

**APPENDIX 1: University Collaborations with Northern Lights Aid – Student Testimonies - January 2022 /
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Abbe Cleverdon, University of Leeds, UK:

“I got in contact with the work placement department within my department at uni and set up a meeting with the careers and work placement officer. I told her of my experience so far - that I had wanted to find a placement within the third sector (charity) but was struggling to find anywhere that would pay at all, let alone enough to live on. A friend of mine had volunteered with NLA and suggested them as a potential avenue for charity work as a placement year. Presenting this to the placement officer at my university, she approved of the idea and informed me that as the placement would be in Greece, I would be eligible for the Erasmus+ grant. At this time (2019), the UK was still part of the EU, which was a requirement for the grant. The amount I received was dependent on the amount of hours I worked and the length of time I was out there - I had to fill in forms and a contract was drawn up with the relevant dates and information of the role I would fill, which was then sent to the Erasmus officer at university. Pending approval, I received the grant.

The uni were originally a bit apprehensive as the blanket summary of working with vulnerable communities raises questions of safeguarding and wellbeing. However, upon a risk assessment and a conversation with the field coordinator, the placement was approved. It was explained that NLA is situated outside the camp and caters to a relatively stable community of refugees and asylum seekers. Additionally, the organisation encourages regular breaks for long term volunteers and provides an excellent support system, therefore the potential risks were mitigated.

The benefits for the university include a connection to the charity, a unique avenue for a placement year for those students who might not want a corporate experience and returning students who are compassionate, hard working and have their priorities straight. I was also very grateful to the university for approving the placement, as I know on the surface the prospect was unusual.”

Pauline Fritz, Sciences Po Paris, France: «University Cooperation: Sciences Po Paris and Northern Lights Aid.

I came to Northern Lights Aid as an undergraduate student at Sciences Po Paris in the Summer of 2018. Although I had been volunteering in the informal refugee camps in Calais even before starting Uni, I was strongly supported by my university to continue this social engagement. Indeed, in order to graduate from Sciences Po all undergraduate students are required to go through a so-called “Civic Learning Program”. It involves collecting empirical data and experiences while working with communities who face discrimination or social precarity and reflecting on these together with a theoretical citizenship issue in the final bachelor thesis. While in Calais I had heard about different organisations working in Greece and had considered coming out, but it was probably this University Program that motivated me to apply and finally come to NLA. The 6 weeks I spent in Kavala that summer were short, but extremely forming. In retrospect, I often think about all the mistakes I made and stories I didn’t understand because I was so ignorant of the asylum system and the restrictive protection scheme in Europe. After that summer I continued working with asylum seekers in France and ended up writing my bachelor thesis on the criminalization of Civil Society Organizations and the implications for the concept of “European Citizenship”.

I know that many other Sciences Po students came out to join NLA as part of this program and in their own time. Many of them now raise awareness about the situation of refugees on the European External Border. Just recently a conference about the situation in Northern Greece has been organized and is scheduled to take place on the 7th of February.»

Stephanie Alex, American University of Paris:

“My initial engagement at Northern Lights Aid was through my university Careers Department. Communications majors had the option to either do a thesis or find an approved volunteer/internship placement. I had volunteered with another organization that worked with refugees at my university, so I was keen to volunteer again. I was looking for a medium to long-term volunteer experience, to work closely with refugees, and to be able to provide a valuable contribution to the organization. Also, I wanted to volunteer at a relatively small organization because I wanted to be able to provide valuable input and learn from their current practices. When the option was presented to volunteer at NLA, the organization ticked all my boxes. Everyone on the team was very accommodating to the research assignment required by my university that I had to submit at the end of the volunteer experience. I was able not just to volunteer but to work closely with incredible people who shared similar values and interests.

Based on my positive experience at NLA, I decided to do a Masters in International Development. Today, I currently work for a humanitarian charity that also helps refugees around the world.”

Manon Louis-Puttick, University of Glasgow, Scotland:

“I first joined NLA in 2019, in my final year of studying at the University of Glasgow. I found the organisation through Indigo Volunteers, as my priority was to find a project which aligned with my interests and knowledge of the context. I was also investigating the possibility of carrying out research for my undergraduate dissertation project, however I knew that there would be many ethical challenges to consider. My university ethics committee explained that, understandably, I could not carry out any research that directly involved any vulnerable groups of people. However, my research was focused on critically exploring the western concept of ‘voluntourism’, particularly in organisations that worked with people on the move. Consequently, I focused the research on my own experience of volunteering with NLA, as well as on other volunteers’ experiences who were working with NLA through the same time period as me. NLA and the team were very accommodating to my request of research, however made it clear that it should not interfere with my primary role as a volunteer, and in accordance with the university, requested that it not involve any vulnerable groups. This experience taught me a lot about being cautious with research in these environments, and I learnt extensively from NLA about both the values and harms of volunteering.

NLA provides services based on dignity and compassion, but also an environment to learn, to think critically about identity relations and various forms of activism. The conclusions of my research were based on the numerous ways that volunteers returned home and spread awareness to break down negative stereotypes so often dominant in western news. Many got involved in groups at home or university, and some entirely changed their career paths following their experience with NLA. Once I returned home, I became more involved with Student Action for Refugees, standing on the committee for two years as well as advocating for Equal Access campaigns at the university.”

APPENDIX 2: Statement from PhD-student Henrik Kjellmo Larsen. March 2022:

“Working with refugees in Greece was a transformative experience for me. My intention was to stay in Greece for only four days, but this became four months. At the point, I had just recently finished a bachelor’s degree in business and management from Durham University, and I was having a hard time finding ways to use my skills in a constructive manner. Working hands on with refugees in Greece gave me a reality check.

What occurred to me was that how I choose to spend my time, directly impacts other people. It sounds obvious, but for me there is a definite *before* and *after* working with refugees in the field. After having been a field coordinator for the Norwegian NGO ‘Dråpen i Havet’ (A drop in the ocean) from September - January 2015/2016, I was part of the team that founded Northern Lights Aid in January 2016.

The fieldwork had affected me in more ways than I knew, and returning from the field. I spent some time recovering before starting to conduct research on volunteering and humanitarian work. This led me to pursue a master’s degree in International Development Practice at Monash University and has so far resulted in two scientific publications and five academic blog posts published at LSE and Oxford amongst others (see publication list below). My research has allowed me to take active part in the public debate on refugees and migration related issues and I regularly publish opinion pieces in Norwegian newspapers.

The experiences I gained from work as a spontaneous volunteer, and not least alongside other spontaneous volunteers during a humanitarian crisis motivated me to pursue a PhD at Monash University where I am investigating how volunteering in a humanitarian crisis affected the lives of the volunteers afterwards. I am also interested in how the professionalization of humanitarian aid affects organisations' views on volunteers.

I am telling this story to show how valuable this field in Greece was to me. It completely changed my priorities in life, both privately and professionally.

Volunteering in Kavala with Northern Lights Aid will be a lot more structured and organized than what I did. Nevertheless, I believe that this kind of field work will have the potential to provide the student with experiences that could inspire thoughts and ideas that could influence their academic and personal life. Through the fieldwork the student will have the potential to affect more people than just themselves, and this can inspire related research in a variety of fields.

I am based in Oslo and can if needed contribute as a supervisor in Norway or a party in a three-part contract.”

List of publications:

- Larsen, H.K. and Gordon, E. (2021) 'Criminalising the right to seek asylum'. Oxford, Border Criminologies.
- Gordon, E. and Larsen, H.K. (2021) 'The violent inaction of the state and the camp as site of struggle: The perspectives of humanitarian actors in Moria Camp, Lesbos.' *European Journal of International Security*.
- Gordon, E. and Larsen, H.K. (2020) 'Sea of Blood': The Intended and Unintended Effects of the Criminalisation of Humanitarian Volunteers Rescuing Migrants in Distress at Sea', *Disasters*.
- Larsen, H.K. and Gordon, E. Out of Site, Out of Mind? The Warwick Interdisciplinary Research Centre for International Development.
- Larsen, H.K. and Gordon, E. No More Morias': How the World's Worst Refugee Camp Was Destined to Fail. *E-International Relations*.
- Gordon, E. and Larsen, H.K. Criminalising search and rescue activities can only lead to more deaths in the Mediterranean. London School of Economics and Political Science.

APPENDIX 3: Additional Information on Northern Lights Aid - November 2022:

NLA was established as an official NGO in January 2016. On the website [Northern Lights Aid](#) you can read the background to the Norwegian founders' initiative for this grassroots organization, the annual reports from 2017 onwards - and more specifically about all ongoing projects – the text below is taken from the site "Who We Are":

About Us

«Northern Lights Aid (NLA) is a Greek and Norwegian-based NGO operating in Kavala, Greece. Its focus is to improve the quality of life of refugees currently residing in the country.

NLA works in support of approximately 450 people living in enforced exile in the Kavala Perigiali Camp. The majority of residents hail from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq with at least five other countries represented. Almost half of the camp population is under 18 years old. NLA also offers its services to several low-income families living in the wider Greek community.

The situation for refugees in Greece is characterized by a lack of stability and an uncertain future. NLA works hard to offer stable and consistent support through our projects, which focus on education, integration, and material needs. Located in rented premises, a walking distance from the camp, they include a Mother and Baby Program which provides essential hygiene items and a women-only space, a regular schedule of English Classes, and the distribution of non-food items such as clothing and footwear. We also promote skill-sharing in our Community Garden and Workshop and provide children's activities, fitness classes, and integration projects. The team is made up of both international volunteers and volunteers who reside in the camp. The organisation operates in close collaboration with local people, the authorities, and international NGOs to build sustainable projects for those it serves.

(...)

Our History

In September 2015, the founders of Northern Lights Aid traveled to the island of Lesbos, Greece in response to the emerging humanitarian crisis. Quickly realizing the desperate need for support on the island, the founders decided to make Lesbos their base of operation.

In January 2016, Northern Lights Aid was established as an official NGO. The organization was initially created to provide emergency aid to first arrivals on the island. The team provided clothing, food, water, shelter, and alerted medical groups, as well as the Hellenic Coast Guard, in the event of emergencies on land or at sea.

After several months working on Lesbos, with a changing political climate in Europe and the presence of more organisations on the island, it was decided that NLA was needed elsewhere. In March 2016 the northern border of Greece became the new base for NLA. During this time, it supported Hara camp, near Idomeni and focussed on providing food and material support as well as providing shelter and activities for children.

When residents from unofficial refugee camps in Greece began to be transferred to government-run facilities in the summer of 2016, NLA was granted official approval by the Ministry of Migration Policy to operate within the Kavala Perigiali camp. In 2017 our operations moved outside the camp. The new premises enabled our projects to expand and our services became available to local low-income families as well. Our current activities are focused on providing long-term material, educational and community-oriented projects to support the residents of the Kavala camp.»