

# The academia program

The Academia is a unique project focused on offering non-formal education to refugees.

*In every person there is a sun. Just let them shine - Socrates*



When Stand by me Lesvos (SBML) started in 2017 we were a group of local educators and business owners here in Lesvos who quickly saw the need for helping refugees in the long term and we built a safe place where using our skills as educators we could teach refugees English and Greek, a way to communicate, connect and improve their lives in a practical way. One and a half years later we have achieved large parts of that initial goal, and now we have a vision for the future:

- Creating a non-formal curriculum that prepares refugees to take the A1 language test
- Coordinate an organized network of language learning organizations doing similar work
- Training volunteers, especially refugees, to become non-formal teachers (a certified skill)

**Some Background:** Working with thousands of refugees over the past two years SBML can clearly say that refugees need a way to prepare for the taking the A1 test in any European language. For example, women refugees arriving from Afghanistan are usually very motivated to learn, but don't have the basic tools of reading and writing, having been prevented from going to school as girls.

This is a challenge, how do you prepare a woman from Afghanistan who has not had access to schooling and is functionally illiterate to take a standardized European A1 language test? SBML has also met so many refugees who had incredible skill sets and we asked ourselves what is the best way to capitalize on this incredible wealth of knowledge already available to us?

**Non-formal – Formal Education:** Non-formal education is an alternative or complement to formal education as part of the process of lifelong education. Non-formal education is an important and effective tool in improving adult and youth literacy and alphabetization all over the world. Non-formal education is often the first step in getting refugees to a baseline literacy level where they are able to begin the formal education of the European Language system. It is also very important to help them communicate with locals and authorities while in Greece. But informal education from its very nature is not standardized and varies very much and as such is not recognized, so a certificate from Lesvos would mean nothing in Athens, or Berlin. This is a real issue that is negatively affecting the learning situation for refugees and is very frustrating for volunteers and teachers.

The Academia Program is working on the solution by giving structure to non-formal education. At SBML we have divided the informal education that prepares refugees to be able to later participate in formal education into 10 units. This is a curriculum, and has measurable outcomes and inputs. This also allows internal consistency so that two classes being taught by two different teachers are learning the same things. Creating a non-formal learning curriculum is a powerful tool because it allows SBML as an organization to share this with other similar organizations – creating a network where we know exactly what refugees are learning. So a person, who completed units 0-5 in Lesvos, could now go to Athens and continue at a partner organization learning units 6-10 and not waste time starting at the bottom again. That person would then go on to start the formal learning much better prepared to succeed.

This organized network of non-formal language learning would integrate other organizations that are currently doing similar work. Being able to recognize that the certificate a refugee receives at one Language School and know exactly what they learned is extremely meaningful and would have strong impact on the language learning process. Right now so many refugees are wasting their time, as what they learn at one place is then not recognized, and then they have to start the process from the beginning, which is very demoralizing. This is also a huge waste of resources and slows down the integration process.

The other part of this vision is creating a serious non-formal education cooperation that is based

on volunteers. Training volunteers to become informal teachers and how to use the informal learning curriculum is a core component of this vision. We want to add value by training refugees into recognized informal education teachers; this would be an incredible added value to language learning and to the refugees who would now have a strong certified skill set. SBML would also like to include retired teachers into our volunteer network, as they have the knowledge and skills to professionalize the volunteer training program and they also have the time to seriously build this cooperative.

Our plan is to fulfill this vision over the next two years. We are building networks with other organizations in Greece and within a Erasmus+ funded program. We are working to train volunteers to be informal teachers.

Every week more than 350 women and children attend our various classes at the Academia. Working with local teachers, refugee volunteers and international volunteers, with the assistance from international organizations, we have set up curricula to fit the unique needs of refugees.

### How can you help?

Visit our centre, volunteer with us or contribute to Stand by me Lesvos's projects, by donating via our website: [www.standbymelesvos.gr](http://www.standbymelesvos.gr)

Spread the word to family and friends.

Stand by me Lesvos is a Greek organization, we are taking a bad situation and with very little funds, working to make a safe, positive space, where we can train and teach refugees, and advise them on how to reintegrate from the margins of camp life, back into mainstream society.

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