OUR IMPACT IN 2020

Photo by Anthony Jean
Choose Love does whatever it takes to help refugees at every stage of their journey. From fleeing danger, to rebuilding in a safe place, we provide everything from lifesaving search and rescue boats to food and legal advice. There is nothing we won’t do to help, and we couldn’t do it without you.
OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

- **60,405 people were supported with medical support.**
- **38,668 legal cases were supported.**
- **30,300 people accessed washing facilities.**
- **870 people were rescued at sea.**
- **29,000 hot meals were distributed.**
- **250 tonnes of firewood were distributed.**

Lotus Flower
Forced to live in cramped, unsanitary camps and shelters, refugee populations have been made particularly vulnerable to COVID–19.

Across the countries we work, we have amped up support of healthcare projects, ensuring thousands more people have had access to COVID screening, primary healthcare, critical information provision, as well as supporting the distribution of hundreds of thousands facemasks, hand sanitisers, and soaps.

Lockdown restrictions have meant many people have been unable to work or access the usual support services. For those struggling, we’ve helped with destitution grants and other emergency support and so more people could continue their studies, stay connected and access support, we funded the distribution of tech items.
Lockdown restrictions have dramatically changed the face of education throughout the countries in which we work.

After already missing out on months, even years of education because of conflict, persecution and displacement, we have worked with our partners to move classes online so students do not miss out any further. To support this shift, we have moved our support focus to tech, phone data and take-home worksheet packs so students can take part.

On the Greek island of Chios, we are proud to have funded the start-up of two brand new education spaces for teenagers and young adults.
COVID-19 aside, this year has been peppered with emergencies where our partners have stepped up to respond.

In August, a devastating explosion tore through Lebanon’s capital, Beirut, destroying much of the city. We are proud to have supported our partners emergency relief efforts, helping with the enormous clean-up efforts and ensuring those affected by the blast had access to food, water and clothing.

In September, a huge fire tore through Moria camp on the Greek island of Lesvos – Europe’s largest refugee camp. Within a few hours, the entire facility was razed to the ground, leaving almost 13,000 people – including around 5,000 children without any shelter at all. Our partners worked around the clock to provide food, water, emergency shelter, healthcare and baby essentials. We are particularly proud of our partner Better Days who helped to locate four hundred unaccompanied minors who were then transferred to accommodation on the Greek mainland.
Everyone should have the freedom to be who they are and love who they choose, but LGBTQI+ refugees face an increased risk of violence and persecution, with many forced to hide their true identity even in the supposed safety of Europe.

The majority of LGBTQ+ people face legal difficulties in order to be recognised as a refugee as sexual orientation and gender identity are difficult grounds to "prove".

We are incredibly proud to support organisations that support LGBTQI+ refugees around the world – these groups are vital in building community, providing support, and sharing essential information – they are a lifeline for many.

Whilst our legal partners support the LGBT community in every country that we work, we also now fund LGBT peer-to-peer solidarity groups in the UK, in Greece, and on the U.S.-Mexico border.
There were almost one thousand police evictions of camps in Calais last year - nearly three per day. These often violent evictions can leave people with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

To ensure less people go without the basics we all deserve, our partners have stepped up distributions of tents, warm sleeping bags, food and other supplies, including 250 tonnes of firewood - vital for people to keep warm and cook food throughout winter. This support was never more important than during the initial COVID lockdowns which left communities more isolated than ever before.

Collective Aid
Calais Woodyard

In northern France we’ve reunited families and protected lone refugee children.

Every year, hundreds of unaccompanied children travel to northern France in the hope of reuniting with family or finding safety in the UK. They often find themselves sleeping rough, making them especially vulnerable to exploitation.

With our support, our partners assist on average over 300 children at the border at any one time, through individualised casework support, information, recreational and educational activities, and by acting as a crucial gateway to state child protection services.

Through targeted litigation work, our partner Safe Passage helped twelve unaccompanied children and eight families including twenty two children access their right to join their relatives in the UK before the December 2020 Brexit deadline.
The Trump administration’s ‘remain in Mexico’ policy forced thousands of people to wait in dangerous and unsafe situations. Even if a person had a credible fear of persecution, they were forced to wait in Mexico without access to family, limited legal, or social support. The pressure on the groups trying to provide help was huge.

We are incredibly proud to support these heroic groups working on both sides of the border, providing everything from food, shelter, lifesaving medical care and legal support to reunite families.

On the US-Mexico border we’re supporting the teams working to heal the invisible scars of war and displacement.

With our support, psychologist Christian and the rest of the team at Centro 32 FBT México team, now run this ingenious mobile psychological support unit – aka a psychologists’ clinic tucked into the back of a transit van!

There are thousands of displaced people in the city, many of whom have fled persecution and violence, and so professional psychological support is vital. This mobile clinic travels to the city’s camps and shelters, helping to ease people’s pain of losing loved ones, deal with the horrors of war, the traumas of displacement as well as giving people the tools they need to rebuild their lives.
Regular, violent pushbacks, growing animosity, a lack of official accommodation and rising COVID infections have left thousands of people more in need of support than ever before.

Our partners in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania have provided everything from food, wash facilities and primary healthcare to monitoring human rights abuses on the borders.

**THE BALKANS: CASE STUDY**

In Serbia we’ve supported the opening of two brand new shower and wash facilities – vital for keeping more people safe during the pandemic.

Providing hundreds of showers and laundry washes per week, our partner Collective Aid run a wash facility in Belgrade, and in the city of Subotica they operate a mobile wash facility in a converted truck.

The vast majority of the people they support are street homeless or sleeping in abandoned buildings. In these circumstances, often getting access to clean water is difficult.
Greece continued to host huge numbers of people seeking safety while failing adequately to protect their rights. Fires destroyed Moria camp on Lesvos, Europe’s largest refugee camp, leaving thousands, including more than 4,000 children, without shelter – despite campaigns to evacuate the people affected to proper accommodation, people were rehoused in an even more inadequate tent camp.

COVID restrictions have meant thousands of people living in camps have ensured months of curfews and limits to movement, despite the rest of society enjoying greater freedoms and even the return of tourists.

Worryingly, this year has seen Greek authorities cracking down on organisations that support refugees. We have led the way in challenging this shrinking space for civil society, ensuring that the voice of smaller NGOs and grassroots movements is heard.

We’ve ensured that more people have had access to vital healthcare during the pandemic.

In response to outbreaks of COVID-19 in Greece and the inaction of authorities, we supported our partner Together For Better Days to open a brand new triage clinic on the island of Lesvos.

Over one hundred and fifty patients per day were filtered through the central triage clinic in order to be screened for COVID-19 before being referred onto the relevant services: chronic care, wound care, psychosocial support, unaccompanied minor support or the pharmacy. This was the first time such a collaborative approach has been taken with the medical partners operating in the camp.

Photo by Milene van Arendonk

Together For Better Days
Lockdown restrictions left many people struggling and unable to access their usual support services or community centres. We have worked with our partners to ensure that more people have had emergency food vouchers, destitution grants and other support. We are proud to have supported our partners to provide hundreds of tablets, laptops and phones so communities who would otherwise be left isolated have been able to connect with support services, online courses and loved ones.

We’re supporting groups helping LGBT+ people to live out and proud. One of our new partnerships this year has been with African Rainbow Family, headed by the phenomenal human rights activist, LGBT campaigner and trainee barrister, Aderonke Apatá.

Armed with firsthand experience of the asylum system, Aderonke and the rest of the team support LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum in the UK. Providing essential supplies, counselling, advice and advocacy, this incredible team has developed a network of over 500 members operating in Manchester, Birmingham, London and Leeds.
Over a million displaced Syrian people live in Lebanon. Even before COVID and the devastating explosion in Beirut, Lebanon’s ongoing economic crisis had led to increased poverty amongst Lebanese people and refugees alike. Now the majority of Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty, with hunger becoming more and more commonplace – parents often parents to skip meals so their children have something to eat.

We have helped fund the distribution of tens of thousands of emergency support packs, providing struggling families with food, hygiene supplies and other essentials as well as take-home education packs for children.

We supported the heroes providing emergency relief after the devastating explosion in Beirut, Lebanon.

Volunteers from our partners Basmeh Zeitooneh and Sawa for development and aid worked around the clock to provide food, water, clothing, and temporary shelter to those affected, as well as helping with the vast cleanup effort.

There are well over a million displaced Syrian people in Lebanon, and our partners normally work to support these communities – but after this appalling tragedy they stepped up to help everyone.
In 2020 it’s estimated that about 1,426 people have died or gone missing while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe to escape war or persecution or to pursue a better life. This is an average of almost three people per day.

We are incredibly proud to continue our partnership with SOS Méditerranée operate the Ocean Viking, a search and rescue ship. Their has saved thousands of lives.
KEY ADVOCACY MOMENTS

Following the enormous fire that totally destroyed Moria camp on the island of Lesvos, we mobilised 180,000 individuals and 452 organisations, parliamentarians and politicians to call for the immediate evacuation of the people on Lesvos. Because European leaders have ignored refugees on the Greek islands for way too long, we took their voices to the European Commission in the heart of Brussels. These projections were reported by multiple international news outlets.

This year we also brought together MPs from every major UK political party to call on the government to provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary for refugees and then again to call on the government help vulnerable refugee children reach safety in the UK.

Following the exploitative, voyeuristic coverage of boat crossings from several broadcasters, we mobilised thousands of people to submit complaints about this dehumanising coverage that was stoking hostility towards refugee.
We are so grateful to everyone for standing in solidarity with refugees and for showing that in dark times, the incredible power of love and togetherness can shine through.

While the pandemic made life even more difficult for people stuck in refugee camps around the world, with 2020 such a challenging year for everyone, we didn’t know what to expect when we re-launched our store in November. We needn’t have worried.

32,525 people shopped in our stores over the 2020 festive period.
85,172 vital items and services purchased.
Which raised an incredible £2,525,904 / $3,453,415.
Choose Love is a restricted fund under the auspices of Prism the Gift Fund, UK Charity No 1099682. In the USA, Choose Love, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit organization, and gifts are tax-deductible as allowed by law.