



PRE-ARRIVAL, VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Thank you so much for your interest in volunteering with Starfish Foundation. It is because of people like you that we can continue our work for both the refugees and the local community. Over the past years Starfish was fortunate to welcome thousands of volunteers from all over the world to work together and we are excited to welcome many more.



Disclaimer

This Pre-arrival Volunteer Handbook provides general advice and relevant information on volunteering with Starfish on Lesvos, it is not intended to be legal advice. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided within this handbook at the time of publication, the publishers can furnish no guarantee as to its accuracy. We suggest you seek legal advice through your own legal service provider with regard to particular issues or questions if they come up.

We are looking forward to welcoming you to our team.

For the most up to date information on Starfish Foundation activities, programs and volunteering needs, see our website and other social media:

asterias-starfish.org/en/
facebook.com/starfishfoundation.org/
instagram.com/starfish_foundation/
twitter.com/starfishlesvos

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Situation on Lesbos	5
Volunteering with Starfish	6
Getting to Lesbos	7
Planning for your Stay	8
General information About Lesbos	10



INTRODUCTION

Starfish Foundation - Where it started

Lesvos is situated just a few kilometers from the Turkish coast and therefore has always served as an entry point into Greece and Europe. Very soon after the conflicts in the middle east started, thousands of refugees arrived on the shores of the island driven by hope. Lesvos became a focal point of the refugee crisis in Greece. Throughout the summer of 2015, 1,000 – 1,500 refugees arrived in Molyvos every day. Half of the 660,000 refugees that arrived in Europe between January and November 2015 arrived through Lesvos. Desperate men, women and children in need of help were fleeing war, persecution and destruction in their home countries, particularly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Starfish Foundation was born in Molyvos by locals in response to this humanitarian disaster, with the initial objective of meeting arriving refugees' immediate needs for food, clothing and hygiene. Starfish Foundation created and managed OXY transit camp, provided assistance to people rescued by the coast guard near Molyvos and Petra harbours and coordinated clothing distribution. We also fed the hungry at Moria centre, and provided urgently needed supplies to refugee camps in mainland Greece. With ever increasing responsibility came the urgent need for greater funding and more resources, which lead to Starfish applying for NGO status. This was granted by the Greek Government on the 9th October 2015. Operating as an NGO, Starfish was able to secure volunteers from all across the world, as well as support from many NGO groups active on the island. It is estimated that Starfish assisted more than 200,000 people during the height of the 2015 humanitarian crisis. The EU-Turkey Agreement of March 2016 stemmed the flow of arrivals to Lesvos and required NGOs to vacate the refugee camps. Starfish adapted to the situation by shifting focus to supporting the most vulnerable and moving operations to the capital of Lesvos, Mytilene.

Starfish Foundation has since grown from one of the first respondents to the refugee crisis, to a multifaceted NGO that continues to support vulnerable people, both local and refugee, who face uncertain futures. Most recently, Starfish has been meeting needs previously filled by international NGOs, after many have now left the island. 2019 and 2020 was marked by a surge in new refugee arrivals, increasing the pressure once again on everyone – both the refugees and the local population. The already stressed Greek economy has taken additional strain.

Our key objectives are providing assistance to the most vulnerable, whenever needed, and supporting the local community impacted by the crisis and the refugees.

SITUATION ON LESVOS

As of January 2020, 20,000 people, including 1,140 unaccompanied minors, live in or around Moria camp -- a facility built to house 3,000. This has created tensions and discontent between the Greek host community, the refugees and humanitarian workers. Especially during the month of February 2020 those tensions erupted several times and caused a series of issues.

In general, Lesvos is very safe. People are friendly, and the streets have people even at night. But volunteers should join remain aware of the local situation. Join a network on WhatsApp, or elsewhere, to receive news of local happenings. NGOs, refugees and humanitarian workers have to adapt to the situation constantly, and act accordingly. Generally, we do not believe that Lesvos is an unsafe place, but we ask you to keep a low profile, be aware of the situation around you and keep the risks in mind.





VOLUNTEERING WITH STARFISH

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. The normal working times when volunteering with Starfish are from 9am to 5pm, however you can also work other times after you discuss this with the coordinator. Our coordinator will explain your role and main tasks before you come and give you a brief introduction into the organisation once you arrived, as the activities may vary from day to day, because there is no such thing as a typical day when volunteering. We ask all our volunteers to be flexible, responsible, and professional.

Starfish normally takes on volunteers who can stay 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 will consider volunteers for shorter periods of time if we are understaffed, if you have a special project with us or if you have Arabic and/or Farsi fluency as we always need interpreters. Returning Starfish volunteers can also join us for shorter periods of time. It is vital that if your dates change you let us know as soon as possible, as it can cause scheduling and accommodation problems if we are not aware of changes in plans. We will help you to complete further paperwork for the Greek government once you begin working with Starfish.

Volunteers pay their own flights, accommodation and food. We, as much as we can, try to organize transport to and from the airport and to and from the camp to ensure that you get to Moria safely. We do have our own volunteer accommodation, at a reduced cost, which can house several volunteers. Please see more info in the accommodation section.

GETTING TO LESVOS

You can travel overland from European countries by train and bus. The website “The Man in Seat 61” is a good resource for train and bus timetables. From Athens, Thessaloniki or Ayvalik you can depart for Mytilene, Lesvos.

From Greece: Coming from Athens or Thessaloniki to the airport of Mytilene. There is an airport in Mytilene, Lesvos, which is served daily all year round with flights from Athens.

From Athens you can also take a ferry to Mytilene. 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.

From Turkey: Fly to Izmir or Istanbul, Turkey, and take a bus to Ayvalik. There is a ferry from there to Mytilene. Schedules vary depending on the season and you can find timetables online. Round trips cost around 25 Euro and 15 Euro one-way and the journey takes around an hour and a half.

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 ferry strikes, so please factor this into your travel plans. During tourist season, there may also be direct flights to Lesvos from your country of origin. 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 the separate legs of your journey, such as London to Athens and then Athens to Mytilene, rather than London to Mytilene. Keep in mind, if you do this, you may also need to exit security at the airport to get your luggage, before re-checking it for the next flight.



PLANNING FOR YOUR STAY

Housing

You should expect:

- Hot water is turned off except when needed Turn it on 30 min before you need it. (Once you turn it off, it stays warm for quite a long time.)
- Heating is expensive so homes are cool in winter – 60 F (16 C)
- Toilet paper is thrown in the bin beside the toilet, not into the toilet.

Don't expect:

- Microwave – you may or may not have one
- Internet – ask
- Clothes washer -- ask
- A full stove/oven. Small cook stoves are common.
- Clothes dryer. Dry them on a line outside to reduce moisture inside
- Teapot/coffee maker – ask
- Television -- ask

Clothes

Bring casual, comfortable clothes – that don't stand out. There are many cultures and religions represented here, so somewhat modest dress is recommended.

All Seasons:

- Raincoat
- Umbrella
- Rain proof shoes. Not for muddy or pools of water, just rain.
- Your own towel and wash cloth
- Soap

Winter:

Homes are kept quite cool in winter, so be prepared to dress in layers for warmth, even indoors.

- Bring warm coat/jacket
- Gloves



- Consider bringing long underwear (thermal underwear)
- Thick woolen sox and slippers for around the house in the evening
- Bring layers of shirts and jackets/sweatshirts so you can adjust your warmth
- Bring warm pajamas or sleepwear
- Considering bringing fingerless gloves for inside use
- Scarves are unrivalled for keeping the head and neck warm, or keeping the wind off your head

Summer:

Just bring normal summer clothes, as well as sunscreen. It can get quite hot. Keep in mind the varying cultures you will be interacting with, and use discretion.

Power: voltage and frequency

Greece uses 220 V at 50 Hz. Plug types are C, D, E and F.

If you come from somewhere with the same power standards, you're fine. If your country uses different plug types, you'll need a plug adapter for power outlets. See this link for other countries' standards: worldstandards.eu/electricity/plug-voltage-by-country/

If your country uses a different voltage, check your devices. Many electronic devices, such as phones and computers, will work on both 110V and 220V. They will say somewhere on the device which they can use. Or check your documents. Other devices, such as razors or hair dryers, will need a power transformer.

GENERAL INFORMATION 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 so many refugee boats come to Lesvos. The capital is Mytilene, 65 kilometers from Molyvos, where Starfish is based.

Climate – Winter temperatures (December to March) can get down to 35 F (2 C) at night. Although, average daytime highs at this time of year are around 57 F (14 C) and nighttime lows are 45 F (7 C). Summer average highs are in the high 80sF, and 30C; and can have periods of intense heat. For details see: climatestotravel.com/climate/greece/lesbos

Communications - The international dial code for Greece is + 30 and emergency services can be reached on 112, but only if you have a local SIM card.

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.

Shop hours -- The shops in Mytilene center are open Monday to Saturday from 09:00 to 14:00 and on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday they are re-open from 18:00 to 21:00

Transport - There are a few buses between Mytilene and Molyvos, 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, and a hospital in Mytilene.

Refugee Camps - 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.

Arrivals - 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.

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.

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. If someone approaches you to admonish you about your work here on the island, do not engage, remain polite and leave the situation.

Greece is a developed European country and if you have spent time living or travelling in Europe, you won't find it that different. 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, a main source of Lesvos economy. While 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.

If you want more information, here are some online resources, provided by other sources.

<http://www.bit.ly/voldoc>

FaceBook: Information Point for Lesvos Volunteers,
Lesvos Volunteers accommodation sharing

Recording crime or aggression -- If you see anyone on the island committing a crime, or being aggressive and/or violent towards refugees, please photograph them (if it is safe to do so) and speak to Starfish admin support.

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