

REFUGEE RIGHTS ACTION LAB

It's often difficult for activists to continue working as a network after their common project is over. But when they've all shared an intense experience, in close proximity to some of the most unfair and inhumane practices in Europe, there's a greater chance that they'll stay connected. This is what happened to the participants in Amnesty's Refugee Rights Action Lab 2017.

Based on the concept of Amnesty's Human Rights Action Camp, the Action Lab aims to provide a new way of supporting and connecting staff and activists – including refugees – campaigning on refugee rights. Building on the Human Rights Action Camp's strengths, and addressing its weaknesses, it's been designed as a 'journey': over nine months participants take part in workshops and webinars to share experiences, plan campaigning actions, develop skills and increase knowledge. In building and strengthening relationships with other activists and organizations, the Action Lab cohort gains inspiration, energy and the capacity to reach out to new audiences.

A central component of the Lab is the Action Camp, which took place from 15 - 23 July 2017. The Camp is very hands-on - it empowers activists by providing a space to share stories and experiences, [develop an action](#) together and spread a united message. It was held on the Greek island of Lesbos, one of the shameful ramparts of Fortress Europe – a limbo for thousands trapped between hope and fear. A place where human rights violations are a daily occurrence.

As expected, the Camp turned out to be the highlight of the Action Lab 'journey'. It took place in Pikpa, the open refugee camp run by volunteers and the local organization Lesbos Solidarity. The daily interactions with refugees living in the camp around shared meals and joint events, gave activists a first-hand understanding of their realities, hopes and struggles. Public activities organized by Lesbos Solidarity and Amnesty in the capital Mytilene, such as an open-air cinema screening and a World Café, allowed participants to interact with the local population and to re-energize and network with the local activism community.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive experience reported by the participants, there were many lessons learned during the process that we'd like to share with others considering similar projects. It proved to be very difficult for local activists to commit to such a long period of time in their busy reactive environment. As a population in flux, it was particularly challenging to recruit local refugee leaders ahead of the Camp. Language issues also arose which limited the participation of key voices. Ensuring diversity was another challenge; despite a good gender balance amongst the international activists, this was a huge shortcoming in terms of local representation, and the issues and stories presented. Some of this imbalance was addressed during the Camp activities, but recruitment strategies and criteria should make diversity and gender balance an essential precondition – and the Camp design and methodology further adapted for the local environment.

The main challenge, however, was much more difficult to prepare for. Refugee leaders had organized non-violent protests in the overcrowded state-run Moria refugee camp, a site that has become a symbol of the misery caused by Europe's inhuman treatment of refugees. One of the two protests held that week – which started peacefully and called on Greek and European authorities to end the confinement of asylum-seekers on the island and move people to mainland Greece – turned into clashes between the Greek police and the inhabitants of Moria. The police responded with [excessive use of force](#) and 35 asylum-seekers were arrested. Although these external events were beyond the remit of the Action Camp, Amnesty had planned for the researcher on Greece to be on the island to monitor and document events. While every effort was made to keep the external events outside the focus of the activists participating in the Action Camp on the premise that the incidents were being investigated by the Amnesty researcher, they strongly impacted on participants' mood and affected some of them psychologically.

Through a combination of space for explanation, reflection and participant-led energizers, facilitators and

participants regained the energy levels needed to ‘get outside the pit of powerlessness’ and continue with even more strength and determination to support refugee rights during the second half of the Action Camp. This experience became even more powerful once the activists had returned home and processed the events.

There’s no doubt that the Action Camp had a profound impact on the participants. It deeply shaped their personal and activist lives and hugely boosted their commitment to campaign for refugee rights and change attitudes and perceptions around them. Two of the activists decided to leave their jobs to go and work with refugees. And all of them became more active in the months after the Camp, promoting refugee rights on a deeper level. Local refugee activists were also energized and grateful to see people from around Europe caring for their struggle and actively campaigning for change in their countries.

With their skills enhanced, activists worked to increase the empathy of ‘persuadable’ audiences in their countries, by challenging the media and political anti-refugee narrative. Telling stories in the first person and sharing experiences contributed to building these alternative narratives. As well as increasing the interest of existing Amnesty activists, this led to reaching new audiences and forming new alliances at local, national and regional levels, one of the key overall objectives of the project.

Over the course of the Action Lab, participants organised a wide variety of activities. These ranged from interactive photo exhibitions and guided tours to concerts, talks, presentations and debates; from street actions and articles in the local media to working with tech companies on making their internal policies and practices more refugee-friendly. While the majority of activists were still active after the Action Lab, in hindsight a longer journey (say, 18 months) would give more time for planning and implementing activities and working with others.

Such an ambitious project takes considerable resources. While it’s difficult to quantify the return on investment in the short term, if well embedded in a long-term campaign, its benefits by far outlive the project. Participating sections can define their own journeys according to their local and national plans and increase the active participation of activists and rights-holders – including refugees - in their campaigns.

The emotional aspects of such events need to be carefully managed, with dedicated psychological support available on-site and more spaces for reflection and decompression during the Camp. A solid assessment of the risks must be done beforehand, mitigation plans be put in place, and sufficient numbers of staff on hand to respond to external events. Checks and thorough assessment of applications for the camp are crucial (e.g. to minimize the risks of emotional triggers for participants), and emphasis must be paid on recruitment and induction of activists in the Lab.

As long as sections commit fully to the process and support the participants, the Action Lab experience can be truly transformative. By using a “train and trust” approach – developing the power of a few strong leaders who then support activists to mobilize people – a balance can be struck between mobilizing and organizing. The reality is that many of the participants were ‘mobilizers’ – who inspire and motivate others through organizing actions and events – rather than organizers – who train and develop other activists and leaders. This is possibly because the activism approach that prevails in Amnesty sections focusses on what [Hahrie Han calls “transactional” mobilizing rather than “transformational” organizing](#). The Action Lab may have brought some of the sections one step forward in the direction of increasing activist leadership skills, moving towards a more balanced organizing + mobilizing approach and of working with activists and rights holders in a more participatory way. In fact, such projects could contribute to systemic change in the way Amnesty structures its activism as a whole, as well as its approach to people-powered campaigns.

As one of the activists put it: “If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together”.

Refugee Rights Action Lab



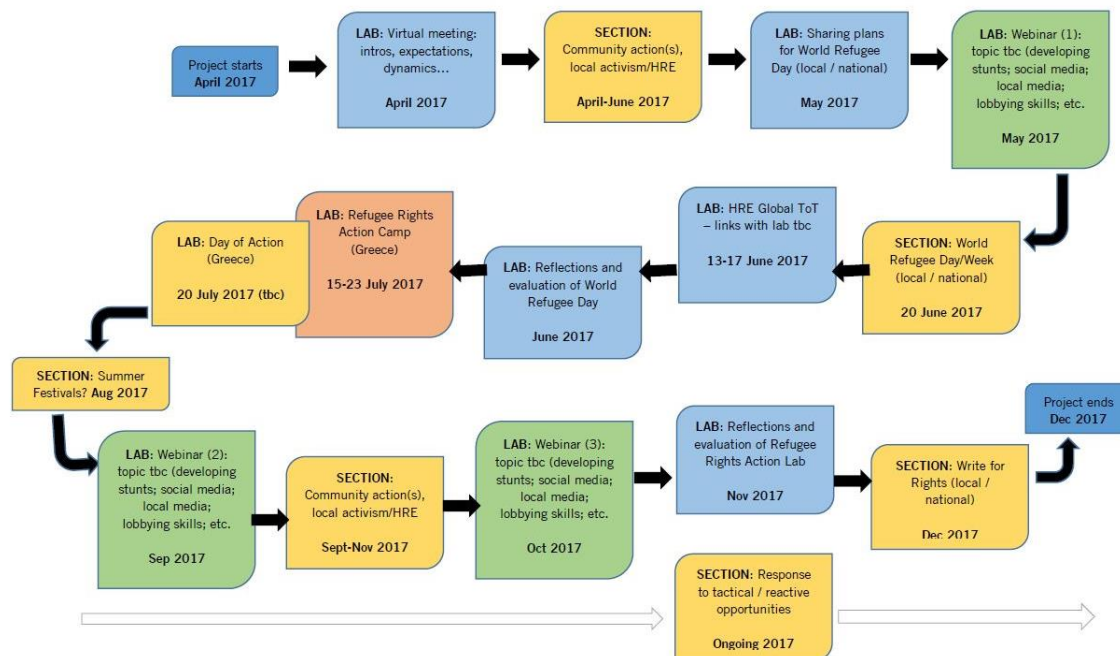
Objectives

- New audiences and alliances campaigning for pathways of admission & changing the narrative
- Enhance collaboration between staff & activists (including refugees)
- Enhance knowledge, skills, motivation and capacity of activists (leaders, organizers & multipliers)
- Strengthen Amnesty's collaboration with local organizations in Greece
- Test & learn from new ways of working (@ local, national & regional level)
- Increase the active participation of activists (including refugees)

... country "teams" of 1 AI staff + 1-2 refugee activists + 1-2 AI activists

... in each participating section: Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey

Action Lab: journey(s)



Action Lab: activism

- Engage with local businesses, sports clubs to give visibility & support
- Tech companies help refugees reach their potential
- HRE & empowerment in schools
- Debates between refugees & conservative audiences
- Photo exhibitions (& human-sized photos & interactive installations)
- Stand-up comedy & concerts
- Food sharing
- Videos & documentaries
- National Activism Camps
- Networking with others; building alliances; sharing experiences & multiplying support for refugee rights online and offline

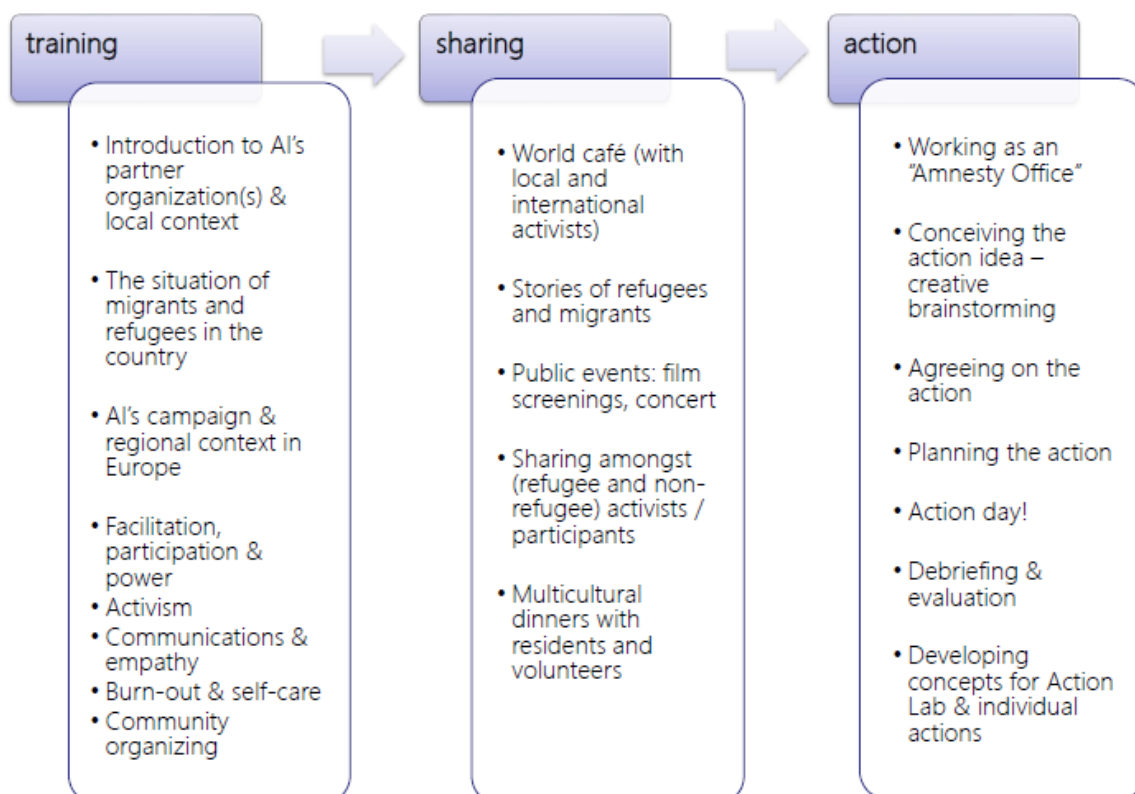
...at the local & national levels in participating countries, where we want to build welcoming communities...

Action Camp in Lesvos

To engage participating activists (refugees and non-refugees) from 8 European countries and from Lesvos to:

- Share, reflect, learn and build skills
- Increase their motivation to keep campaigning for refugee rights
- Plan and implement a public action together
- Develop concepts for “welcoming communities” in Europe
- Develop inter-personal connections and collaboration

...in Lesvos, a hotspot where human rights violations are happening...



Program and Methodology



training

- Introduction to AI's partner organization(s) & local context
- The situation of migrants and refugees in the country
- AI's campaign & regional context in Europe
- Facilitation, participation & power
- Activism
- Communications & empathy
- Burn-out & self-care
- Community organizing



sharing

- World café (with local and international activists)
- Stories of refugees and migrants
- Public events: film screenings, concert
- Sharing amongst (refugee and non-refugee) activists / participants
- Multicultural dinners with residents and volunteers



action

- Working as an "Amnesty Office"
- Conceiving the action idea – creative brainstorming
- Agreeing on the action
- Planning the action
- Action day!
- Debriefing & evaluation
- Developing concepts for Action Lab & individual actions



Communications

www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-40700880/europe-s-forgotten-migrant-crisis

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Europe France Election 2017

NOW PLAYING 1:08 Europe's forgotten migrant crisis? 23 Jul | Europe

UP NEXT 2:05 Cat and mouse: Migrants and police in Greece 18 May | Europe

2:59 Refugee children learn the hard way in Greece 19 Apr | Europe

1:51 Boats burned in the Med 15 Jul | Europe

3:53 From Syria to Sweden: One boy's journey 27 Feb | News

0:32 Migrants rescued off the Libyan coast 23 Feb | Europe

2:00 Ayshah meets child refugees in Greece 14 Mar | News



Europe's forgotten migrant crisis?

Migrants in Lesbos are protesting about being trapped in Greece and risking deportation to Turkey.

More than 8,000 people have arrived so far this year, down from the thousands who were turning up every week, two years ago.

But since then, a deal to deport failed asylum seekers back to Turkey, and the slow process of investigating cases, has led to a bottleneck in Greece, and on the island of Lesbos in particular.

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Irish activists join forces with refugees in Greece to fight

48

21/07/2017 - 06:30:30

Irish activists are taking part in an Action Camp on the Greek island of Lesbos.

They will join forces with refugees to demand action from EU leaders as they are trapped on the island.

Janet Dillon is an Irish volunteer from Cork who has worked with refugees and who spoke...

KAOS GL
Liberation of homosexuals will also free heterosexuals

Kaos GL
Kaos GL Magazine
Anti-Homophobia

Human Rights Women Media

Human Rights

LGBTI+ refugees trapped on the Greek Islands



Mansel Tuğkan Gündoğdu

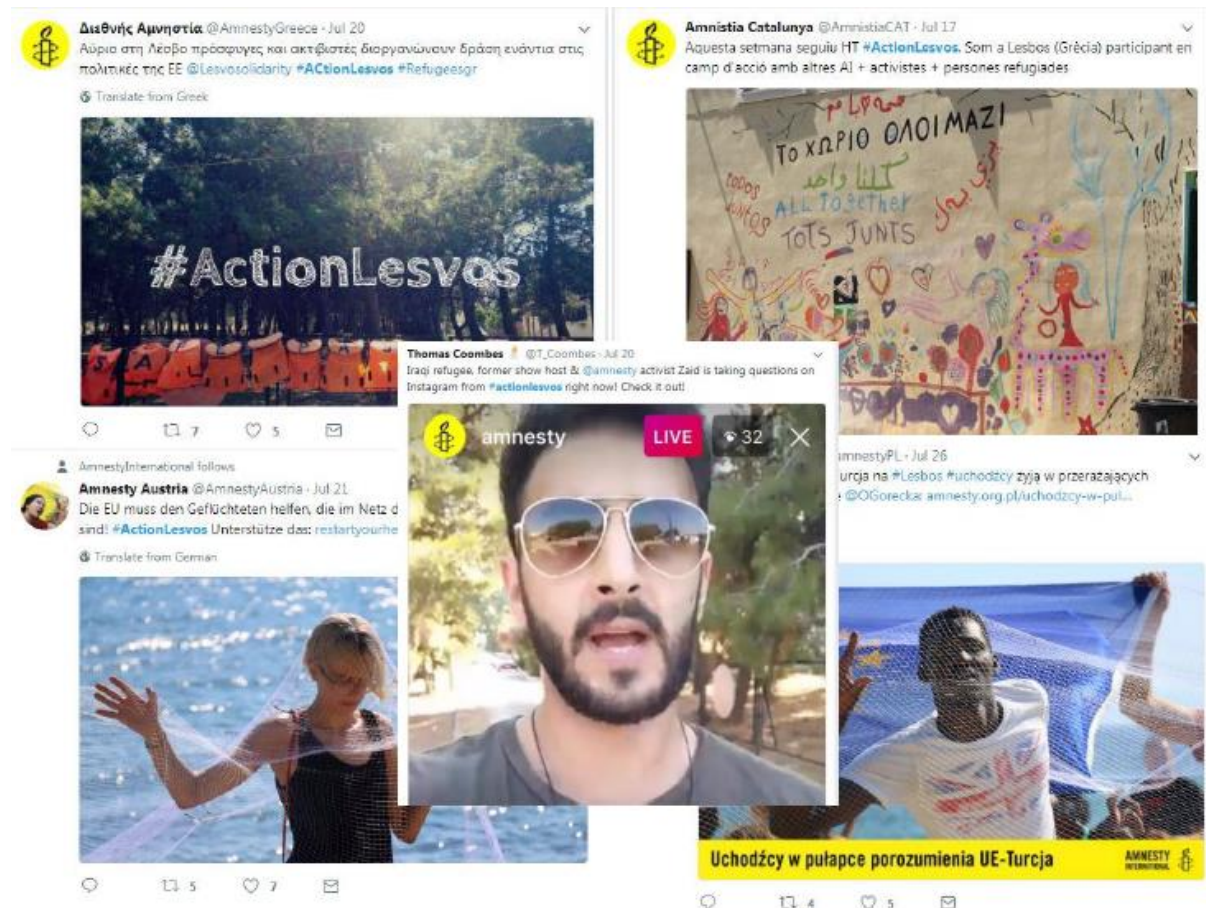
This situation affects LGBTI+ refugees along with the other vulnerable groups such as elders. LGBTI+ refugees who are trapped on the Greek Islands are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and abuse. LGBTI+ refugees who are deprived of fundamental rights such as access to health care, education and other basic services are particularly vulnerable.

28.07.2017, 05:30

Une Valaisanne confrontée à l'urgence du camp de réfugiés de Moria sur l'île grecque de Lesbos

PAR PATRICK FERRARI

TÉMOIGNAGE - Pour sa première expérience sur le terrain pour Amnesty International, la Sédunoise Estelle Borel est partie à la rencontre des migrants sur l'île grecque de Lesbos et...



Action Camp: some lessons

- Very transformative and empowering experience, with powerful connections created between activists
- Allocate sufficient time to deepen learning within sessions as well as breaks to absorb learning and to build relationships
- Resolve tension between international activism and local issues
- Manage expectations and ensure ownership of the action by participants, with transparent decision-making process
- Strengthen capacity to address, respond to and communicate about external events and to manage people's emotions
- Ensure gender balance of participants and gender mainstreaming in camp activities