

# PRESS RELEASE — Action for Education, Glocal Roots & Samos Volunteers

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## SAMOS — 'EMERGENCY WINTER SHELTERING' SHOULD NOT BE THE JOB OF GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS

Over the last few weeks, temperatures have dropped drastically on Samos. The impact these freezing temperatures have on people living in and around Samos camp are clear and consistent, yet there has been no adequate action taken by the responsible authorities.

In Samos, approximately 800 of the 3,500+ people seeking asylum are currently accommodated inside the official RIC facility: 2,700 are living on the slopes of the mountain above Vathy. That is 2,700 men, women and children in tents and makeshift shelters, which offer very little protection against the cold. Among these people, more than 500 fall within a 'vulnerable categories' i.e. newborns, pregnant women, people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, elderly people, SGBV survivors, single women, single parents and separated children. However, those who do not fall under the label of 'vulnerable' should not be forgotten - the cold weather affects every single person living in camps on Samos and across Greece.

Despite unanimously recognising that tangible, long-term solutions are needed, grassroots NGOs in Vathy have once again stepped in to cover the immediate needs that would not have been otherwise met during this harsh cold spell ([S1](#)). These initiatives have included:

**SHELTER:** a group of community centres in Vathy town temporarily have been asked by UNHCR representatives and local authorities to host the most vulnerable whilst temperatures were dropping to freezing overnight. From Monday 18th to Wednesday 20th January, around 50 people — pregnant women and single mothers with small children — have been hosted inside the centres of *Samos Volunteers*, *Action for Education* and *Glocal Roots* ([S2](#), [S3](#), [S4](#)).

**HOT FOOD:** The kitchen of *Project Armonia* provided the community centres, every day, with warm dinners and breakfasts ([S5](#), [S6](#)).

**DISTRIBUTIONS:** NFIs distributors — *A Drop in the Ocean*, *Refugee4Refugees* and *Médécins Sans Frontières* — both provided community centres with emergency beds, sleeping bags and blankets, in addition to working around the clock to provide winter essentials for everyone living in the camp ([S7](#), [S8](#), [S9](#), [S10](#)). Together with *Movement on The Ground* they have distributed blankets, jerry cans, hats, snoods and hot water bottles, as well as providing each individual with at least one set of decent, warm, winter clothing.

**SHOWERS:** *Action for Education* is once again offering hot showers to students who register for a weekly slot ([S11](#)). The Samos camp has a mere 46 showers, only 8 of which open to general use, and the rest shared by camp residents in solidarity with each other - in a word: a situation that is wholly inadequate to meet the basic human right to sanitation for over 3,500 people residing therein.

**WARM TEA:** *Samos Volunteers* has started giving out hot tea from its Alpha Centre, offering a small token of warmth and a reason for people to get up and move from their tents on the mountain

These are some of the measures put in place through the coldest days and nights on the island. Now that temperatures have risen above 0°C — though the weather is undoubtedly still cold and extremely wet — all women and children have now made their way back to their 'home' on the slopes of Vathy hill. This is further amplified by the fact that the ESTIA programme housing vulnerable people in apartments has ended on Samos, Kos, Rhodes and Leros, resulting in many losing much needed protection. .

We are pleased to see our collective efforts recognised by an international authority like the UNHCR ([S12](#)). Unfortunately, public expressions of gratitude are not enough. Most of all, we need pressure to be exercised on European decision-makers: it is nonsensical and disrespectful to keep managing these persistent state of affairs as an 'emergency' - this is the fifth winter in which decision-makers have utterly failed to solve these unacceptable conditions once and for all.

It is highly problematic to rely on NGOs to provide basic necessities to the most vulnerable people and for the competent authorities to negate the responsibility of ensuring that human rights are not violated. Every human being has the right to shelter, sanitation and warmth ([S13](#)). Human dignity is among the core values of our European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights ([S14](#))

People seeking asylum in Europe deserve — and moreover, it is their right — to receive far more than what is currently given to them. These men, women and children deserve to receive a treatment that is just, humane and lawful

Every one of us is morally bound to speak out, and to call on the EU and European governments to take responsibility and find a just and long-term solution to the conditions in Samos, which have only worsened year on year.

Signatories: Action for Education • Glocal Roots • Samos Volunteers



**GLOCAL ROOTS**

