



Procedure for becoming a volunteer with Starfish (IF OUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME RESUMES)

Starfish is a non-profit organization which aims to provide the best care possible for refugees of all nationalities arriving on the island. As the refugee crisis is extremely volatile, we try to be as flexible as possible as situations change. We try to adapt to these changes to best suit the needs of refugees. We always aim to uphold the human rights of people arriving in Lesvos. We are in partnership with many local organizations, grassroots programs and large NGOs, working in tandem to have best practice in this refugee crisis. We work together with local Greek people, expats living in Molyvos. When our volunteer programme was in operation, many volunteers from all over the world embraced our relief efforts.

In our work, we value everyone, whatever their creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, colour or class background. We feel everyone can make a positive contribution to the lives of refugees and want to give everyone we can such an opportunity.

Starfish normally only takes on volunteers for one month or more as we need people who can commit to us so we can ensure that we have well trained and experienced teams working at all of our sites. We work with many vulnerable and traumatized people so we simply cannot cut corners - there is too much at stake. We will consider volunteers for shorter periods of time if we are understaffed, if you have a special project with us or if we have Arabic and/or Farsi fluency as we always need interpreters. Returning Starfish volunteers can also join us for shorter periods of time.

If you meet this criteria, please fill in our online volunteer registration form which can be found here or under the "About" section on our Facebook page. **It is vital that if your dates change you let us know as soon as possible** as it can cause us big scheduling and accommodation problems if we are not aware of changes in plans. You will need to complete further registration procedures once you arrive on the island.

Before you join us

Please keep abreast of recent developments in the refugee crisis as situations change quickly. Here in Greece, we are particularly at the whim of the weather, political developments and border policy changes. Good websites include Al Jazeera, News that Moves, IRIN and the Guardian.



Ensure you pack appropriate clothing for the weather here in Lesvos. In winter months, from mid-November to mid-March, the weather changes rapidly. There may be sunny days but there will also be storms and it can get down to below freezing at night. Snow in January and February is not uncommon. If you are volunteering with us during this time, please pack warm clothes and waterproofs. Decent footwear is necessary all through the year- the camps often have rough ground, so please bring trainers. If you are coming in summer, please remember your sun cream!

Please ensure that all of your vaccinations are up to date. Whilst you do not need any specific inoculations to visit Greece, you will be working with people who come from countries which may not have thorough vaccination programs and in environments where there is a risk of tetanus. Please consult your doctor and/or pharmacy about boosters before you arrive.

How to get to Lesvos

You can travel overland from other European countries by train and bus. The website [“The Man in Seat 61”](#) is a good resource for train and bus timetables.

From Turkey you can travel by ferry from the Turkish port of Ayvalik to Mytilene. Schedules vary depending on the season and you can find timetables [here](#). Round trips cost around 25 Euro and 15 Euro one-way and the journey takes around an hour and a half.

From Athens you can fly or take the ferry. Ferries normally leave from Lesvos/Athens around 8.30 pm and arrive around 8.30 am the next morning. Tickets cost around 45 Euro one way. You can book in advance from travel agents or in the port. When there are many refugees in Lesvos, Christmas time or during tourist season, it’s advisable to book in advance as ferries can often be booked out for several days. Be aware there are often frequent ferry strikes, so please factor this into your travel plans.

There is an airport in Mytilene, Lesvos, which is served daily all year round with flights from Athens. During tourist season, there may also be direct flights from your country of origin. During the winter and/or if there are no direct flights from your home country, [Skyscanner](#) is one of the best flight comparison websites around. Please be advised that it may work out cheaper if you do separate searches for London to Athens and then Athens to Mytilene, rather than London to Mytilene.



Info about Lesvos

Lesvos is the third biggest of the Greek islands (miles) and is in the North Aegean region. On a clear day you can see Turkey, which is a mere 3.5 miles away on some parts of the coast - the main reason why so many refugee boats come to Lesvos. The capital is Mytilene, 65 kilometers from Molyvos, where Starfish is based.

Climate - Lesvos has four seasons and is only really cold from December to March. However it can still be quite chilly at night outside of these months.

Communications - the international dial code for Greece is + 30 and emergency services can be reached on 112.

Language - Greek is the national language here, although many locals in the tourist areas speak good English. The main languages of the refugees arriving are Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, Urdu and Dari. French is sometimes also spoken.

Transport - There are some buses between Mytilene and Molyvos (times) but most people here use cars. It's also possible to hitchhike if you are going short distances.

Medical facilities - There is a medical Centre at Kalonni, in the Centre of the island and a hospital in Mytilene.

The official registration camp for refugees, Moria, is in Mytilene. There are two more camps in operation in Mytilene. Lesvos Solidarity (former Pikpa), the small center for vulnerable refugees and Kara Tepe camp.

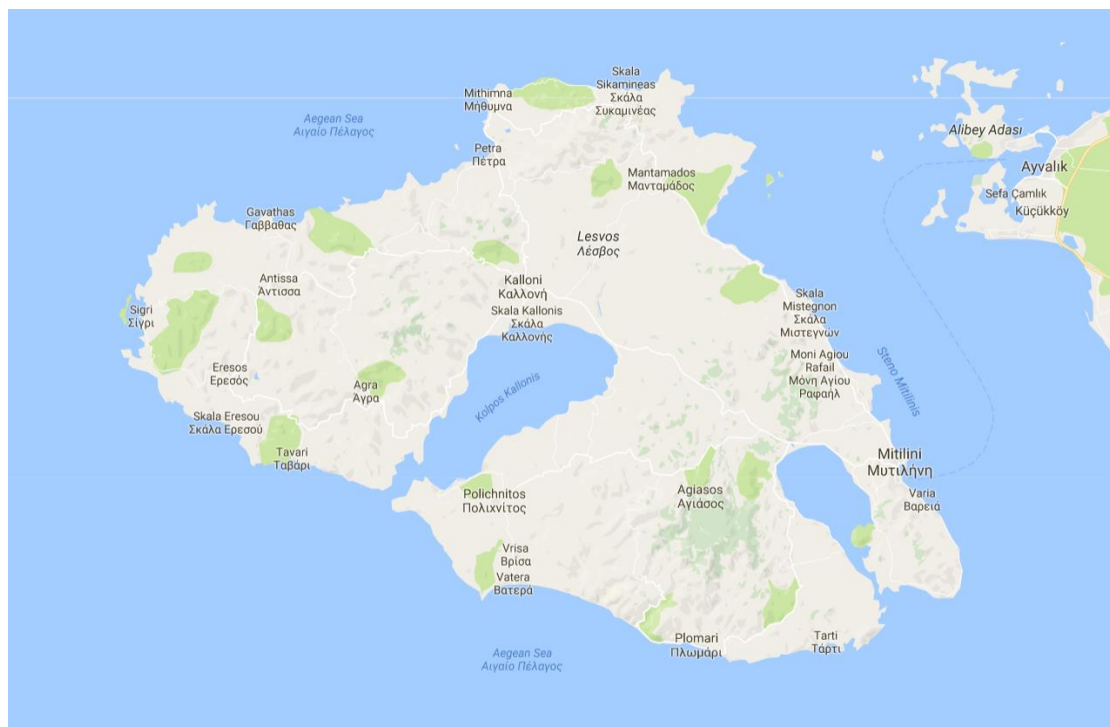
Boats generally arrive along the 20 kilometer stretch of coast - unofficially called the dirt road as it's unpaved - between the villages of Skala Sykamias and Eftalou. Eftalou is a few miles from Molyvos.

Since the spring of 2016, refugee arrivals on the north coast have slowed dramatically.

Starfish is therefore no longer involved with refugee arrivals, which at this time are monitored and coordinated by Frontex, the Hellenic Coast Guard and various NGOs.

Essential Molyvos information

Molyvos is a beautiful fishing village (population 1,500 approx.) situated on the north of the island of Lesvos. The village is ancient, with some suggesting that its origins lie back as far as the 7th century BC. Molyvos is dominated by the Genoan castle on the hill that overlooks surrounding area. The main source of income for the local population is tourism.



Banks – The main bank with an ATM machine in the village is the Greek National Bank. There is also an annex of Alpha Bank with an ATM machine. They are situated on the outskirts of Molyvos. The post office in the village also has an ATM. During tourist season, roughly May to September, there is an ATM outside of Com travel agent near the harbour.

Medical facilities - There is no doctor's surgery in Molyvos. There is a small medical center for minor ailments in Kalloni and a hospital in Mytilene. There are two pharmacies in the village; one near to the banks and one in the village closer to the post office where antibiotics and painkillers can be purchased, many without a prescription.

Travel Agents - the only travel agency in Molyvos that is open all year is Com- Travel.



Car rental - Starfish recommends Cosmos, a small agency on the edge of Molyvos, close to the banks, for honest cheap prices.

Accommodation - Starfish can provide free accommodation for long term volunteers. For people who are here for shorter stays or who want larger spaces, Air B&B has some great deals, especially outside of tourist season.

Phones - We suggest to all volunteers that they should buy sim cards and top up credit at a shop with a Kodak sign outside near to the banks on the edge of town. Otherwise making calls to people you work with can be expensive.

For more general information about Molyvos, [please take a look at this comprehensive website](#) about the village and surrounding areas.

The local community

The vast majority of local people have worked tirelessly with refugees for many years, long before all the NGOs arrived. Please respect this and be aware that the community here has in depth knowledge of this crisis that you may not be aware of. There are some local people who may express anti-refugee sentiment. Always bear in the mind the context of the situation here and where these viewpoints may come from.

Driving - PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY AND SAFELY AND DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE. Several volunteers have had accidents whilst on the island. As well as being a risk to life, driving extremely fast and/or drunk also causes resentment amongst the local community to our presence here. Please remember at all times that you are a guest here on Lesvos.

Social Media

We have a large platform on Facebook with our [Starfish page](#), we have a twitter account @helpforrefugees and an Instagram as well, asterias_starfish. Our website also has a blog where we keep our supporters updated with what what's going on in Molyvos and all our latest news. Dimitris, currently deals with most of the social media, so if you have any good photos of Starfish at work or you have some ideas for the blog, please contact him.

**Note of caution:**

If you see anyone on the island being aggressive and/or violent towards refugees, please photograph them (if it is safe to do so) and speak to Starfish admin support. If someone approaches you to admonish you about your work here on the island, do not engage, remain polite and leave the situation.

Culture

Greece is a developed European country and if you have spent time living on travelling in Europe, you won't find it that different. But please be respectful of local people on the island. Austerity measures have hit Greece hard and the refugee crisis has had a huge impact on tourism. Whilst the rest of us can leave the island any time we want, islanders have to deal with this reality every single day.

Be aware of the expression "Greek time". Things will often take longer here than in your home country. Bureaucracy here is also legendary, so please factor that in when dealing with the authorities.

You will also be working with refugees whose culture may be very different from your own. Please be sensitive to this. If you are male, it may be considered very inappropriate to speak to a married woman or offer woman sanitary towels. Use your common sense to judge individual situations.

Volunteering in a crisis situation

It's very important that you give careful thought to the decision of coming to volunteer with Starfish as situations here change very quickly. Smugglers, government policies, the weather, visits by politicians can all have massive effects on refugee flows. Expect change at the drop of a hat and be mentally prepared for that. There may be quiet days, where not much is happening and you will be sorting clothes in our storage area - are you prepared for not every day being adrenaline filled? There are other days where you will be exhausted on your feet after hours and hours of physically and emotionally draining work. Can you cope with this? The most important thing are the people Starfish is trying to help - they are from diverse backgrounds and nationalities and everyone's story is different. However, there are common denominators; most people are fleeing war and many are victims of violence, state sanctioned torture, sexual violence and political persecution. Are you mentally ready to interact with people who have suffered such deprivations?



It's very easy to get totally immersed in this refugee crisis and try to work all hours in an effort to 'solve' it. This is often when burn-out can occur. Burn-out can occur as a result of physical and emotional exhaustion and can manifest itself as nightmares, depressive feelings and isolation as well as a refusal to take care of yourself, i.e. eating properly, sleeping enough. Volunteers will often witness a number of traumatic events while volunteering, from speaking to victims of trauma, to dealing with grief-stricken people who have lost a member of the family on the boat crossing. Most volunteers will have not encountered situations like this before and this can have profound emotional effects. All of these things can contribute to burn-out. Here are some tips to avoid or deal with burn-out:

- Take care of yourself! Remember to eat, drink, breathe and sleep. Listen to your body - if it's telling you it needs sleep, don't ignore it.
- Don't feel guilty about taking time out and ensure you regularly do so. No one is irreplaceable and teams can cope without your presence. A tired, cranky volunteer is not useful! Go to the beach, drive to another town, go out dancing and watch films. Take time out from the crisis.
- Make sure you stay in touch with friends and family back home. Talk about what you are doing and how you are feeling. Let those who know you best support you.
- Speak with other volunteers. You are all in this together, so there is a good chance you will be experiencing similar feelings. It can also be useful to speak to long-term volunteers as they have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with you. Sometimes it just takes a good chat about things to alleviate stress, anger and sadness.
- Be prepared! Read up on the refugee crisis before you arrive in Lesvos. Speak to volunteers about their experiences, follow the news, and get involved with groups on social media to learn more about what you will encounter. Make sure you are clear about what you want to get from this experience, so you avoid feelings of disillusionment.

Returning home

Volunteering with Starfish and helping with this refugee crisis may radically change you. Or it may not influence you that much at all. Everyone is different. Often the longer you are here for, the more profoundly your experiences will affect you. Returning home can be a challenging experience. Especially if you are from a country not directly affected by this crisis, it can be difficult to speak with people about your time on Lesvos as they may not understand the situation.



This can potentially be quite isolating. Stay in touch with people who you shared difficult experiences with. Meet up with volunteers in your area to stay connected. Take time off after you return home. You have just spent at least a month in a really challenging and stressful environment and you need rest and time to process what you have just been involved with.

There are many ways that you can stay involved with helping with the refugee crisis once you return home. If you are from a country that is receiving refugees arriving here in Europe, such as Sweden or Germany, get involved with local initiatives that are helping new arrivals to integrate. Speak to the media in your home country about your experiences. Think about what skills you have that you could utilize to contribute remotely; can you build apps? Do your talents lie within social media? Arrange collections for supplies to be sent here. Fundraise on behalf of Starfish. Raise awareness by speaking to your local community in schools and universities or any groups interested in your experiences. Fight misinformation about the refugee crisis. Lobby your government to support policies supportive of refugees. There is so much you can do once you have left Lesvos.

Also, you can always come back. We would love to have you again!