



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

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Students' solar power scheme helps refugees to stay in touch

Two University of Edinburgh students are using their technical skills to provide a lifeline for refugees.

The environmental sciences undergraduates have created solar-powered mobile phone charging units for refugees living in camps in Greece.

Through Project Elpis, second-year students Alexandros Angelopoulos and Sam Kellerhals are helping hundreds of people contact families and access vital information.

The units generate electricity for 12 devices per hour and run for 10 hours a day.

For refugees stranded in Greece, a smartphone is a lifeline – as long as its battery lasts.

Access to electricity can be hard to find in overcrowded camps. Young and old people gather together over individual sockets, waiting anxiously to contact home.

The solar-powered devices can deliver electricity to 3600 people in one month and help to meet major demand for phone charging stations and off-grid electricity.

Sam and Alex have spent the summer in Greece installing units at several locations.

Each unit costs £850 to produce, excluding the cost of shipping to the location. The students raised their initial funding target of £4000 through a crowdfunding campaign.

The project received financial backing from the University's Scholarships and Student Funding department and support from the University Chaplaincy.

The students hope to gain more funding to provide additional devices for some of the 850,000 refugees who have arrived in Greece in the past year.

They plan to introduce their units to key locations across Greece, such as ports, detention centres and accommodation centres.

It is hoped that Project Elpis – named after the Greek goddess of hope – can be extended to more countries in Europe and the Middle East.

The solar-charger has been built in collaboration with Entec, a Greek renewable technology company.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Alex said: “War has torn apart families but Project Elpis aims to bring them back together and create a means of communication through solar power.”

Professor James Smith, the University of Edinburgh’s Vice-Principal International, said: “Tackling global issues has always represented the essence of Edinburgh’s international ambitions. Project Elpis is a great example of a student-led project that makes a practical contribution to the emerging humanitarian crisis in the east Mediterranean. Alex, Sam and colleagues are a credit to their university and, I hope, an inspiration to the broader university community.”

More information can be found at www.projectelpis.org.

A short film about the challenges faced by those who live in the camps and the benefits of the project is available to media free of charge and can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/181953929>.

A 30 second version is available here: <https://vimeo.com/181953492>

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