



**EMPATHY MAKES US HUMAN**

**ACTIVITY REPORT 2020**



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## I. MAP OF LOCATIONS OF IMECE'S ACTIVITIES



*Map of Imece's activities in Izmir province. The Greek islands of Chios and Lesbos lie to the west and are the gateway to Europe and the site of many drownings during sea crossings*

*In green - Imece village, the association's welcoming heart*

*In blue - locations of emergency distributions at crossing points*

*In grey - Former refugee camps and distribution points*

*In red - Current refugee camps receiving distributions*

*In yellow - 'Return to school' programme. Reintroduction to education for child refugees.*

## II. THE YEAR 2020 IN BRIEF

In 2020, the Solar Age programme gained in maturity. During the year a total of 123 days of solar training was given to Syrian refugee women. By January 2021 nearly 200 women had been trained in solar engineering, and 5 women had started to earn money on the new programme, Energy for Everyone (EFE). In 2021 IMECE started a second phase of development based on a new solar battery (EFE 2.0) offering strategic access to energy, the financial empowerment of displaced people and the production of renewable energy. The project approaches 6 of the 17 UN sustainable development goals 2030: 1 no poverty, 2 zero hunger, 3 gender equality, 7 affordable and clean energy, 10 reduced inequalities and 17 partnerships for the global goals.

Throughout 2020, Imece has remained active in the refugee camps in the Izmir region. Meeting only minimal vital needs it has had to learn how to support the refugee population while limiting the risk of spreading infection during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has not affected the number of distributions and has accelerated a new initiative to distribute hygiene kits in all the informal camps identified by IMECE.

Special support was given to the most disadvantaged in Çeşme region during the early stages of the pandemic from April to May 2020, with canned food being distributed to unemployed families who had lost their sole source of income. These reserves are intended for emergency situations, and have been vital in police, gendarmerie and coastguard stations for refugees caught at sea.

The other major event of the year, the Magnitude 7 earthquake on 30 October 2020 in Izmir region, prompted immediate mobilisation and Imece paused its usual work and dedicated most of its resources to assist almost 5,000 people who found themselves homeless. This lasted 3 weeks with a team of around 10 people working six days a week and created lasting links with the local authorities.





### III. ORIGINS OF IMECE INISIYATIFI

The association was founded in 2014 by a group of people who wanted to develop ways of serving the community. While the initial job was to provide aid to local populations in need, priorities shifted at the onset of the refugee crisis. Although Çeşme and Chios have always been important points for population movements, the security situation in the Middle East in 2015 created a massive influx of people attempting to cross into Europe. Most of the assistance provided by Imece consisted of emergency distributions of goods necessary for the survival of these families (food, water, formula, first aid kits, medical aid, etc.)

Before the EU-Turkey agreement from March 2016, many people were crossing illegally to Chios (Greece), where they could easily organize legal and safe transport to European soil. With the entry into force of this agreement, refugees must now obtain all their administrative permits from the Greek islands, which can take up to two years. During this time, many are staying in camps where the living conditions are very bad. For this reason, many refugees have chosen to stay in Turkey.

In March 2016, Imece was recognized as a non-profit organization by the Turkish state, which allowed it to continue its work on a larger scale. With the increase in the number of unofficial camps, Imece started distributing food in various camps in the Izmir region. Nevertheless, the members of Imece realized that while the distributions are necessary and indispensable, they do not promote the autonomy of the refugee populations. For that reason the association decided to develop the Imece Village project. In this alternative location, Imece offers a variety of programs that promote the long-term independence of their beneficiaries. In addition, the organization is developing an innovative model of community life aimed at self-sufficiency.

In early 2017, Imece started a collaboration with [Barefoot College](#) in India to learn new ways to empower women who come to the Village to gain their autonomy. After learning about the Barefoot College Women's Solar Engineering Program, Imece Inisiyatifi sent two of its members to participate in the training, so they could come back and teach solar engineering. The Solar Age program began in November 2018.

In 2020, the Solar Age programme became part of Imece's long term strategy. By giving them a professional skill, Imece gives the women in the programme the chance to develop a career, integrate into Turkish society and become financially independent.



## IV. OUR BENEFICIARIES

### In the non-official camps

The Syrians who are registered in the region where they live have free access to Turkish public services, including healthcare and education under a 'temporary protected' status. Many people are however registered in southern Turkey where they arrive after crossing the border. Those who subsequently come to Izmir must update their administrative status, formalise their presence in the region and send their children to Turkish public schools. Many of these families work in the fields and move within Turkey according to the demand for agricultural labour. Already very disadvantaged, the families Imece works with often come from the Dom population, who are even more vulnerable to discrimination.

Although a vast majority of the refugees live in the town, more than 10% of those in Izmir province live in rural areas. Most of the unofficial camps lie in agricultural zones where the parents find it easier to find work, but in conditions equating to modern slavery. As almost all refugees work illegally, without an official contract, they are not integrated into Turkey's social security system and therefore cannot benefit from legal assistance to assert their rights as workers. They are exploited but participate in this oppressive system because for them it is the only way to earn some money. Because of these financial difficulties the children start to work full-time from the age of 13. The residents of these unofficial camps are also affected by the lack of running water and access to sanitary facilities or waste disposal which can adversely affect their health and welfare.

The few refugee children who are able to go to school are disadvantaged by their limited competence in the Turkish language, which can affect their ability to follow the lessons and communicate with their teachers and the other children. This often leads to social exclusion and discrimination and bullying. In addition, the children are negatively affected by the lack of structure, domestic violence they suffer and a lack of treatment for their trauma.

### In the cities

Imece Inisiyatifi also works with Izmir's Syrian community, notably mothers and their children. Single mothers constitute the most vulnerable group of all the refugees; they run the greatest risk of becoming homeless and unemployed. That is why we have chosen to concentrate on that group.

In our work in the towns, we have met many single mothers, some with as many as 5 children. Generally, they live in rooms whose rent they often find difficult to pay: it is almost impossible for them to earn a living outside their home because they must care for their children. In most cases, financial insecurity means their children must work or be exploited from an early age to contribute to the family's survival. These children are prevented from going to school and living a safe and happy childhood.

Whatever the living environment, urban or rural, these families are confronted with numerous problems which give rise to marginalisation, invisibility, absence of contact with the local Turkish community due to language difficulties, and deprivation of rights.

## V. THE SOLAR AGE PROGRAMME

Created in cooperation with Barefoot College based in India, the Solar Age programme aims to enable refugees to become financially independent and help them better integrate into Turkish society.

The majority of refugees in Turkey are women and children a large proportion of whom are not engaged in money generating activities. For these single mothers in particular, economic independence is a daily struggle. This is why Imece Inisiyatifi decided to create a solar engineering programme to turn a new page for these female refugees living in Turkey: The Solar Age programme.

As well as being a constantly growing sector in the labor market, solar energy is the future of sustainable and environmentally friendly energy.



The programme aims to create a virtuous circle for our beneficiaries giving the opportunity to the women to achieve professional competence, while their children are able to benefit from a programme of education and recreation. The objective is to become financially self-sufficient through marketing a product from this programme, a solar battery and lamp: EFE “Energy For Everyone”.

Beyond the functions of the EFE, the objective is to enable the consumer to have a direct impact on marginalised populations through the purchase of a useful and efficient product, an EFE, which directly supports the women who make it by hand and in an ethical manner. A key point of the programme: 10% of the profits go directly to the women and the remainder is used to finance the solar age programme and Imece’s other educational activities.

## How is the Solar Age programme designed?

### Step 1 : the B-A-BA of solar engineering

*10 days to complete, 7 hours per day*

Three times a month, groups of 4 to 6 trainees stay in the associations' education centre (IMECE village). There the women learn the basics of solar engineering. At the end of ten days, they can install and maintain a domestic solar system powered by solar-powered domestic appliances. They can rebuild environmentally friendly electrical systems respectful of the environment and ensure their autonomy in terms of their own access to energy.

### Step 2 : the construction of portable batteries

*15 days to complete, 7 hours of lessons a day*

The trainees on stage 1 who are willing and able to continue in the solar engineering programme come back to Imece Village to learn how to build the EFE, which they will be capable of doing at the end of the 15 days

The solar engineering course is complemented by other classes:

1. Women's health, let's talk about it
2. Integration and financial independence – Making soap, candles and bracelets to sell in the markets.
3. Integrating the children into the local education system.
4. First aid for the women and their children



*Hamziyeh, one of the participants on the Solar Age programme, in process of explaining the different types of electrical resistance in October 2018*

**EFE – Energy for Everyone : Our solar battery, designed at the same time for life in the camps, long journeys and daily use**



At the end of the programme the female refugees learn to produce a portable battery powered by solar energy: The EFE (Energy for Everyone and 'Robin of the woods' in Turkish). This tool aims to help the displaced populations in their journey by providing energy to what has now become a life-supporting device: their mobile telephones. The battery pack, made of wood, is also equipped with a LED light.



*EFE, Energy For Everyone : un chargeur de téléphone et une lampe alimentée par énergie solaire*

1. Thanks to the two integrated LED lamps, the EFE offers light in a humanitarian crisis where access to electricity is precarious and uncertain and flashing mode makes it easier to identify at sea in an emergency.
2. The EFE provides a portable solar charger adapted to needs generated by a humanitarian crisis when displaced persons can often remain without access to electricity for weeks at a time. Thanks to the EFE, they are able to stay in contact with their family and contact emergency services in a crisis.
3. The EFE also provides an income to female refugees who have taken our solar engineering programme and built the EFE. The revenues generated by the sale of the EFE are shared between the women and the association in order to perpetuate the Solar Age programme.



*Video presenting the programme (2019)*

[Imece Inisiyatifi - Solar Age](#)

## VI. OUR EDUCATION ACTIVITIES



### A/ THE IMECE VILLAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMME FESTIVAL

The primary objective of the programme is educational, but the programme also includes recreational activities like visiting the cinema or the beach, which most of the children have never done before.

The main struggles faced by female refugees in Turkey are the means of survival and economic independence. They are however closely linked to health and social integration in Turkey. That is why Imece Inisiyatifi has devoted a part of the summer educational programme to these issues and provides some of the same modules included in the Solar Age programme.

1. Women's health – Let's talk about it
2. Integration and financial independence – Making soap, candles and bracelets
3. Integrating the children in the local education system
4. First aid (for the women and their children)



*Candle-making lesson, activities with children and hospital simulation, summer 2018*



## Focus on the content of the educational program

### 1. Course 'Women's health » - let's talk about it!

Created in cooperation with Norwegian nurses. The students learn about the human body, contraception, protection against illness and the importance of breastfeeding. The course is reserved for females so they can express themselves more easily and freely. This course is followed by practical Turkish lessons and simulations to make it easier for them to communicate with Turkish health services: urgent hospitalisations, dentistry, midwives etc.

- 2. In order to achieve financial independence**, students learn how to make handicrafts that will be easy to sell in the Turkish markets, like soap, candles and bracelets. They also receive advice on how to market the products they will produce later. They leave the village with a toolkit that will enable them to start production from home.
- 3. To prepare the children for the Turkish education system** we offer them an education programme while their mothers attend other workshops. With games adapted to their age, the children learn basic mathematics and Turkish language.
- 4. Women and children are trained in basic first aid**

In addition to an education programme, Imece also provides pedagogical material for those who wish to improve their knowledge of the Turkish language after they leave the village.



## **B/ MOBILE EDUCATION PROGRAMME “BACK TO SCHOOL”IN THE CAMPS IN IZMIR PROVINCE**

Every week since May 2016, children from 2 to 18 have participated in a ‘Return to School’ programme in the non-official camps of Menderes and Torbali in Izmir province. It is aimed at facilitating the integration of children in the camps into local Turkish schools. The programme had to be paused however due to the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The project will restart as soon as the risks can be controlled.

### **Children under the age of 5 attend workshops on the following topics:**

- Hygiene: handwashing, brushing teeth etc
- Holding a pencil: drawing, colouring and letters of the Latin alphabet.
- Behaving with others: using construction toys in cooperation with other children, remaining seated and attentive during the workshop, managing negative emotions etc

### **Children from 5 to 18 years old work on:**

- Hygiene: handwashing after going to the toilet and before eating, brushing teeth etc.
- Parts of the body and other useful vocabulary in Turkish: the children live on the margins of a society that is very exposed to violence and child trafficking. They must be able to contact emergency services and explain their problems.
- The Latin alphabet and Turkish language: These skills will enable them to integrate better into Turkish society.
- Basic mathematics.
- Social behaviour and non-violent communication: these children are often confronted by traumatic events and do not have access to psychological care services. Few have access to school and are not used to concentrating during lessons, and taking instructions etc. When they enter Turkish schools, they must learn a new language and scholarly behaviour. Imece’s activities are aimed at filling these gaps.

## Places of concern

The mobile education programme has been developed in two rural zones with different context in Izmir's region.

### Region of Torbali:

Most of the families move each season to a different agricultural region in Turkey, depending upon the availability of work. As a result, they are often not registered in Izmir and their children have never been to school. The mobile education programme at the Torbali site concentrates on hygiene, social behaviour and the Turkish language.

### Region of Menderes and Çamönü

The families have been settled for more than 3 years. Imece Inisiyatifi therefore helped them to register with the authorities. Then they negotiated with the parents and the local school to enrol 26 children in September 2017, and 57 in September 2018. The members of the association observed a clear positive change in the behaviour, skills and management of emotions among those Çamönü children who went to school and in cooperation with the teachers at the local schools, the mobile education programme has been expanded to include homework.



*Mobile education programme at Çamönü, autumn 2018*

## VII. OUR DISTRIBUTIONS



### Total distributions in 2020:

- Scholastic material for 900 children
- 450 pairs of rain boots for children
- Hygiene packs for 1,800 families (1,800kg of detergent, 3,600kg shampoo, 9,000 bars of soap, 3,600kg laundry detergent, 3,600 cleaning wipes)
- Clothing for 600 families
- 1,200 blankets
- 96 wood-burning stoves
- Nutrition packs for 650 families (flour, pasta, rice, lentils, milk, beans, sugar)
- Special food packs for Ramadan for 200 families
- Food vouchers for 120 families

### A/ DISTRIBUTIONS IN THE CAMPS IN IZMIR PROVINCE

In the course of 2020, Imece Inisiyatifi has continued to carry out distributions in the camps at Çamönü, Menderes et Torbalı. The objective of these distributions is to improve the families' quality of life. The content of these distributions by Imece has been worked out with the families and is frequently revised according to current needs. Special attention is given to the most vulnerable among our beneficiaries, the children and women. Apart from the fact that needs obviously change according to the seasons, Imece Inisiyatifi's proximity to the families makes it possible to send specific articles to individual beneficiaries (scholastic material, a tablet to access courses online, a wheelchair for a child).

This close contact enables Imece to have a durable, trusting, relationship with these families. The education projects for training and integration have all been designed in partnership with the beneficiary communities.

Each kit is designed for a family of, on average, 8 people:

- **Hygiene kit** (*soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, baby powder, washing powder, soap, shampoos, sanitary towels*)
- **Food packs** (cooking oil, sugar, flour, lentils, pasta, rice, milk).
- **Clothings** (baby hats, rain boots for children and heaters for winter).
- **Baby Care** Baby milk, nappies for babies, cleaning wipes
- Various items customised for the needs of individual beneficiaries.

## **B/ DISTRIBUTIONS TO POLICE POSTS, THE GENDARMERIE AND THE COAST GUARDS**

When refugees are stopped when they try to make an illegal crossing of the Aegean Sea towards the Greek island of Chios, they are first taken to police posts, the gendarmerie or the Coastguards, then sent to the administrative centre of Izmir. They are not supposed to stay long in coastal centres as the coastal authorities do not have the budget to provide them with food and water.

But the reality is different. The refugees try to cross when the sea conditions are favourable which means that sometimes hundreds are arrested on the same night and the administrative centre of Izmir is congested.

As a result, they must wait, sometimes up to two days, at the coastal stations. When this happens, the authorities call our association, and we provide the refugees with food, water and indispensable articles such as sleeping bags.

Since Imece was set up more than 100,000 meals have been distributed. Meals include water, bread, canned food, sandwiches, milk and biscuits. Distributions also include children's toys, infant milk formula, sanitary pads, blankets, dry clothes etc.



*Distributions at Torbalı (heating, hygiene kits, food) September - November 2020*

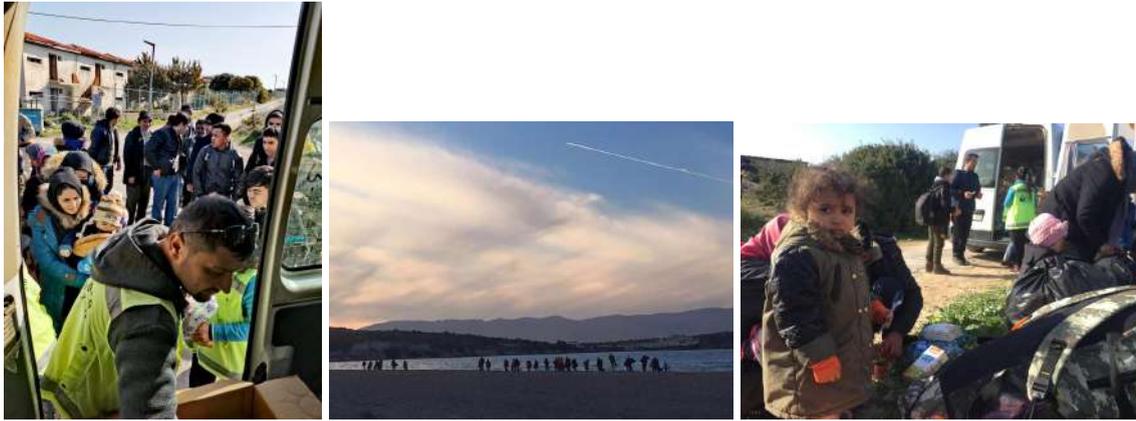
## February - March 2020

In February 2020, after the death of 33 Turkish soldiers in Syria and after having unsuccessfully requested support from the EU, Erdogan announced the opening of Turkish borders with Greece. In vain, the Greek authorities reaffirmed that their borders remained closed.

Tens of thousands of people headed towards the Edirne land border, and hundreds of families attempted a crossing to the island of Chios via Cesme. After weeks of being open and numerous drownings, the maritime borders were closed again. The land border at Edirne remained open until 15 March 2020, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey.

In February 2021, the Syrian-Turkish border is closed and the Turkish government is trying to keep as many refugees as possible in northern Syria by building camps and financing the reconstruction of infrastructure while maintaining a military presence.

Imece has therefore focussed its energies on helping hundreds of families who attempted the crossing to Chios and who sometimes waited for days without water or food. Every day we have distributed water, food and basic necessities.



*Emergency distributions in February-March 2020*

