Help Refugees
Our impact
August 2015 to December 2017
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Set up by a group of friends, in just two and a half years we’ve grown from a social media campaign into a charity that’s helped over 722,500 people.

This is because we do things differently. We’re a group of everyday people, doing the work that governments and larger NGOs are failing to.

Challenging old and outdated models of charity, our work shows how ordinary people can step up and make a real difference to the lives of those in need.

We’re a pioneering charity leading a new movement in humanitarian aid.
We work with, and for, refugees.
Our story

Help Refugees is a movement of thousands of everyday people, taking action to improve the lives of refugees and displaced people. In a little over two years, we’ve grown from nothing more than a hashtag into one of the largest facilitators of grassroots aid in Europe.

In the summer of 2015, a group of friends started a campaign on social media – #HelpCalais – to try to make a difference to the worsening situation for refugees in the north of France.

We were soon at the forefront of a huge ground-swell of support from the British public. In just a few weeks, we had raised over £100,000 and we were receiving 7,000 physical donations every single day.

Help Refugees was born.

In the two and a half years since, we’ve provided vital humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of refugees across 12 countries.

We manage distribution centres in France and Greece, and provide funding, support, volunteers and coordination to grassroots organisations in the UK, France, Greece, Italy, Serbia, Croatia, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

We continue to challenge governments and larger NGOs to uphold their international commitments and obligations. We’ve taken the UK Home Office to the High Court* over its commitment to unaccompanied minors in Europe, and the French state to court over human rights abuses in Calais.

Our work shows how ordinary people can step up and make a real difference to the lives of those in need.

* Our advocacy work is carried out under our Limited Company number 09842577

“Help Refugees is one of the unsung heroes of the European refugee crisis, a young grassroots collective that has tried to create a more dynamic form of aid in Calais and Greece, where even seasoned aid workers admit their traditional models have failed”

The Guardian
Our approach
We move fast to help where the need is greatest, focusing on where governments and larger NGOs cannot or will not work. Instead of shipping out teams of workers to set up new operations, we support the most effective people already working on the ground. This way we’re able to use groups’ local knowledge and experience to help people as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Emergency aid and support
Across Europe and the Middle East, refugees have been deprived of their most basic human rights: food, shelter, clothing, medical care and sanitation. In response to this humanitarian crisis, small groups are making an extraordinarily effective difference around the world. From cooking and distributing thousands of hot meals every day, to building shelters and even running rescue boats, grassroots organisations are providing vital support on the frontlines of the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. In partnering with these groups, we are able to respond quickly and efficiently to the urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

Long-term solutions
Whether it’s crossing land borders or getting a boat across the Mediterranean, the routes refugees are forced to take can be incredibly dangerous - but settling down in a new country presents a whole new set of challenges. While we continue to respond to emergencies, we also increasingly work to create long-lasting, sustainable change in people’s lives. We create safe spaces for women, provide sexual health clinics and medical units, and support nurseries, schools and youth centres. Our support strengthens and expands education and employment initiatives, gets people out of refugee camps and into proper housing, and helps bring refugee and local communities together.

Campaigning and advocacy
Away from the frontlines, we hold governments to account in the courtroom. In the UK, we’ve initiated litigation regarding the Home Office’s failure to fully implement the Dubs Amendment. The Amendment provides safe and legal routes to the UK for unaccompanied child refugees in Europe. Our litigation resulted in an increased number of places identified for unaccompanied minors, from 350 to 480. We also worked with a range of partner organisations to successfully challenge the French government’s lack of sanitation provision for refugees in Calais. In July 2017, France’s highest administrative court ruled in our favour and stipulated that the local authority must provide access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

We believe in...

Human dignity
We believe in treating everyone with humanity and respect.

Acting quickly
We move fast to help where the need is greatest.

Building community
We always prioritise working with local groups and refugees themselves.

Speaking out
We speak out against injustice. We believe in advocating for long term change.

Empowering people
We aim to enable refugees to take control over their lives with our work.

Staying independent
We will always be an independent organisation, funded by people like you.

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Our impact

722,500 people helped in 12 countries

Delivered through the tireless work of over 25,000 volunteers

94% of which has gone directly helping refugees

10 ambulances provided for Syria’s White Helmets

6,000 people rescued from dangerous seas

1,000,000 meals distributed in Calais in 12 months alone

800 people housed in Greece

16,500 children treated at Hope Hospital in Syria with our support

£10,000,000 raised

Across 80+ projects

Image: Matthew Firpo
In the last two and a half years, we've provided vital humanitarian aid and services to hundreds of thousands of refugees across Europe and the Middle East.
When we arrived in Northern France, we found a fundamental lack of basic services for refugees. Over the last two years and a half years, our volunteers have provided food, clothes, shelter, legal support, medical care and much more, helping keep vulnerable people in Calais warm, safe and healthy.

When the Jungle camp was at its peak, we worked with grassroots groups to distribute food and aid to over 10,000 refugees. Finding no provision for women and children, we helped set up the Women & Children’s Centre, protecting many of the 1,500 extremely vulnerable unaccompanied children in the camp. We created and conducted an internationally respected monthly census to ensure every vulnerable person was accounted and cared for in the area.

Since the demolition of the Jungle camp in October 2016, the situation has changed drastically. While many people were relocated across the country, hundreds have now arrived back in Calais. Facing regular police brutality, these vulnerable people are forced to sleep rough in the woods, without proper shelter, food or sanitation.

As a result, over the last 12 months we have been responding to an emergency. We’ve distributed 135,327 hygiene items when there was no way for people to wash, 236,658 items of clothing when there was no way to keep dry, and 46,148 items of bedding when there was no other way for people to keep warm at night.

When the French government refused to provide toilets and clean water, we took it to court over its violations of human rights in Calais, and won. Now refugees in Calais have some access to showers, potable water and toilets.

1,000,000 meals provided in one year alone

50,000 blankets and sleeping bags provided

1,500 shelters built to keep people warm and safe
Since the demolition of the ‘Jungle’ in October 2016, media coverage of the situation for refugees in northern France has all but disappeared. We haven’t.

In the months following the eviction, unaccompanied minors began returning to Calais, disillusioned with their situation and a lack of information about the Dubs Amendment from the British and French governments.

With our partners Refugee Youth Service, we created a multi-agency Child Protection team in order to supplement the already overwhelmed system in the region.

While two governments have dragged their feet over providing sanctuary to refugee children in Northern France, Refugee Youth Service has offered casework, support, phone credit and social trips to more than 150 unaccompanied minors in Northern France. With many of those children forced to sleep outside, with nothing more than a blanket for warmth, this Child Protection Team is a lifeline.

Across France, we estimate that around 5,000 vulnerable children have benefitted from the desperately-needed services that we’ve supported.

Find out more at www.refugeeyouthservice.net

Case Study: Refugee Youth Service, Child Protection Team

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‘After a long, difficult and dangerous journey from Eritrea, I arrived in Calais.

I found the situation very shocking, worse than I could have imagined.

No shelter, food, sanitation or healthcare. The authorities were neglecting the situation completely.

I knew I had to do what I could to help.

I worked with Help Refugees for more than a year, doing everything from translation and coordination to shelter allocation and distribution.

We didn’t have the resources of a huge NGO, but we were every bit as effective as one.

To this day, I’m incredibly proud of what we achieved’’

Haile, Help Refugees volunteer and Calais ‘Jungle’ resident
The challenge:

In October 2015, XX refugees were arriving in Greece through Turkey and XX were arriving on the Greek islands every day. In the pitch black of night, dinghies were crashing against rocks, boats were overturned and people’s lives were in constant danger. The first thing we decided to do was invest in floodlights on the islands. As hundreds of thousands of refugees arrived, there was a light in the darkness that guided them safely to shore.

Our impact:

People Helped: 268,840

Greece

In October 2015, 10,000 refugees were arriving by boat to the Greek islands every day. In the pitch black of night, dinghies crashed against rocks or capsized, and people’s lives were in constant danger. One of the first things we decided to do was invest in floodlights on the islands. As hundreds of thousands of refugees arrived, there was a light in the darkness that guided them safely to shore.

Over the last two years, more than 6,000 people have lost their lives trying to reach safety in Europe. Without effective search and rescue teams, this number would be significantly higher. We partnered with a team of search and rescue volunteers already acting to save people’s lives off the coast of Lesvos. And in two years, they’ve rescued over 6,000 people.

In Northern Greece, our distribution centre has supplied 11 refugee camps across the region with food, shelter, hygiene and clothes every day. Over a 6-month period between September 2016 – April 2017, we gave 56,690 items of clothing, 21,489 hygiene items and over 100 tonnes of fresh fruit and veg.

While we provide emergency relief for thousands of refugees caught in desperate circumstances, we also aim to have a long-lasting, sustainable impact on the lives of those we reach. 800 people are currently living in our housing projects in Greece, over half of whom are children. These projects go beyond just housing people. This is about rebuilding people’s lives.

Interpreters, lawyers, social scientists, nurses and teachers work at our partner OMNES’ inclusion centre in Greece. Our rights-based approach is transforming the lives of hundreds of people, while supporting the local population, providing jobs and investing in the local economy.

2,000,000 meals provided over two years

6,000 people rescued from dangerous seas

800 people provided with safe, warm accommodation
When rough seas, flimsy boats and the work of unscrupulous smugglers caused thousands of deaths in the short stretch of water between Turkey and Greece, friends Jude and Joby realised they couldn’t look the other way.

Bringing together volunteers from wide range of disciplines, they formed Refugee Rescue, launching their rescue boat 'Mo Chara' (Gaelic for 'My friend') on the Greek island of Lesvos in early 2016.

Search and rescue is often stressful, tiring and dangerous. Their team works 24/7, always on-call. Since starting their work, this dedicated team have helped thousands of people, and saved many lives.

Help Refugees have provided support for Refugee Rescue since 2016, funding both essential boat repairs and covering a whole range of project costs. We’ve also paid for GPS navigation equipment and night vision goggles to enable spotter teams to carry out their work more effectively at night.

Whether it’s responding to floundering boats or helping families off inaccessible areas of coastline where they’ve been dumped by smugglers, we’re incredibly proud to support this team’s life-saving work.

Find out more at www.refugeerescue.co.uk
Syria

Help Refugees are committed to helping Syrian people strengthen and rebuild their communities. We have supported infant feeding programmes and funded safe spaces for children, while providing food, shelter, blankets and more to towns under siege. To overcome the loss of so much critical infrastructure, we’ve funded the supply of emergency medical equipment and even the running costs of a fully functioning children’s hospital that treats thousands of internally displaced children every month. In just over 2 years, we’ve helped over 300,000 people in Syria.

We recently went a step further, where in collaboration with the Independent Doctors’ Association, we funded a new CT scanner in Northern Aleppo. This was the first machine operating in that area since February 2016 and has meant that a population of 350,000 people in the area can now be diagnosed properly within Syria. This means they are no longer forced to travel to Turkey for emergency treatment, which put them at further risk, moving them from their homes and leaving them without a support network.

We have contributed to projects that have rebuilt hospitals and created vital emergency, inpatient and incubator units. Other projects offer treatment for more common conditions, immunisation services, or pre- and post-natal support. They treat more than 2,700 children every day, and offer medical care to around 150,000 people across 35 villages. We partnered with the Syria Civil Defence for the first time in November 2015. Better known as ‘The White Helmets’, their 3,200 members have saved over 95,000 lives since they began responding in 2012. Their core values, like ours, lie in recognising the value of each human being. We funded ambulances used in emergency response, sending more when two of the original vehicles were destroyed in air raids. We have also contributed to their ‘Hero Fund’, providing psychological therapy and rehabilitation for wounded members, and support for bereaved families.

350,000 people now have access to the CT scanner we funded
10 ambulances provided to the White Helmets
2,700 children receive medical treatment every day from our partners
In November 2016, the Independent Doctors Association children’s hospital in Eastern Aleppo was bombed out of existence. Devastated by this loss, and their inability to keep treating thousands of Syrian children, IDA’s doctors called on the global community for support. In response, we contributed to a campaign to build the world’s first crowdfunded hospital. Hope Hospital was born.

The only paediatric hospital in the Aleppo region, Hope Hospital serves a community of over 170,000 people; providing incubators for newborn babies, treatments for pregnant and postnatal women and lifesaving surgical operations to those injured in the conflict. We continued to fully fund the running costs of the hospital for 7 months of 2017, enabling the hospital to treat 26,729 people, over half of whom were children.

“Hope returned to me when I realised that there are people thinking about us and supporting us... It means the world knew what we were doing inside Aleppo: serving children, the civilians. So we began working hard to build the new children’s hospital. For us, it represents renewed hope and a new place where we can work...”

Dr Hatem, Paediatrician and Head of Hope Hospital
UK

Refugees and asylum seekers often lack legal, social and educational support, meaning that children spend months out of school and women who have suffered abuse can find themselves destitute.

In response, we support CARAS, Young Roots and CAYSH, which help unaccompanied children get back on their feet. We also fully fund the Meena Centre for women and children in Birmingham, providing a safe space and one-to-one support for new arrivals to the UK.

Alongside this, we’ve supported the Welcome Cinema, a project which hosts a monthly event where Londoners and refugees come together, share food and watch films.

Italy

We support grassroots partners in Italy with a focus on supporting safe and sustainable employment opportunities.

In Rome, through our partners Baobab Experience, we’ve supported the provision of food, clothes and support to refugees in the city. We’ve also worked with Donne Di Benin City on a project to empower previously trafficked women through entrepreneurship. Through a micro-farming and catering business, this Nigerian-led social enterprise aims to foster economic independence. Through their drop-in centre, they also provide a safe space that gives advice and practical assistance like clothing, healthcare and legal support.

Serbia

Since first providing emergency aid to Serbia in October 2015, Help Refugees has supported grassroots local responders across the country; we’ve helped coordinate volunteers and have had a team working tirelessly on the ground.

In camps around the country, we’ve supported informal education projects and worked with partners to improve sanitation for the residents, cleaning toilets and providing hygiene items.

In Belgrade’s notorious ‘Barracks’ squats, we installed showers and toilets, and supported the provision of medical care.

In Mosul there are 100s of women and girls from the Rwanya community who escaped ISIS captivity. Now they live in refugee camps, with few opportunities to rebuild their lives.

In response, we’ve supported The Sewing Sisters Project, which teaches women to sew and sell the products they create, promoting well-being and financial independence.

With groups Adventist Help and ADRA, we’ve also part funded a hospital that provides emergency medical assistance to over 100,000 people.

Lebanon

Lebanon has received 25% of the Syrian refugee population since 2011.

We’ve supported the running costs of a children’s school, and helped create a Mobile Education Bus for children stuck in isolated refugee camps. These initiatives create educational and vocational opportunities, empowering and supporting the displaced population as they embark on the difficult path to recovery.

Over the last two years, we’ve also supported the majority of local organisation Salam LADC’s core costs, allowing them to grow and develop, while providing aid, education and medical support.
Choose Love

It’s a simple but powerful message and it’s at the heart of everything we do.

At a time when the world faces many challenges, when rhetoric of hate and division has found itself centre stage, we believe sharing this simple message is vital.

We all have a choice. To be motivated by fear and animosity, to build walls and turn our backs on the world. Or to nurture the hopeful, to recognise our common future. To choose love.

The world can feel broken, but everywhere these cracks are letting in light.

We’re under no illusions. We know we face some huge challenges. But if there’s one thing we’ve learned as charity, and as a community, it’s that we can all play a part in creating the world we want to see - and choosing love seems like a pretty good place to start.

Our iconic Choose Love tees

In Autumn 2015, designer Katharine Hamnett created the ‘Choose Love’ t-shirt in aid of our work.

The tees have since become a global phenomenon, with influencers from around the world using their platform to promote the message.

The profits from each t-shirt sold go straight to our work on the ground. We have now partnered with ASOS, who are offering a range of Choose Love products and selling thousands of items a week.
Case study: Our pioneering Choose Love shop

We created the world’s first store where you can buy real gifts for refugees.

On Black Friday 2017, we opened Choose Love in the heart of London’s Soho, to offer an alternative to the traditional shopping experience. Shoppers could browse items, from emergency blankets to school bags and children’s shoes, and buy anything they wanted. But instead of taking these home, all purchases were distributed to refugees around the world.

Our Choose Love message was shared far and wide, with a media reach of over 200 million. The result: over 12,000 people bought products from our shop, raising over £850,000. This has already funded over 5000 blankets, 3000 pairs of boots and 6000 warm coats.

Purchase real items for refugees at www.choose.love
Our volunteers

Dedicated volunteers are at the heart of our work. In less than two years we’ve inspired and mobilised more than 25,000 people from all around the world. It’s their energy, enthusiasm and passion that’s enabled everything we do.

Johanna, Norway
Spotted refugee boats off the coast of Lesvos

“[I]n the last two years, I’ve been inspired and mobilised by the work of our volunteers. It’s their energy, enthusiasm and passion that’s enabled everything we do. Without them, we couldn’t have achieved what we have.”

Aslam, Syria
Organised the delivery of hundreds of tonnes of food and coordinated grassroots groups across Greece

“[I]n the last two years, I’ve been inspired and mobilised by the work of our volunteers. It’s their energy, enthusiasm and passion that’s enabled everything we do. Without them, we couldn’t have achieved what we have.”

Ali, Iran
Volunteered as a translator and delivered food and clothes to people sleeping rough

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Renke, The Netherlands
Provided desperately-needed aid and campaigned for change

“[I]n the last two years, I’ve been inspired and mobilised by the work of our volunteers. It’s their energy, enthusiasm and passion that’s enabled everything we do. Without them, we couldn’t have achieved what we have.”

Tuyet, Czech Republic
Sorted clothes, taught lessons and organised activities in camps

“[I]n the last two years, I’ve been inspired and mobilised by the work of our volunteers. It’s their energy, enthusiasm and passion that’s enabled everything we do. Without them, we couldn’t have achieved what we have.”

Waseem, Syria
Helped provide fresh fruit and veg to thousands of people

“[I]n the last two years, I’ve been inspired and mobilised by the work of our volunteers. It’s their energy, enthusiasm and passion that’s enabled everything we do. Without them, we couldn’t have achieved what we have.”
Our partners

Our partners make everything we do possible. Their energy, expertise and innovative approaches inspire us every day.

Croatia
- Are You Syrious?

France
- Calais Kitchens
- Dunkirk Women’s Centre
- Help Refugees Warehouse
- L’Auberge des Migrants
- Paris Outreach Team
- Refugee Community Kitchen
- Refugee Info Bus
- Refugee Youth Service
- School Bus Project
- Utopia 56

Greece
- Attika Human Support
- Be Aware and Share
- Dentists 4 All
- Drop in the Ocean
- Filoxenia
- Free Movement Skateboarding
- FoodKIND

GSST
- House of Humanity
- IndiGo
- InterVoice
- Jaffa
- Khora
- Lesbos Solidarity
- LightHouse Relief
- Melissa Network
- Micropoli
- Mobile Info Team
- Notre Dame Project International
- One Happy Family
- Refugees Info Bus
- Refugees Rescuer
- Refugee Support
- Refugee Trauma Initiative
- Solidarity Now
- Soul Food Kitchen

Syria
- Ghiras al Nada
- Hand in Hand for Syria
- Independent Doctors Association
- Karam Foundation
- Lebanon Volunteers

Italy
- People’s Convoy / Can Do Space of Hope
- SAMS
- Syria Civil Defence / The White Helmets
- Women Now

Lebanon
- SAMS
- Donam di Benin City
- SB Overseas
- Women Now

UK
- CARAS
- CAYSH
- Memes
- Safe Passage
- Welcome Cinema
- Young Roots

Refugee Foundation Serbia

Image credit: Alice Andy
Understanding our impact

Wherever we act, we focus on three key outputs: to secure permanent change, to encourage a public response in volunteering or donations, and to manage the distribution of people, funds and items to the places where they’re needed most.

The need >> Our actions >> Our outputs >> Our outcomes

We conduct in-depth needs assessments

- research
- talk
- read
- learn

We then act via...

- communications
- campaigns
- grant giving
- helping people to help
- advocating for change
- supporting groups
- filling gaps
- providing goods
- refugees are helped
- humanity
- dignity
- hope
- respect

Transparency and accountability

Transparency

In building a new movement in humanitarian aid, grassroots organisations are in a unique position to answer the public’s concerns over the charity sector. Help Refugees is committed to pioneering radical transparency - both for donors and for beneficiaries. In our full financial accounts, we made the decision to go beyond what is expected of organisations, detailing exactly where we spent funds, and what we spent them on.

Accountability

From day one, our operations have been built on beneficiary feedback. From our ‘self-build’ programme in the Calais Jungle, to giving out food packs for beneficiaries to cook for themselves, to ‘free shops’ instead of mass distribution of aid, we try to model everything we have done through communication with beneficiaries. We are as accountable to beneficiaries as we are to our donors. Given the nature of emergency aid in the face of the refugee crisis, we were not able to record beneficiary feedback as much as we would have liked to in our first two years as an organisation. Nonetheless, as long-term support continues to play a greater role in our response to the needs of refugees, we are committed to giving a greater emphasis to beneficiary feedback.

Whistleblowing

As an organisation helping vulnerable people on the frontlines of the refugee crisis, we know the importance of clear, robust whistleblowing and safeguarding policies. That’s why we’ve put together a ‘policy pack’ for all of our partners, which they can customise to fit their needs. We know what it’s like for grassroots organisations to respond to emergencies while having to write policies - so we gave a helping hand to those who needed it.

Image credit: Alice Aedy
Financial summary

Total income and expenditure - 2nd Oct 2015 - 31st Dec 2017

Total income £975,548,1.52
Total expenditure £896,548,3.91

Sources of UK funding
- Crowdfunding: £3,538,892
- Individuals: £1,089,154
- Trusts / Foundations: £1,013,662
- Corporates: £1,098,977

Sources of US funding
- Crowdfunding: £2,424,830
- Individuals: £57,151
- Trusts / Foundations: £487,589
- Corporates: £45,059

Expenditure by type
- Project costs: 94%
- Core costs: 6%

Expenditure by country
- Greece: 56%
- UK: 14%
- France: 19%
- Syria: 14%
- Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia: 0.6%
- Italy: 0.7%
- Lebanon: 2%
- Turkey: 0.6%
- Iraq: 0.5%
- Greece: 56%
- Lebanon: 2%
Project expenditure by sector

- Shelter: 16.5%
- Protection: 7%
- Food: 13.5%
- Health & wellbeing: 9.7%
- Non Food Items: 29.5%
- Search & Rescue: 3.2%
- Communicating with Communities: 2%
- Advocacy: 4%
- Education: 5.2%
- General: 1.6%
- WASH: 1.5%
- Help refugees operations: 5.7%
- Awareness: 0.6%
Join the movement

Play your part to help those affected by the refugee crisis. Share our posts, volunteer your time, offer funding, or simply Choose Love. There’s lots of ways to get involved and show your solidarity with people who have been forced to leave their homes.

1. **Donate**
   Whether it’s goods or a financial contributions, you can be sure that anything you give us will go directly to where it is needed most.

2. **Fundraise**
   We need community fundraisers! We rely on a network of passionate, creative volunteers to set up events and raise money to help refugees.

3. **Volunteer**
   We are always in need of skilled volunteers. Whether you can give two days, two weeks or two months, we need your help!

4. **Campaign**
   Follow us on social media, download our letter templates and lobby your local MP. Lend your voice to ours and together we can uphold hope, humanity, dignity and respect.
Help Refugees is a restricted fund under the auspices of Prism the Gift Fund: charity number 1099682. Our advocacy work is carried out under Limited Company number 09842577.

Image credit: Matthew Firpo