALITEAM IS ALWAYS THERE FOR THEM."

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

"MED'EQUALI TEAM ALWAYS HELPS US AND SINCE WE ARRIVED IN SAMOS. WE ONLY COME TO THEM AND THEY ARE ALWAYS KIND TO US."

PATIENT, 2021

3 YEARS
3 MONTHS
3 DAYS

80,000
CONSULTATIONS

"[...] AND ALL MY THANKS, RESPECT AND APPRECIATION TO THE DOCTORS AND INTERPRETERS FOR THEIR KIND MANNERISMS AND I WISH THEM ALL THE LUCK FOR THE FUTURE. ALL MY RESPECT AND GRATITUDE FOR THE TEAM."

PATIENT, 2021