

# ECHO 100 PLUS



## HELP TO HELP

Since summer 2015, the Austrian-Greek charity ECHO100PLUS has been providing humanitarian aid to refugees arriving in Greece. Through its International Volunteer Program, ECHO100PLUS has so far engaged almost 900 volunteers from all over the globe to support the overstressed Greek relief system and to show solidarity across borders. As there are still thousands of refugees stuck in precarious conditions in Greece, ECHO100PLUS has extended its services to educational and recreational programmes and currently runs two educational centres, one on the island of Leros and a second one in Athens.

## THE ECHO HUB Leros



In October 2016 **ECHO100PLUS** launched its first ECHO HUB, a

**community centre in the town of Lakki on the island of Leros, to help refugees prepare for the next steps of their journeys and foremost the difficult task of integration. Neither the Greek authorities nor any other NGO offer similar assistance to adult refugees on the island.**

### Situation on Leros

The island of Leros hosts one of the five island “Reception and Identification Centres”, where Asylum seekers are bound to stay as long as their application is pending. While essential needs such as shelter and food are halfway met by the local authorities, there is significant **demand for resources that address the individual’s mental wellbeing.** In addition to deplorable living conditions in overcrowded shelters, refugees are subject to arbitrary and non-transparent bureaucratic processes involving long waiting times, that inevitably lead to **emotional distress, frustration and social unrest.** With the ECHO HUB we strive to provide a space in which adult refugees can benefit from a friendly and dignified environment and from access to education\* such as:

- › Certified Language courses from beginner to advanced levels (Greek, English)
- › French and German Conversation
- › IT and Coding classes in the Computer lab
- › CV-writing skills and personal development
- › Activities (sports, arts & crafts, film-making, theatre, music classes etc.)

\*Most activities are co-educational, but in order to encourage more women to join our programmes, we provide “**women’s only classes**” and dedicate one afternoon per week to “women only activities”.

## The HUB Boutique

In addition to our educational programme, **ECHO100PLUS** runs the so-called HUB Boutique, which is consistently stocked with donated and purchased new clothing. Individuals and families can try on and choose their clothes in a dignified way. The Boutique provides clothes to 120+ people per week.

## Powered by Volunteers

The organisation’s central functions are staffed by the founders of **ECHO100PLUS**, who volunteer full time to accomplish their mission. This not only includes hands-on fieldwork, but also all the necessary back-office work such as volunteer recruitment, logistics, PR, fundraising, accounting and liaising with authorities and other NGOs. Thereby the organisation itself runs **with minimal overhead costs.**

At any given time, the ECHO HUB Leros operates with a team of **fourteen international volunteers**, who act as coordinators, teachers, professional advisers, Storage and Boutique assistants and drivers. Working side by side are usually **six volunteers from the refugee community**, who act as translators or teach classes and run activities of their own.

## Supporting the Local Community

Due to the arrival of thousands of refugees, the 8,000-inhabitants island community, has been under stress for more than five years now. **ECHO100PLUS** supports the island by **including the local community in the HUB’s services and programmes.** Locals are actively involved as teachers, volunteers and students, and they also have access to our clothing Boutique. Further, we source necessary goods and services locally whenever possible. **ECHO100PLUS** currently **employs three local teachers** to guarantee the HUB’s sustainability and facilitate social cohesion.







## THE ECHO HUB Athens



Since the ECHO HUB on Leros has proved itself as a successful model, we had been working hard to launch another educational centre on the mainland. In September 2019, **ECHO100PLUS** opened the ECHO HUB Athens with the main purpose to fast-track people into employability and a self-determined life.

### Why Athens?

Once refugees have been processed by the authorities and are finally granted asylum, they are allocated to yet another camp on the mainland or are accommodated in one of the EU funded programs in the bigger cities. As the asylum-seeker allowance of 90 €/month is expiring after six months, it is crucial to help people, who have decided to make Greece their new home, develop a perspective to a self-sustained life.

With the ECHO HUB Athens, **ECHO100PLUS** tries to bridge a crucial gap in **education and job preparation** whilst also focusing on integrative activities and community building. Most of our HUB Leros students who are relocated to Athens are again joining our programmes and can therefore profit from a seamless continuation of their education, which keeps them on track for **future employment and integration**. New students joining us, are offered variety of classes to develop their skills and have access to vital services offered by **ECHO100PLUS'** partners.

### Our Partnerships

Due to its metropolitan location, the ECHO HUB Athens has access to significant resources and can offer activities taking advantage of the rich cultural heritage of the city and its surroundings. The location has also facilitated **cooperation with other organizations** that supplement our programmes. **ECHO100PLUS'** main partner in Athens is **Human Rights 360**, who are experts in legal and integration services and offer consultancy to ECHO HUB students on five days per week. **ECHO100PLUS** also

collaborates with **The Language Project** for language teacher recruitment, the **Social Hacker's Academy** for IT programmes, **Velos Youth**, the **ECHO Refugee Library**, and others.

Consequently, the ECHO HUB Athens has become a **one-stop facilitator** for education, legal advice, bureaucratic assistance, psycho-social support and community building.

### Our services in detail

- › Certified Language courses from beginner to advanced levels (Greek, English)
- › German and French language, conversation classes, tutoring
- › Basic and advanced computer skills, coding and web-design
- › CV and personal development workshops
- › Extracurricular activities to strengthen body and mind (Arts & Crafts, Photography, Football, Barber workshop, Yoga, Boxing, Cooking etc)

### Employability Services

As **ECHO100PLUS** closely monitors the students' abilities and talents, we can recommend them for specific job positions. Together with our partners and our growing network also in the business sector we seek to **establish relationships with companies** for employment opportunities for our students. In addition, we explore job niches in sectors such as translation and cultural mediation, care giving, tourism etc. and cater special training for employability in these.

### Powered by Volunteers

Also in Athens, many of the services are offered by international volunteers, though the location also attracts many locals, who are getting involved as part-time volunteers. At any given time, the ECHO HUB Athens operates with a team of **six full-time and six part-time volunteers**. In addition, we employ two language teachers to run our English and Greek language programme and to prepare students for language exams.





## Looking back:

To-date, **well over 3,500 refugees** benefited from the courses and services on offer in the two ECHO HUBs. **105 students** in the higher level English classes graduated with the internationally-recognised **ESB (English Speaking Board) qualification**, a further **53** have successfully taken the **ECDL qualification tests** as part of their IT curriculum. Both qualifications open a crucial door in their lives to employability and future integration, a passage, that many of our students have in the meantime successfully mastered. In addition, **nine of our students gained scholarships** to continue their studies at the American Colleges of Greece' 'Camp to Campus' programme.

Aside from the quantitative results of our work we are proud of the **overwhelmingly positive feedback** that we have received from:

- **Refugees**, who describe the HUBs as safe havens and emotional anchor-points in their otherwise disrupted and precarious existence. The opportunity to study, acquire new skills and be part of a community improves their wellbeing and turns monotonous waiting time into a meaningful and instructive experience.
- **Locals**, who experience the ECHO HUBs as a stabilizing factor in an overall tense situation and as a place where an effort is made to bridge the gap between host- and guest communities.
- **Volunteers**, who can interact with refugees as individuals, share experiences, and expand cultural horizons by learning from each other. **ECHO100PLUS'** volunteers return from the field as ambassadors for civil society engagement.
- **Camp Authorities and partner organisations in the field** (UNHCR, IOM, Arsis, KELPNO, LSN, Human Rights 360, The Language Project, Social Hackers' Academy, Velos Youth, Help Refugees, and others), who perceive **ECHO100PLUS** as a reliable and efficient partner in the joint response to the humanitarian crisis.

Since July 2017 **ECHO100PLUS** is registered as a Greek non-for-profit company and since July 2019 **registered with the Greek Ministry of Migration**, which provides us with all legal qualifications to also operate out of all Greek refugee camps.

## Budget

**ECHO100PLUS** operates a stringent budgeting process which is built around two central elements:

- › Donated goods & services: including volunteer-led courses and donated items such as clothing.
- › Paid-for goods & services: including basic operating costs such as rent, fuel for the vans, but also teacher's salaries.

About 70% of all services provided in the ECHO HUBs are performed by volunteers. While we try to maximise the donated and volunteered share of our monthly expenses, our paid-for goods and services, such as salaries for local teachers, play an important role for our relationship with the locals.

## Looking forward:

To sustain the future of the ECHO HUBs and their services and to remain a stabilizing factor in our students lives as long as we are needed, **ongoing financial support is vital**. As **ECHO100PLUS** is 100% privately funded, we depend on your solidarity and donations.

**The ECHO100PLUS team thanks you for your ongoing support!**

**900**

International Volunteers on the ground since 2015

**3,500**

Asylum seekers registered in the ECHO HUBS programmes

**105**

Students graduated with an ESB certificate

**53**

ECDL certificates taken



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