



Executive Summary

We Need Books is an Athens based NGO that believes that multicultural spaces and books serve several important functions that can be of great benefit to all layers of the population of the city, including marginalized and vulnerable populations such as the approximate 55,000 refugees living in Greece. Since the beginning of 2017, the organization has collected over 12,000 books, created small libraries, participated in conferences, started fundraising and established We Need Books as an official NGO.

Our goal for 2018 is to create the first multilingual library of Athens, where locals, refugees and migrants can come together, share their similarities and differences, learn about each other and create an inclusive community through their common love for books.

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1 Mission

Build an inclusive community, spark imagination and empower refugees and migrants to choose their paths in life by providing access to knowledge in a space that feels like home.

2 Inspiration

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” - Maimonides

“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.” - Mahatma Gandhi

At the age of twelve Nadir Noori fled Afghanistan to escape Taliban recruitment. He was not literate nor did he speak the languages of the countries he was fleeing to. Four years into his escape he landed in Greece. Unlike the boy he was when he fled his homeland, Nadir learned to read, write and to speak five languages. He had access to books for the first time in his life, and because of this his whole life (and the lives of many around him) changed course. He learned not only languages but that there was a world much larger full of many other ideas and ideals than he had previously been exposed to. Today Nadir is a high school graduate and works as a translator in Greece providing a critical service as the refugee crisis unfolds. He is also an avid photographer and human rights activist.

Ioanna Nissiriou was born and raised in Athens, and had a successful career working as a producer for MTV and Nickelodeon channels. Yet, when Ioanna saw the refugee crisis unfolding, she knew she could not sit on the sidelines and watch, she had to take action. She was compelled to do something as the crisis touched a part of Ioanna's own family experience. Her Grandmother Amphitriti was a refugee from Turkey in 1917. Amphitriti's family was forced to leave Turkey with less than a day's notice and could take only what they could carry. When they arrived in Greece they were put into a refugee camp where her parent's quickly perished. Amphitriti was four years old and an orphan with no food and no one to take care of her in a new country. She had to scratch the walls to scrape off the plaster to eat it to fill her belly and survive. Eventually a local family took her in and provided for her, sending her to school and opening her life to possibilities she would not have had otherwise. Caring for others and education are central values Ioanna's family believes in.

In response to the current crisis, Ioanna quit her job and the safety it provided her, so she could spend all her time on the current refugee and migrant cause. She made the decision to open up her home to a refugee to help. The refugee she sheltered was a shy, hardworking, artistic young man named Nadir. This meeting would change both of their lives and the lives of many around

them. Instead of there being a faceless refugee crisis, suddenly there was a name and face for the real people that she and others feel compelled to help.

Together Nadir and Ioanna have formed We Need Books.

The refugee and migrant crisis in Greece has now been ongoing for several years. While many hard working officials, NGO staff and citizenry are working on ways to help refugees and migrants survive this crisis, there are few efforts focusing beyond survival, towards helping refugees and migrants thrive in Greece. We Need Books is focused on the future and towards building an inclusive, stronger Greek community.

By building a multicultural space, providing access to knowledge, and kindling social cohesion, we want to give migrants access to information, people, community, to jumpstart their new life in Greece and the EU. We want to inspire them to dream bigger. We like to imagine a little girl from Afghanistan who doesn't even know how to hold a pencil or spell her name and we want to give her the opportunity to be an author. It is not just because we want to give this little girl a chance but because the world will be a better place with her book in it.

3 Who we are (people, bios)

Ioanna Nissiriou is the founder of We Need Books. She recognizes that cultural and linguistic diversity is the common heritage of humanity and is everyone's duty to protect and maintain it. Ioanna was born and raised in Athens, in 1996 she moved to UK for studies in Film at Staffordshire, Warwick and Canterbury Christ Church universities. Ioanna worked in London in the film production industry until 2004. Upon her return to Greece, she worked in film production in Le Spot and from 2010 until 2016, she worked as a producer and eventually head of production in MTV and Nickelodeon channels. Ioanna is highly organized, driven, resourceful, conscientious, tireless and dedicated.

It has been longer than a decade that Ioanna has been involved with volunteerism and social projects. In 2010, she co-founded the NGO, [A Seed for Change](#), the main goal was the preservation of heirloom seeds and biodiversity. When the refugee crisis erupted in 2015, she applied herself to finding practical solutions to help improve the living conditions of refugees in Greece. In 2016, she and her co-founder started the We Need Books as a private initiative, and in 2017 We Need Books was officially registered as an NGO.

Nadir Noori is the co-founder of We Need Books. His multifaceted experience with the refugee crisis, his language skills, his hard work and endless optimism was part of the conception of We Need Books.

In 1996, at the age of twelve, Nadir left his native country, Afghanistan, as an unaccompanied minor. In 2003, he managed to reach Greece, where he applied for asylum. In 2016, he gained

his high school diploma by the “Agion Anargyron” Second Chance School. He has attended numerous trainings in regards with Politics, Economics, International Relations and Mental Health. Nadir is fluent in Greek, Farsi, Dari, Hazaragi (Dari dialect) and English. Since 2010, he has been working as a translator, intercultural mediator and community worker mainly for UNHCR and various NGOs, accumulating significant experience and offering invaluable support to refugees. Nadir, because of his qualifications and background, played an important role in the management of the refugee crisis during the period 2015 - 2017.

Nadir understands firsthand the value of education, easy access to educational material, and the importance of refugees and migrants learning Greek and English. Currently, he is fully committed to the cause of We Need Books.

4 How we've started

We have launched several initiatives across Greece partnering with different organizations:

- **Schisto Library:** Based in the Schisto Refugee Camp, that hosts 1.000 Afghan refugees in containers, we turned one of the containers in a library itself. It contains over 300 Farsi books and 400 books in Greek and English, including children's and teen's books and textbooks, encyclopedias, language learning and Greek culture books. It's currently run by local volunteers, and training refugees so they eventually can take over running it completely. This library was built thanks to a crowdfunding campaign and book donations from Greek publishers and individuals.

- **CRS Library:** Based in a Catholic Relief Services shelter in Athens, hosting approximately 20 single families and over 50 neighboring families in nearby CRS shelters, we created a library that contains 320 books in Farsi, Pashto and Arabic and over 450 books in Greek and English. The library is designed to cater for everyone, regardless of their level of education, interests or tastes. We provide children's, classic literature, teen literature, history, cooking, art, literacy, educational, comic books, science fiction, dictionaries, and encyclopedias.

- **Antigone Project:** We collaborated with [Antigone](#), an organization focused on female refugees issues in Northern Greece. We provided over 20 books in Farsi and Arabic on women's health, literacy, etc.

- **Project Elea:** We also collaborated with [Project Elea](#), an organization focused on improving the life of and creating prospects for the refugees living in the Eleonas camp. We have donated 15 books in Urdu to support their lovely library.

- **Thessaloniki Municipal Libray:** We have donated 50 books in Farsi and Arabic, for children and teenagers to make sure that their new multilingual section does not exclude the farsi and arabic speaking refugees and migrants living in the area.

- **Conferences / Seminars / Workshops:**

- Library Services to Refugees & Immigrants, Goethe Institute in Athens

- Effect.org Expedition: “Hack” the Refugee Crisis
- Amsterdam-Athens Capacity Building Programme for Initiatives Supporting Refugees & Study Trip to Amsterdam
- “Innovative Practices - Dignity, Solidarity and Humanity with Persons in Exile” by AMEL/SSI
- “Unraveling Integration”: Workshop by Symbiosis, Norwegian Embassy and The Council of Europe
- Urban Innovative Actions Applicant Seminar in Thessaloniki
- Athens Citizens’ debate: “Without Panel: Discussion about Europe” with the participation of the European Committee of the Regions
- TechCamp Athens: Digital tools for civic society in Greece and the Balkans, by HIGGS and the US Embassy
- “Libraries and Society, the role of Marketing” workshop
- “Fundamental Human Rights and their application” conference

5 Vision

“People may go to the library looking mainly for information, but they find each other there.” - Robert Putnam

Cultural and linguistic diversity is the common heritage of humanity and we have a duty to serve and maintain it for the benefit of all. It is a source of exchange, innovation, creativity, and peaceful coexistence among peoples. We Need Books aims to build an inclusive and stronger Greek community, spark imagination and empower immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to choose their paths in life by providing cultural multipurpose facilities, giving access to knowledge and strengthening social cohesion.

We strongly believe that multicultural spaces and books serve several important functions that can be of great benefit to a marginalized and vulnerable populations such as the refugees and migrants living in Athens. To name a few benefits, reading helps better familiarizing the refugees and migrants with the western way of life and thinking, and creates common cultural reference points and touchstones. Books cultivate empathy and compassion, they give hope that hardships can be overcome, they inspire, they broaden readers’ perspectives. Moreover, educational books such as textbooks offer a chance to the children that were going to school to pick up where they left off and carry on studying the subjects that interest them until they can properly attend school in Greece or in whichever country they are accepted in the future. And of course, educational books are absolutely pivotal in one’s effort to learn languages, fluency being the most useful and urgent tool for social integration. Thusly, We Need Books is committed to creating multipurpose spaces to house books and welcome everyone, regardless of the language that they speak.

Libraries are more than just reading spaces¹. We believe these libraries can help revitalize struggling or depressed neighborhoods and downtowns. Libraries are places where people come to know themselves and their communities. Libraries serve as catalysts for addressing social problems. Libraries provide immigrants with helpful information about and opportunities to connect within their new communities. Libraries provide opportunities to host and offer free classes, free tutoring, homework help programs, and summer reading programs for kids and teens, to bridge the economic divide that impacts students' academic performance. Libraries are important partners in child development.

There are approximately about 55,000 refugees in Greece². On top of that, there is also the second generations being born that also need to be considered. We Need Books aims to encourage refugees to get involved in our initiatives either through volunteering and/or with compensation. This work will help them gain skills and experience as to increase their employability in the future and assist in their integration into the community.

Short term vision

We Need Books has been growing fast. We collected over 12,000 books, we created libraries, we participated in conferences, we started fundraising and established We Need Books as an official NGO. The next step in our plan is creating a multicultural space in Athens. We have yet to more officially name this space as we want to offer up naming rights as part of a sponsorship fundraising source.

Our physical space will be centrally located and visible, in one of the old buildings of Athens. It will comprise of a multilingual library housing books not only in Greek, English, Farsi and Arabic but in all the languages spoken by the citizens. In these languages we will feature books for children and adults. We will offer literature, educational texts and have a special focus on diversity of cultures and civilizations. We will introduce programs to encourage reading to children.

Our vision is to create a physical library that looks more like a home, with mixed and matched bookcases and bookshelves, tables and chairs, armchairs, carpets, with cosy corners for reading and different types of lighting. We want the space to create a sense of safety and familiarity and to encourage the discovery of books.

Gradually, we also plan to offer access to computers, a daycare center / space for occupying children creatively, a space for screenings of films from all over the world, a space for workshops, lessons, seminars and events like book fairs, weddings, traditional multicultural celebrations. We aim to have a cafe that will offer international drinks and snacks where people can mingle but which will also help sustain the whole venture financially, and a shop to feature goods made by the refugees themselves.

The outcome of this vision is to help improve refugees' language skills which in turn releases other numerous benefits (better communication with aid workers and locals, better job prospects, integration, easier access to education, self confidence etc.) We will be offering a safe destination for refugees to go to in the city, where they can spend time on their own or with

¹ <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/04/community-centered-23-reasons-why-your-library-is-the-most-important-place-in-town/>

² Approximation, there is no official public census data available and the numbers keep changing.

their children and interact with others by providing a “bridge” that connects refugees and migrants to their ancestral culture via literature, history, poetry, art, folk songs, fables etc but which will also connect them to the local population. We will invite outside speakers into the space for further opportunity to interact with the community. And we want to the library, the café and the events we host to be attractive to the locals as well, so that they will slowly start to interact with the new members of our society and start seeing the similarities we share.