

# The Refugee Crisis in Greece's Samos Island: Open Doors Now Open!

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

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*On Thursday 22 November 2018 Open Doors opened its doors! It is proving to be all that we hoped for. It is not simply that the grocery store has almost sold out after just a few days but it has been the enthusiasm and happiness of the people coming to the shop which has brought us the greatest pleasure.*

The fact that we supply quality foods at the cheapest price is clearly crucial. Refugees, local Greeks and the few tourists still around all remark on our (low) prices. It hardly needs to be said that for those with little money this is very important.

But it is not just a matter of prices. We stock food from across the Middle East and beyond which is not available on Samos. It is simply wonderful to see so many of our customers delighting in the availability of foods which they have not seen since they left their homes. Whole families come into share this experience and take photographs of themselves by the shelves with their favourite foodstuffs.

Image on the right: Mohamed (left) from Gaza with Sofiane. Our first customer!



We spent some time considering what we should stock but we knew that we would need help from the users of the shop. We now have a long list of things we need to order! One small but important consequence has been the presence of older refugee women who are rarely seen in the town centre but who clearly feel comfortable and safe in the shop and who relish the opportunity of being listened to as they tell us of the items we must try to

stock.

As many customers have told us the shop is a small oasis of normality and unlike any other store on the island. They talk of the atmosphere of the shop; its welcome not the least for their children who are never hassled.

And of course the shop is beautiful; light and cheerful; paintings and photographs on the walls, plants and flowers. It speaks to dignity, to respect, to humanity, all issues which are almost absent in the Camp.

These are very early days. None of us have done anything like this before. We are facing some issues which are completely new to us like how do we cope with the winter storms that affect the ferries from Athens which carry our supplies? Will our pricing structure meet our overheads? Can we navigate all the bureaucracy of the Greek system which crushes so many small businesses? The months preparing for the opening have been well spent and we feel strong.



Finally, the shop needs to be seen in the context of Samos where the numbers in the camp have swelled to around 4,000. Where hundreds of refugees have been compelled to buy their flimsy tents and find a place in the olive trees around the camp. In the last 10 days the autumn rains have arrived. Already a shit hole of squalor the camp has considerably worsened as the rains and colder weather take effect. Nothing has been done yet again to prepare the Camp for the winter. Nothing has been done about the ongoing water and sanitation problems. Nothing has been done to control the rats and vermin. Nothing has been done about improving the quality of the food. Against this horror Open Doors is like a flicker of light - a candle in the wind- which we will nourish with all our effort.

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