

Newsletter No. 6 – November 2023

UPDATES FROM SELF.M.AID

from Julia Minder (co.-founder & director)

Dear selfm.aid - community

Since our last update, the situation on Samos has changed drastically. Following the tragic shipwreck in Pylos in June of this year, the Greek government temporarily replaced violent pushbacks with sea rescue missions. This led to an overwhelming increase in new arrivals, pushing the Samos camp beyond its limits - exceeding it's capacity by more than 300%.

Our dedicated team of community volunteers was suddenly relocated to camps on the mainland, leaving the SKILLS FACTORY unexpectedly empty - something we had never experienced before.

In response to the crisis in the camp, we swiftly redirected our focus to essential services like showers, phone repairs, laundry, and crafting vital items such as soaps, energy bars and baby blankets, collaborating closely with our partner organizations on the island.

At the same time, we invested heavily in welcoming the new people arriving on Samos and informing them that the SKILLS FACTORY is ready for newcomers.

Sure enough, the people started to find their way to the SKILLS FACTORY - and in large numbers! It has been beautiful to see how the vibrant culture of empowerment and creativity returned, but we are now struggling to meet the heightened demand.

Without your support, our work would never be possible. Thank you for not forgetting those trapped on Europe's borders and for standing with us.

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Phones without Borders**SELF.M.AID**

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DO YOU SHARE OUR VISION AND WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

There are many options to support us...

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SAMOS UNDER PRESSURE

MORE THAN 4'000 NEW ARRIVALS IN ONLY 2 MONTHS

Samos faces an unprecedented influx of new arrivals seeking safety.

Following the tragic shipwreck near Pylos (as reported in our previous newsletter), the Greek coastguard temporarily changed its policy, shifting from violent and fatal pushbacks at Europe's borders to promoting sea rescue missions which was widely spread in local media.

Over the subsequent months, the coastguard saved a substantial number of people seeking safety from the sea and brought them directly to the camp for registration.

Just in July and August 2023, more than 4,000 people arrived on the shores of Samos. Such high numbers of new arrivals haven't been seen for years, particularly since the inauguration of the new closed controlled access center in 2021.

The camp became overcrowded within a short period of time, causing the system to collapse.



SYSTEM BREAKDOWN

PEOPLE SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR

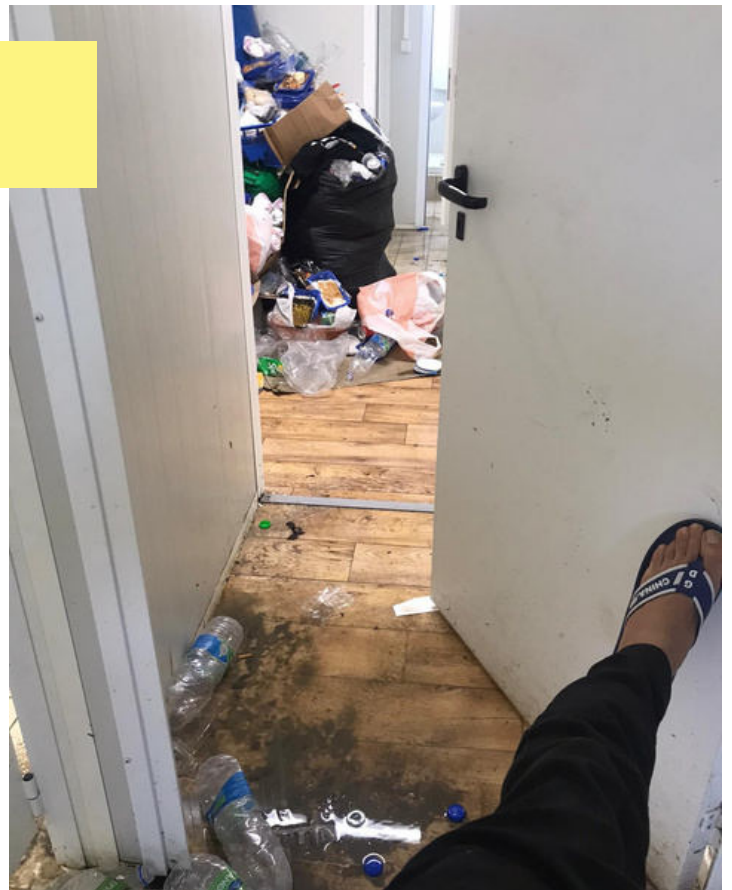
People are left without basic necessities.

With the sudden surge in new arrivals, the infrastructure at the new Samos refugee camp (CCAC) collapsed within a short period of time.

Despite the immense investment of 42 million euros, residents found themselves trapped in dire conditions. Basic essentials like sufficient food, running water, adequate beds, access to hygiene and medical services, and even protection were severely lacking.

The registration process faced significant delays, leaving some individuals who arrived drenched from the sea waiting over 37 days in isolation before receiving fresh clothing.

A new humanitarian crises has emerged. In Europe. Once again.



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EMERGENCY RESPONSE

FROM THE SKILLS FACTORY

How we responded to the new situation.

As our entire team of community volunteers was suddenly transferred to camps on the mainland, we temporarily had to shift our programs, redirecting our efforts toward supporting partner organizations and providing emergency relief.

We launched the soap project, contributing over 1600 soaps to MSF for hygiene kits, expanded shower and laundry services, offered phone repair services, crafted baby blankets for newborns in the camp, and provided energy bars for additional nutrition.

Simultaneously, our team dedicated significant efforts to establishing a mobile information team, welcoming new arrivals and ensuring they were informed about the available services on Samos including the opportunities available in the SKILLS FACTORY.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

HOW THE PEOPLE CAME BACK

"I wish I knew the SKILLS FACTORY before. I would have spent every single day in it" (M.A., tailor, community volunteer).

As we started to get to know more and more of the new arrivals, we organized an open invitation for a solidarity brunch in the SKILLS FACTORY.

This was a wonderful opportunity to create new connections, get to know one another, and spread the word about our project. Word spread fast - soon many people started to reach out, eager to explore and experience the transformative atmosphere of the SKILLS FACTORY.

They found a place to express themselves, feel accepted and respected and eventually became part of our team. Our outreach efforts led to an unprecedented demand, especially in light of the escalating numbers within the new camp, like we have never encountered them before.



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TAILOR WORKSHOP

DEPARTMENT UPDATE



With the addition of professional fashion designer Rafiq A. to our coordination team, the sewing department has reached a whole new level.

Our expansion of the department further included the integration of a professional coverstitch machine, enabling us to start creating prototypes for sweatpants and sweaters, crucial in addressing the shortage of clothing on the island, especially with winter approaching.

Collaborating closely with Samos Volunteers, who run a free shop for camp residents, we assessed their inventory's pressing needs and now design solutions within our production capacity.

We are ready to start production and are hopeful that our efforts will contribute significantly to keeping people warm in the upcoming winter months.

BARBER WORKSHOP

DEPARTMENT UPDATE

In our previous newsletter, we highlighted the incredible donations received for our barber department, including contributions from Eddine Belaid Coiffeur, WAHL professional barber machines, and various private donors.

These generous donations of professional equipment have helped the barber workshop to become one of the most popular and in-demand departments within the SKILLS FACTORY.

This overwhelming demand led to the expansion and establishment of a second workshop, crafted with dedication by our construction and wood department. We now proudly offer two professional barber stations, where up to 15 people each receive attentive grooming and treatment daily, with dignity and care.

Moreover, our skilled barbers continually mentor and train newcomers interested in learning this profession or seeking to enhance their skills as they take their initial steps into their new lives in Europe.



Did you know?

Nal'iman (نعيماً) is an Arabic expression used to express satisfaction or well-being, commonly said to men after shaving or to individuals of all genders after taking a shower.

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KITCHEN CERTIFICATES

DEPARTMENT UPDATE

Last summer, we recognized the importance of enhancing visibility in our learning processes to inspire and acknowledge achievements.

We worked to formalise the learning journey for our community volunteers, offering certificates across different proficiency levels, ranging from Basics to Confidence and Department Manager roles.

Our team diligently crafted practical and innovative learning goals across various departments. Recently, we successfully piloted the first courses in the kitchen department, with several community volunteers achieving their certificate goals.

Our commitment remains to provide optimal support for our communities as they take their initial steps toward an independent life in Europe.

SHOWER AND LAUNDRY PROJECT

DEPARTMENT UPDATE

Thank you to our partner organisation forRefugees for your generous support!

We have successfully completed and implemented our WASH project by constructing two bathrooms, complete with toilets and showers, ensuring a safe and dignified space for personal hygiene - an essential provision lacking in the Samos refugee camp.

The escalating demand also included laundry services, an area that remains non-functional within the camp. We are incredibly grateful that forRefugees has committed to further support, enabling us to expand the shower building and incorporating a new laundry area.

Collaborating with such flexible and responsive organizations is invaluable, as they address the most pressing needs on the ground.



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WAR IN GAZA

THE SUFFERING OF PALESTINIANS ON SAMOS

The past 50 days have been covered in darkness in the mist of the horrific war targeting civilians in Gaza.

Given that most of our community volunteers and part of our staff come from the occupied Gaza strip, we have directly felt the impact of this devastating war, experiencing its toll day by day.

Although creativity and motivation define the atmosphere in the SKILLS FACTORY, fear, shock and anger remained present amongst the community. Many Palestinians were struggling with their own relative safety in Samos the fact that they are here in Samos, while their families in safety while their families face the war alone, without protection. "I just want to go back to my family, even if it means I'll die with them."

We stand in solidarity with our community. As an organization working hand in hand with people on the move, we see it as our responsibility to amplify their voices. Our hearts ache, and we extend our deepest condolences to all former and current community volunteers who have lost their families and friends.

May Palestine's future be built on peace, justice, and unconditional access to freedom and human rights.

GOODBYE AND FAREWELL

TEAM UPDATE

"Alles wird good"

This summer marked the bittersweet farewell to our coordinators Simone and Jasper, who have been part of our team and journey since nearly its beginning.

Thank you for everything! For your dedication, your hard work, your reliability and your commitment to the SKILLS FACTORY. Thank you for standing side by side through ups and downs, fires, emergencies, and floods.

Jasper and Simone, we wish you all the very best in your future personal and professional endeavors. [This](#) is for you.



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PHONES WITHOUT BORDERS

DONATED SMARTPHONES FOR EMERGENCIES

Introducing our latest initiative - Phones Without Borders (PWB).

the idea

We collect used smartphones in Europe, process them on site (including repairs and data deletion), then distribute them directly and easily to those who need them most.

how did it begin?

the phone repair department in the SKILLS FACTORY has become one of our most important and in demand services. For those whose phones are damaged beyond reasonable repair, we have begun to distribute donated smartphones to ensure people can stay connected to family, immigration authorities, and more.

Witnessing an increase in demand and acknowledging that we are the only organization on Europe's borders offering phone repair and replacement services, we recognized a pressing need and big potential to expand the scope of the idea and to provide people in emergencies with donated or repaired phones across whole of Greece and even beyond.

did you know?

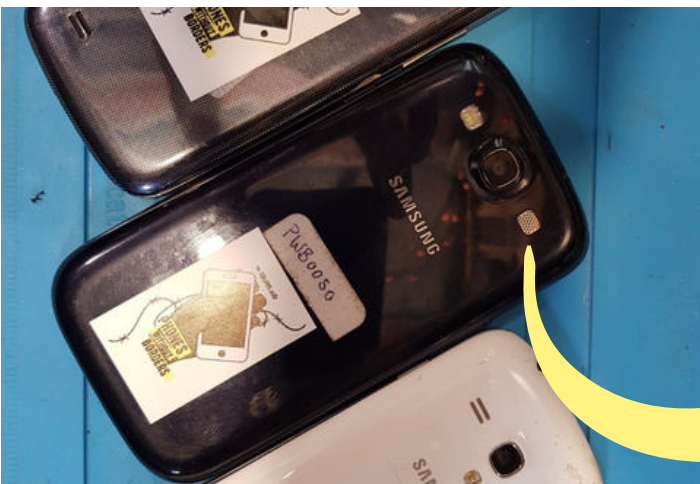
Shockingly, 50% of asylum seekers arrive in Europe without a working phone, often due to shipwrecks, police violence, accidents, or theft. Smartphones are indispensable for asylum procedures, communication with lawyers, NGOs, navigation in unfamiliar territories, and staying connected with loved ones.

To meet this pressing need, we gather used smartphones in Europe, process them in our central workshop (including repairs and data deletion), and directly distribute them to those in dire need.

we need your support!

To establish the project we are urgently looking for donations of used smartphones as well as a remote project coordinator (volunteer position)-

For more information, please visit our [website](#) and the [job description](#).



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SELF.M.AID - SUMMER PARTY

UPDATES FROM THE BOARD



On the 16th of September, the very first Summer party of the selfm.aid took place in Bülach, Switzerland.

United for a fairer and more sustainable world, the festival's highlight featured diverse workshops where attendees could explore, refine, and share their skills. This event exemplifies our ongoing efforts for over 2.5 years, dedicated to improving the circumstances of displaced individuals and offering sustainable humanitarian aid at Europe's external borders.

The workshops allowed guests to showcase their talents, provided insights into the precarious situations faced by asylum seekers, and showcased innovative problem-solving approaches. The Summer Party brought a taste of the workshops held in the SKILLS FACTORY on Samos, to Switzerland, giving our supporters insight into our approach to independently producing humanitarian aid with displaced people, building community, and fostering self-reliance and perspectives.

BOARD EVALUATION

TOGETHER FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Since the start of selfm.aid, our journey has been fast, sometimes overwhelming, yet undeniably incredible. What began as a simple idea has turned into several impactful projects, all thanks to the dedication of our exceptional team of community volunteers, external partners, and supporters. As our initiatives continued to flourish, it became evident that reorganization and restructuring were needed to match our growth and increased workload.

Our entirely volunteer-based board was ready for this challenge: In September, we held a board meeting to evaluate our roles, needs, and communication strategies and to find new opportunities. Our objective was to enhance the effectiveness and supportiveness of our collaboration, particularly in strengthening the ongoing projects on the ground.



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FOOD IS READY!

OUR FIRST COOK BOOK IS AVAILABLE

Join us on this spectacular and surprising culinary journey.

We are excited to announce the launch of our first cookbook, "Food Is Ready!"

Over the years, we have collected recipes from near and far, from somewhere on the path between the home left behind and a new future.

The culinary creations prepared by our team in the SKILLS FACTORY community kitchen on Samos are now accessible to you!

Order your copy now:
admin@selfm-aid.ch



IMPORTANT DATES

STAY UP TO DATE

"Samos Under Pressure" - Support Our Crowdfunding Today!

28.11. - 31.12.2023

For another 33 days we have joined forces in our annual crowdfunding campaign to collect the needed funds for the SKILLS FACTORY. Join us:

[Samos under pressure - support the SKILLS FACTORY now!](#)

Meet the selfm.aid team in person!

16. & 17. December 2023




Catch us at the Christmas markets in Hochfelden, ZH, and Muttenz, BL. We are looking forward meeting you and welcome phone donations at both locations.

"One for One" Exhibition:

The exhibition "[Kunst im Warteraum](#)," initiated by "Anwaltskollektiv Zürich", will continue until the end of the year (visits with appointment).



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