



Raad van Kerken in Nederland

***Council of Churches in the Netherlands***  
***Solidarity visit to refugees, churches and NGOs in Greece***  
***13-18 March 2022***

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# Summary

From Sunday 13 to Friday 18 March, a delegation from the Council of Churches in the Netherlands visited churches and aid organizations that are committed to refugees in Greece. This country on Europe's southeast border has been hosting many refugees for years, but feels abandoned by Europe.

The main purpose of the visit was to show solidarity with Greek churches and aid organizations. They are committed to refugees in Greece in very difficult circumstances. In the second place, the Council of Churches wants to bring the situation of refugees in Greece to the attention of the millions of Dutch church members and politicians in The Hague. The trip will certainly also serve as a mirror for the Netherlands, which can and must do more for refugees.

The situation is particularly dire on mainland Greece. Many people wait in camps for years, hunger is a regular occurrence. Reason for the Council of Churches to go here. First of all, Thessaloniki was visited, where the NGO Naomi operates. Then Katerini, where the Greek Evangelical Church has services. The delegation then went to Athens and visited Apostoli, which distributes food parcels, Synyparxis, which takes care of children, the Roman Catholic Caritas and the Greek Council for Refugees, which is committed to legal aid. Refugee camps were visited in both Thessaloniki and Athens. In Athens there was also a meeting with the Dutch deputy ambassador.

After a week of observations and conversations with Greek church leaders, NGO employees, officials, journalists and especially refugees themselves, the delegation takes these important conclusions to the Netherlands:

1. Legal assistance for people who get stuck in the asylum system has been reduced, but there is a great need for it.
2. Contact between refugees and Greek society helps with integration.
3. Refugees have no way out after their application has been rejected and are deprived of help and any form of perspective.
4. Newcomers need good education and job coaching.
5. Churches play an important role in aid provision and contribute to support for the integration of newcomers. They are well rooted in society through parishes and municipalities.

The Council of Churches therefore makes the following recommendations:

## 1. Legal Protection

- Upgrade legal aid for people stuck in the asylum system, including capacity for church organizations and NGOs providing legal aid.
- Make agreements in a European context about not returning to unsafe countries.

## 2. Integration

- Refugee and migrant reception centers should not become detention centers. Keep the centers open to allow refugees to interact with Greek society.
- Financially support church and NGO programs for the integration of refugees and give them the necessary space.

## 3. People whose asylum applications have been rejected

- Guide rejected asylum seekers to a sustainable perspective, providing them with the necessary legal and social support, and the necessary for daily life.
  - Ensure that aid provided to refugees for humanitarian purposes is not criminalised.
4. Help newcomers with education and job coaching
- Support church organizations and NGOs that provide education and job training to newcomers.
5. Contribution of churches to aid and support for newcomers
- Recognize the role of churches and their leaders and encourage church-government dialogue and collaboration between churches and with NGOs.

## 1. Introduction

From Sunday 13 to Friday 18 March a delegation of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands visited churches and aid organizations working with refugees in Greece. This country on the European southeast border has been welcoming many refugees for years, but feels abandoned by Europe.

The Council of Churches has been working for years for a humane reception of refugees, in the Netherlands, but also in Europe, through participation in the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). In the CCME 36 churches from 19 European countries participate. In October 2021, the general assembly of the CCME issued a stronger call to Europeans and their governments as well as churches to take in another million vulnerable refugees and migrants.

The reason for the visit to Greece was a request from the Remonstrants' Faith and Society Working Group. (Letter, August 2021). They asked for attention to:

- the enormous problems both on the islands and on the mainland of Greece with the reception of refugees,
- signs of refugees being sent back to Turkey,
- the fact that due to the bad treatment many refugees try to travel on to Western Europe,
- the bad economic situation in Greece, where after years of austerity a lot is asked of the population to receive refugees,
- that fortunately a lot of good work is being done by numerous NGOs.

The NGO Naomi, operating in Thessaloniki, invited the Dutch churches to visit.

## 2. Purpose of the visit

After the Council of Churches had decided to respond to the invitation, the purpose of the visit was determined:

- a. To express solidarity with Greek churches and NGOs working for refugees in Greece under extremely difficult circumstances, recognizing the complicated position some church leaders find themselves in in a context where support for refugees is under pressure, and paying attention to what they expect from Dutch churches and organizations.
- b. Generate publicity in the Netherlands among:
  - the own church constituency, by informing, encouraging and feeding them with a counter narrative; Let us save another million (CCME)

- the wider Dutch public on the gross violations of human rights on European soil, financed and executed by European institutions
- Dutch government and politics, for the failed reception of refugees on European territory and the dual role of the EU. Seeing Dutch church leaders visiting Greek camps can be a strong signal in this regard.

### 3. Travel program - dates, partners and schedule

In consultation with the Greek partners the following travel schedule came about:

#### **Sunday, March 13**

- Flight Amsterdam - Thessaloniki

#### **Monday, March 14**

- Visit to NGO Naomi, information on reception, advice, integration and equipping refugees to take control of their own lives.
- Visit to Diavata camp
- Visit to Casa Base, next to Diavata camp: a safe space for women and girls
- Exchange with experts in the field of political refugees

#### **Tuesday, March 15**

- soup kitchen of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Neapolis and Stavroupolis.
- Trip to Katerini
- Perichoresis. Presentation of the work of Perichoresis, visit to food and clothing bank, and Social Cooperative Enterprise 'Peri-Ergon'
- Trip to Athens

#### **Wednesday, March 16**

- Roundtable, organized by Synyparxis
- Soupkitchen Stathmos Larissis (Apostoli)
- Nikea Shelter of Unaccompanied minor Refugees - lunch with the children
- Dutch Embassy, Meeting with Mr. Ter Kuile, Deputy Ambassador.
- Visit to Archbishop Ieronymos, Archdiocese of Athens (Apostoli)

#### **Thursday, March 17**

- Camp Schisto, under the leadership of Greek Council for Refugees
- Meeting with Archbishop Theodore Kontidis S.J. of Athens
- Visit to a program of Caritas
- Second round table, organized by Apostoli
- Conversation with Ingeborg Beugel, journalist in Athens

#### **Friday, March 18**

- Evaluation. Agreements for continuation. Flight Athens - Amsterdam

### 4. Refugees in Greece

Greece has been hit hard by successive crises over the past 15 years. The country was hit hard by the global financial crisis of 2008-2016. In 2015 came the large influx of refugees from under Syria (1.5 million) that led to dramatic conditions especially on the islands. In 2019 followed the Covid pandemic that crippled the

country, currently Greece is preparing for the arrival of refugees from Ukraine. For now, one is counting on an influx of 40,000 refugees from Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the country seems to be recovering. The pressure on the islands from the influx of refugees has subsided. Refugees have been scattered around the country in centers. Now that the Corona pandemic seems to have subsided, the country is preparing for the arrival of tourists. The country is on the rise again.

#### **Some data**

Greece has a population of over 10.5 million. About two-thirds of the population lives in the cities. A quarter of the population lives in or around Athens.

**Aging.** Greece is rapidly aging. Greece has a low fertility rate: between 1.3 and 1.4. The birth rate (8.5‰) is lower than the death rate (11.2‰). About a quarter of the population is over the age of 65. The population of Greece is shrinking.

**Ethnicity.** The population is composed mostly of ethnic Greeks. The country has a recognized Muslim minority that includes Albanians, Turks, and Bulgarians. In addition, there are smaller minorities of Jews and Armenians. Also living there are many other nationalities, especially from Europe, North America and the Middle East.

**Religion.** According to a 2010 Pew-Templeton survey, 88.1% belong to a Christian church. The Greek Orthodox Church is by far the largest. Although church and state are separate, because of its historical significance, the Orthodox Church holds a privileged position that is also enshrined in the constitution. Over 5% of the population is Muslim. Other religious minorities include Sephardic Jews, Roman Catholics (about 250,000), Armenian Christians and several small Protestant communities. Greece includes the autonomous monastic state, the Oros Athos peninsula.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Legal assistance for people stuck in the asylum system has been reduced

Since 2015, legal support for people seeking asylum and caught up in procedures has declined significantly. At the beginning of the refugee crisis, there was a lot of legal support available, but it has been greatly reduced over the past year. Church aid agencies and NGOs have legal support departments, but cannot handle the work.

We hear from church aid agencies and NGOs that currently more and more people get stuck in the procedures or are completely left to their own devices after their application is rejected. If an application is rejected, people have to leave their residence within 30 days and are out on the street. They can no longer claim anything.

In Thessaloniki and in Katerini we met several people who are in that situation. Young parents with children who should return to Kurdistan after eight years because it would be a safe country. But are unable to do so.

Young adults whose parents are already elsewhere, but because of their age cannot come with them and are left orphaned. Chanceless. Supposed to return to Iraq because it would be safe. And of course the issue of whether Turkey is a safe country. In a general sense, Turkey is seen as a safe country from which you would not have to flee, but that is not true for everyone. Worryingly, the pushbacks that are also openly talked about in Greece are not only taking place at the borders, but are also taking place in refugee reception centers. It happens that people in a refugee center are intimidated and sent back.

## 5.2. Contact between refugees and Greek society helps with integration

In the years that the refugee numbers on the Greek islands increased dramatically, the discussion was about relocation of refugees to other countries in Europe. European agreements on this issue were not kept. Not even by the Netherlands. There is still the idea that refugees who arrive in Greece want to travel on to North-Western Europe as quickly as possible. Refugees and migrants whose applications have been rejected try to make their way to Greece via Albania, among other places. Once they arrive in Belgium, the Netherlands or Germany, they can stay there for the time being because these countries do not deport refugees to Greece.

We have not seen dramatic scenes. The impression is that few new refugees can enter from Turkey, Bulgaria and Albania. The borders are closed, people who try are sent back. Without papers.

Several refugee centers have been set up scattered across Greece since 2015. There are now said to be 25 of them. We visited some of these centers where 500 to 1,000 people are staying in containerized houses. The situation in these centers can vary greatly. The atmosphere and the degree of personal freedom and respect for fundamental rights depends largely on the attitude of the management. Centers are funded by the European Union. The European Union can determine the conditions under which these centers should operate. Respect for fundamental rights of refugees and migrants should be guaranteed at all times by those who are responsible for them. Refugee and migrant reception centers should not become detention centers. Because of the recent installation of high walls with barbed wire and fences paid for with European money, we get the impression that it could go that way. Ingeborg Beugel was very adamant about this in the conversation we had with her at the end of our trip: detention centers for refugees are being set up in Greece with European money.

Greece seems to have a better grip on the situation at the moment. Refugees are staying in centers or in shelters in different cities. For the near future, the question arises as to what the policy of the Greek government will be: push refugees onwards, send back or integrate?

The aid organizations we spoke to have developed programs for integration of refugees. Synyparxis focuses particularly on the reception and counseling of minors. Apostoli also has a similar center. Apostoli and Caritas focus on providing education in language and culture, and psycho-social support. Also Naomi in Thessaloniki and Perichoresis in Katerini focus on integration of newcomers. The people we spoke to also told us that they would like to stay in Greece.

Greece is a large country (4 times the Netherlands) with over 10 million inhabitants. A century ago, Greek populations from Asia Minor were forced to move to Greece. This refugee past was often referenced during this trip. Greece must surely be able to integrate newcomers into their society.

We heard of initiatives by church organizations being taken over by the government only to fall apart. The question is why does the government take over these programs (Katerini, Caritas) and then prove unable to sustain them?

The government plays a central role in all of this. Aid funds are allocated to aid organizations through the Greek government. This gives the government a position of power. Large projects such as the reception of minors in shelters and the cash program for refugees cannot exist without government funding. Often it will be European funds that are redistributed by the government.

### 5.3. Refugees can't go anywhere after their application is rejected

During our trip, we met people whose applications had been rejected twice. They are then completely on their own. They have no right to any support whatsoever. Aid organizations that depend on the government for funding are not allowed to help them.

Helping undocumented migrants is punishable in Greece. Anyone who takes in or helps someone without documents can be taken to court for this.

People who helped bring refugees safely ashore in Lesbos have also been charged with human trafficking.

The criminalization of aid to refugees is an extremely serious development that must be addressed at the European level.

In the Netherlands we have the bed, bath and bread arrangement that was established after a court ruling. This should also be regulated at the European level.

Leaving people who have gone through a procedure to their fate is a violation of their human dignity. The duty of care of a government for people in need goes beyond a legal procedure.

### 5.4. For newcomers, good education and job coaching are needed

For the integration of newcomers, knowledge of language and culture and finding a job are essential. The church organizations we visited are working on just that.

NAOMI in Thessaloniki has set up its own textile production. They make their own designs. Migrants receive training here. Unfortunately, there is little transfer to other companies, but it is a start.

Peri Ergon in Katerini also provides sewing lessons and has a store in town where their products are sold. Peri Ergon also tries to guide people to work so they can support themselves.

Synparxis focuses mainly on the care and guidance of minors. In five houses, approximately 200 young people (Afghans, Syrians, Iranians) aged 12-17 are given shelter and guidance. They receive education and if necessary psychosocial support. Almost all of them ended up in Greece on their own. Without family.

Apostoli's social assistance focuses on the socially weak and on migrants. Migrants are also involved in the provision of aid. Caritas takes exactly the same approach.

Apostoli and Caritas are both active in education in language and culture.

Apostoli and Caritas are both active in the field of job coaching.

## 5.5. Churches play an important role in providing assistance and contributing to support for integration of newcomers

Church leaders play an important role in Greek society. Their attitude towards migrants and refugees is important. A few days ago, Archbishop Ieronymos called on Greeks to take in Ukrainian refugees.

The churches in Greece are very active in helping migrants and refugees (see above).

As far as we have been able to observe, there are not many contacts among them. There should be more cooperation.

For funding, church aid organizations depend on the Greek government and on donor organizations abroad.

## 6. Recommendations

### 6.1. Legal Protection

Given the decreased attention to legal assistance and its great importance for people trapped in the asylum system, we recommend:

- Bring legal assistance for people stuck in the asylum system up to standard, including capacity for church-based organizations and NGOs that provide legal assistance.

Given the fear of deportation to unsafe countries, we recommend:

- Make European agreements on not returning people to unsafe countries.

### 6.2. Integration

Given the establishment of closed centers for refugees, we recommend:

- Centers for the reception of refugees and migrants should not become detention centers. Keep the centers open so that contact of refugees with Greek society remains possible.

Given the good results of church and NGO programs for the integration of refugees we recommend:

- Support church and NGO programs for the integration of refugees financially and give them the necessary space.



### **6.3. People whose asylum applications have been rejected**

Given the lack of support for people whose asylum claim has been rejected but who have not (yet) left Greece, we recommend:

- Accompany rejected asylum seekers to a sustainable perspective, providing them with the necessary legal and social support, as well as the necessary for daily living.

Given developments in which aid to refugees is increasingly criminalized, we recommend:

- Ensure that assistance provided to refugees with a humanitarian purpose is not criminalized.

### **6.4. Helping newcomers with education and job coaching**

Given the good results of church organizations and NGOs to provide education and job training to newcomers (asylum seekers with status) we recommend:

- Support church organizations and NGOs that provide education and job training to newcomers.

### **6.5. Contribution of churches to aid and support for newcomers**

In view of the important role of churches in aid delivery and their rootedness in society contributing to support for integration of newcomers we recommend:

- Recognize the role of churches and their leaders and encourage conversation between churches and government and cooperation among churches and with NGOs.

# Annexes

## 1. Letter of Faith and Society of the Remonstrants

### REFUGEES IN GREECE

Note to the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, August 8, 2021

1. The refugee crisis in Greece has partly shifted from the islands to the mainland. The situation on the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos is still as bad as ever. Many refugees have been living there for years in a hopeless situation in tent camps or in containers. The Greek government, with the support of the European Union, is more concerned with stopping refugees than with arranging for dignified reception. Journalists have discovered that Frontex is pushing refugees back to Turkey. This pushing back is taking place out of sight of the media mainly in the North of Greece. Frontex is an EU agency responsible for guarding the external borders. Frontex is supposed to also protect refugees, but does not. The European Parliament has now also established this, partly through the actions of Dutch MEP Tineke Strik.
2. There are currently an estimated 120,000 refugees in Greece, the majority of whom are on the mainland. Because of the great media attention on the islands, there is too little attention for the enormous problems on the mainland. The Greek government has found its own solution for the refugees on the islands. More than 50 percent of the asylum seekers are recognized as refugees. After being recognized as refugees, the refugees must leave the "shelter" on the islands and go to the mainland. Then the Greek government completely pulls its hands off them. They receive no benefits, no medical care, no schooling and no housing. They are put on the cobbles in Athens or Thessaloniki. This course of action is in flagrant violation of refugee law but the Greek government gets away with it because other EU member states do not call the Greek government to account for it. One of the consequences of this Greek policy is that refugees who have received recognition are trying to travel on to other countries in Western Europe. Under the Dublin Convention, however, the refugees could be sent back to Greece straightaway. The Dutch government also tried this. The German government hesitated, because in Germany there is more understanding of the hopeless situation of refugees in Greece. In the meantime, both German and Dutch judges have prohibited deportation to Greece.
3. The lousy situation of the refugees in Greece cannot be separated from the general misery in Greece. The Greek people have paid dearly for the irresponsible behavior of Greek governments in the past. When the Greek national debt became so high that it threatened to undermine the stability of the Euro, the EU forced the Greek state to make drastic cuts. This led to cuts in pensions, a downsizing of the public administration, cuts in the already ramshackle health care system, and to massive unemployment, causing half a million Greek youth to leave the country to seek work elsewhere. The stability of the Euro has been restored but on the backs of the Greeks. The paradox is that because of corona anno 2021 within the Western world a large national debt is no longer seen as a problem. That insight came too late for the Greeks. For Greece, Corona had the additional disadvantage that its main source of income, tourism, was completely lost. In such a situation it is asking a lot from a population to then also generously take in refugees. The danger exists that the refugees will be seen as the cause of the problems. Greece also has organizations and political parties who like to blame everything on foreigners.

4. Where governments fail, there are fortunately always citizens who see things differently and who take matters into their own hands and do what people are supposed to do: help each other. This is also the case in Greece. Numerous NGOs on Lesbos and Samos have done a tremendous amount of good work when those islands had to receive large numbers of refugees. Also in northern Greece, NGOs are active in the reception of refugees.
5. A very good one is Naomi, a church-based NGO In Thessaloniki. Naomi provides housing, social, legal and medical counseling. Naomi has successfully set up a textile project. Refugees make textiles that are sold through German NGOs. Naomi is well embedded in the Thessaloniki and Northern Greece area and maintains necessary relationships with other NGOs. Naomi originated from the German-speaking Protestant congregation of Thessaloniki in 2011, but is broader than that and calls itself ecumenical for good reason. There are good contacts with the small but hard-working Greek Protestant churches and a bridge to the Greek Orthodox Church, the state church of Greece. The name Naomi is derived from the person Naomi in the Biblical book Ruth. Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth were also traveling against their will. The Dutch Remonstrants received indications that Naomi was in dire straits and immediately offered financial help. Naomi receives support from four German Landeskirchen and the Remonstrants are now in discussion with those German churches to see how Naomi can be helped structurally in the coming years.
6. Naomi is happy with the financial support, but emphatically asks the German and Dutch churches to come and visit. Naomi is horrified to see how fences of concrete and barbed wire are being built around refugee camps in Greece with EU support. Naomi sees refugees being pushed back across the Greek borders. Naomi's leadership desperately wonders if there is any awareness in the Netherlands of how hopeless the position of refugees in Greece is and what the actual role of the EU is.  
The Brussels-based Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is also calling for more attention to the problems of refugees in Greece and the role of churches there, and is willing to help facilitate a visit to refugee camps in Greece and to Greek churches.

**A visit by church leaders has the following functions:**

To express solidarity with the churches and NGOs working with refugees in Greece;

To draw public attention to the miserable reception of refugees on European soil and the dual role of the EU. The EU calls in public documents for respect for human rights, but at the same time finances unacceptable repression against refugees.

Of course we hope that the Greek and Dutch governments will find a real solution within the framework of the European Union. But pressure is needed for that. Also from the churches.

## 2. Press Release - Council Solidarity Visit to Refugees Greece

**From Sunday 13 to Friday 18 March a delegation of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands will visit churches and aid organizations working with refugees in Greece. This country on Europe's southeast border has been welcoming many refugees for years, but feels abandoned by Europe.**

The trip has two goals: First, to show solidarity with Greek churches and aid organizations. They are working to help refugees in Greece under very difficult circumstances. The country lies on the external border of the European Union. Many refugees are setting foot in Europe for the first time here. Due to European regulations (the Dublin Convention), there is no mechanism to distribute refugees fairly across all EU

countries. Because Greece has been going through an economic crisis for years, support for refugees in the country is under severe pressure.

Secondly, the Council of Churches wants to bring the situation of refugees in Greece emphatically to the attention of the millions of Dutch church members and the politicians in The Hague. The trip will certainly also serve as a mirror for the Netherlands, which can and must do more for refugees.

### **Encouraging signal**

The Greek churches and aid organizations are looking forward to this trip, which for them is an encouraging signal in a difficult time. Support for refugees is under severe pressure. Several organizations have published reports of refugees being forcibly transferred across the border into Turkey, in violation of all international treaties. Greece has also enacted laws that punish aid to refugees with fines and prison sentences. Journalists feel less and less free to report on the situation.

The Council of Churches has been working for years for a humane reception of refugees, in the Netherlands, but also in Europe, through participation in the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe.

<https://www.raadvankerken.nl/nieuws/2022/02/vluchtelingen-in-griekenland-solidariteitsbezoek-raad-van-kerken/>

## **3. Composition of the delegation**

The delegation consisted of:

Drs. Geert van Dartel (Chairman, Council of Churches) - leader of the delegation

Rev. Christien Crouwel (General Secretary Council of Churches)

Msgr. Ron van den Hout (Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Groningen-Leeuwarden)

Rev. Karin van den Broeke (programme leader, Kerk in Actie, Protestant Church in the Netherlands)

Drs. Annelies Klinefelter (chairperson Christian Peacemakers Teams Netherlands, General Mennonite Society)

Dr. Goos Minderman (vice-chairman of the Refugee Working Group of the Council of Churches, chair of the CCME, Churches Commission of Migrants in Europe)

Mr. Coen van Loon (deacon in the Roman Catholic Church)

Mrs. Tineke van der Stok (Communication Officer Church in Action of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands) - communication

Mr. Hans Meyer - transportation

## **4. From day to day - the weblogs**

Solidarity Visit of Council of Churches to Refugees Greece (Press Release)

<https://www.Raadvankerken.nl/Nieuws/2022/02/Vluchtelingen-In-Griekenland-Solidariteitsbezoek-Raad-Van-Kerken/>

15-3 Harrowing Stories of Refugees in Thessaloniki

<https://www.Raadvankerken.nl/Nieuws/2022/03/Schrijnende-Verhalen-Van-Vluchtelingen-In-Thessaloniki/>

16-3 Church as Beacon of Hope in Difficult Times

<https://www.raadvankerken.nl/Nieuws/2022/03/Kerk-Is-Een-Baken-Van-Hoop-In-Moeilijke-Tijden/>

17-3 Helping Refugees and Poor Greeks in Athens

<https://www.raadvankerken.nl/Nieuws/2022/03/Hulp-Aan-Vluchtelingen-En-Arme-Grieken-In-Athene/>

18-3 A Drop on a Glowing Plate?!

<https://www.raadvankerken.nl/nieuws/2022/03/een-druppel-op-een-gloeiende-plaat/>

24-3 Greek church helps anyone in need: 'Hopelessness does not suit the church'

<https://protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/griekse-kerk-helpt-iedereen-in-nood-hopeloosheid-past-niet-bij-de-kerk/>

## 5. Background information on partners

### Naomi (Thessaloniki)



Ökumenische Werkstatt für Flüchtlinge

Emergency Aid for refugees (food, medicine, shelter)

and a wide program of integration measures for social participation.

Emergency aid for refugees in Thessaloniki and in surrounding emergency camps.

In cooperation and in close consultation with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), refugees are supported by NAOMI staff and volunteers in coping with their daily lives and are encouraged in their projects. To this end, counseling is provided and, in many cases, in-kind services and financial assistance are made available. In the process, personal contact is established with those seeking protection and a relationship of trust is gradually built up.

<https://naomi-thessaloniki.net/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NAOMIPROJEKT1/>

### Perichoresis (Katerini)

Perichoresis NGO is a humanitarian and non-profit association, based on volunteerism. Association's fundamental principles are philanthropy and social & religious humanism based on Christian ideals, as mentioned in Holy Bible. Perichoresis NGO mission is the alleviation of human hardship regardless of ethnicity, race and creed. Perichoresis' vision is to embrace every destitute fellow human being and encompass all people, both native and foreign, in the spirit of inclusion, providing protection, accommodation, medical / pharmaceutical care, legal support, social inclusion and educational programs. Our involvement in the refugee crisis began in February 2015 when a group of volunteers from the Greek Evangelical Church of Katerini, visited Eidomeni, on the border between Greece and FYROM. The majority of the members of the Evangelical Church of Katerini are descendants of Greek refugees from Pontus, Cappadocia and Asia Minor. Our ancestors were forced to leave their homes in 1922.

<https://www.perichoresis.ngo/>

## **Apostoli (Athens)**

Apostoli was founded in 2010 by the Holy Archdiocese of Athens in the form of a non-profit civil organisation with humanitarian, developmental and educational activities with both nationally and internationally. The objective and continuous attempt is for APOSTOLI to henceforth become the instrument, the tool, the humble factor of relief for people.



<https://mkoapostoli.com/en/>

## **Caritas Hellas**

Founded in 1976 by the Catholic Bishops in Greece, Caritas Hellas (Caritas Greece) has a mission to promote and safeguard human dignity through social support services to migrants and refugees, advocate on behalf of the poor and needy and provide humanitarian aid when natural disasters or other types of emergency situations occur.

Caritas Hellas has an extensive range of programmes that include offering nourishment and expert social support services to a rapidly growing population of refugees and immigrants, young people in need, the elderly and needy families. On a daily basis, the service includes the distribution of food, clothes, education, counselling and psychological support to 300 people, including 80 children. In addition, Caritas Hellas also has a prison-visiting programme that offers ethical support and facilitates links with families.

<https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/europe/greece/>

Caritas is te vinden in Athene, bij de Armeense katholieken, in Thessaloniki, Theia Pronoia (Divine Providence), op Corfu, Kreta, Naxos-Tinos, Rhodos, Santorini, Syros en Chios.

“Caritas Hellas coordinates operations in emergencies, implements social work and advocates for a better and fairer world for all people.”

<https://caritas.gr/en/our-work-en/>



## **Greek Council for Refugees (Athens)**

The Greek Council for Refugees is a Non- Governmental Organization, which has been active since 1989 in the field of asylum and human rights in Greece. It was founded by Hari Brissimi and 20 more people aiming to defend the rights of refugees in Greece.

Hari Brissimi was the first woman in charge of an international organization as she was the Director of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva.

On a daily basis, GCR welcomes and offers free legal and social advice and services to refugees and people coming from third countries who are entitled to international protection in our country, while special emphasis is put on vulnerable cases, such as unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking etc. The ultimate goal is their protection and their smooth integration in our country.

<https://www.gcr.gr/en/our-work/who-we-are>

## **Synparxis -Ecumenical Refugee Programme (Athens)**



'Integration Centre for Migrant Workers-Ecumenical Refugee Program (KSPM-ERP)' is a non-profit organization of the Church of Greece founded on July of 2012 as the successor of the Integration Centre for Migrant Workers which had been operating as an office of the Holy Synod of

the Church of Greece since 1978, aiming initially at socially and financially supporting the reintegration of Greek returnees from German-speaking countries.

Ever since the 1990s, when migrants and refugees started flowing into Greece, the Integration Centre for Migrant Workers extended its scope to providing services to asylum seekers and refugees by founding a new office, the Ecumenical Refugee Program.

On 2/3/2021 the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, following a proposal by the Steering Committee of our Center, approved the change of the name to Synyparxis – Ecumenical Refugee Programme.

[www.kspm-erp.com](http://www.kspm-erp.com)

[www.facebook.com/SYNYPARXIS.ERP/](https://www.facebook.com/SYNYPARXIS.ERP/)

## 6. Previous church Statements on Greece

### **Visit of Pope Francis to Greece** (December 2021)

Pope Francis on Lesbos: Stop this shipwreck of civilization

The Pope on Sunday visited the Reception and Identification Centre of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos.

While there, he heard the testimonies of migrants, and told those present migration is a humanitarian crisis that concerns everyone.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-12/pope-francis-on-lesbos-stop-this-shipwreck-of-civilization.html>

On Saturday December 4, 2021, at 6.45 p.m., at the conclusion of the first day of his apostolic journey to Greece, Pope Francis returned to the Nunciature, where waiting for him was a group of seven of the nine Jesuits working in Greece, that is, the members of the Athens community.

When they were seated in a circle, a spontaneous conversation began that lasted an hour.

<https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-logic-of-the-inexplicable-pope-francis-in-conversation-with-the-jesuits-of-greece/>

### **CCME - Let us save another million vulnerable people** (October 2021)

The extraordinary General Assembly of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) has issued a message “Together we can save a million vulnerable humans in Europe again!” The assembly was held 14 to 16 October 2021.

The message calls on European institutions, citizens and churches across Europe to protect a million of the most vulnerable refugees and migrants by bringing them to Europe.

<https://www.ceceurope.org/ccme-together-we-can-save-a-million-vulnerable-humans-again/>

### **Give asylum policy a soul, even in the longer term** (September 2021)

Rev. René de Reuver: It goes without saying that the Dutch government is now doing everything it can to generously evacuate Afghans to the Netherlands. That is good, but I hope and expect that the Dutch government will be able to transform this acute generosity into long-term and fundamental mercy toward people seeking safety.

<https://www.protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/geef-het-asielbeleid-een-ziel-ook-op-langere-termijn/>

### **Protestant Church disappointed with government Greece deal** (September 11, 2020)

The reception of 50 minor refugees and 50 people in families with minor children decided by the cabinet on Thursday, September 10, is good news only for these 100 people. "It offers no prospect of a solution for the thousands of migrants who were displaced from Camp Moria by the massive fire and urgently need a safe place," said Jurjen de Groot, Director of Kerk in Actie. "The fire shows once again that we cannot leave the asylum approach at the border of Europe to Greece, but must tackle it together. Disappointing that the government does not want to take steps here."

<https://www.protestantsekerk.nl/nieuws/protestantse-kerk-teleurgesteld-over-griekenland-deal-coalitie/>

## 7. Some articles on refugees in Greece

### **Rev. Alke Liebich worked for three months in a refugee camp**

<https://www.protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/ds-alke-liebich-werkte-drie-maanden-in-een-vluchtelingenkamp/>

"Through a German-Greek ecumenical aid organization, I was able to work in a drop-in house for girls and young women in the fall of 2020, just outside the camp on the outskirts of Thessaloniki.

Our house was open every afternoon except Saturday. Fortunately, the drop-in center was able to stay open during the pandemic. However, there was always a police van in front of the door to make sure that there weren't too many people inside."

### **NGOs raise alarm at growing hunger amongst refugees and asylum Seekers in Greece**

Refugees International, [November 29, 2021](#).

A halt to cash assistance for asylum seekers, and the denial of food support to recognized refugees and rejected asylum seekers is creating a hunger crisis in Greece, warn 27 NGOs and civil society organizations.

"The women in Eleonas camp keep telling us that their children are crying at night with hunger. Mothers now don't have money for baby milk so they mush up cookies in water instead." said Emily Wilson of Project Elea. One chronically ill father of three children from Afghanistan, said "If I don't eat it's fine but I can't leave my babies hungry".

### **7 questions about the failed EU-Turkey deal**

<https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/nl/artikelen/nieuws/7-vragen-over-de-mislukte-eu-turkijedeal>

Refugee News 10 March 2020

Refugee boats shelled at sea in recent days, aid workers trapped in a car for hours as they were besieged by right-wing extremists, and a police force that locks down the border in Greece with tear gas and barricades.

A humanitarian disaster is currently unfolding in the Greek islands and on the border with Turkey. A crisis within a crisis, caused by the EU-Turkey deal. 7 questions.

### **On a shield to Europe**

The disaster in the Greek capital is possibly even bigger than on Lesbos.

[Ingeborg Beugel](#) February 3, 2021 - published in De Groene, [no. 5](#).

'Do you remember the beginning of February last year? I'll never forget it,' Evropy scolds, an Athenian yoga teacher who has been tirelessly volunteering with refugees in the city center for years. Refugee families who could no longer cope with the horror of Greek reception camps in Attica had broken out and set up successful living communities with local activists. Children attended schools nearby. Men



worked as modern slaves. Women did the housework, planted vegetable gardens. They had built a minimally dignified existence.

Right-wing Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, winner of the July 2019 elections, evacuated all squatter homes between August and December. Parents and children were lifted from their beds at gunpoint, had to watch as the front doors were bricked up before their eyes - slowly the children's drawings on the walls of the entrance halls disappeared behind bricks and cement - were forced into buses that drove the families to various camps in all corners of Hellas. Military helicopters flapped as if in a scene from *Apocalypse Now* over the squatter district of Exarchia. Families that had formed close-knit communities were torn apart, Greek parents demanding that their children's refugee friends go back to school were ignored.

Now Evropy works with families on the street, corona or not. She is dead tired, because the families and singles with status and nothing else, also without money to eat, gather in the center. The disaster in the Greek capital is, if possible, even bigger than on Lesbos.

Evropy roars through the phone. 'After Brussels had cut my country to pieces for ten years, had taunted and spat on us for a decade because we were lazy tax-dodging freeloaders, EU Commissioner for Asylum and Migration Ylva Johansson suddenly praised Greece as "the shield of Europe," the brave border country protecting Europe from the invasion of unwanted aliens. Remember?" she chokes up in anger. Since then, Greece has been allowed to violate human rights with impunity, to do illegal push-backs, to let 120,000 people and children die in refugee camps.

Last night, a refugee washed up on a wooden shield on Chios, Evropy says. 'Too small to be noticed by the coast guard. On a shield! I check, it's true. The man cobbled together a raft on a Turkish beach. But Evropy calls it a shield.

The number of dead and missing in the Mediterranean counted in 2021 according to the Missing Migrants Project (IOM): 105

See also: <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/drijfspartelen-naar-het-turkse-strand>;  
Journalist Ingeborg Beugel confronts Mitsotakis and Rutte with lies

UNHCR- UN Refugee Agency warns of increasing violence and human rights violations at European borders  
<https://www.unhcr.org/nl/2022/02/toenemend-geweld-mensenrechtenschendingen-aan-europese-grenzen>  
/ Femke Joordens, Mon Feb 21, 2022

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is deeply concerned about the increasing number of violent incidents and serious human rights violations against refugees and migrants at several European borders. These regularly lead to tragic loss of life. Violence, ill-treatment and pushback continue to be regularly reported at multiple land and sea borders, within and outside the European Union (EU), despite repeated calls from UN agencies, including UNHCR, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs to end such practices. [...]

## 8. Photo attachment



Thessaloniki - Hassan at work in the studio of NAOMI



Thessaloniki - Geert van Dartel receives the photo book made by the girls of the photography workshop



Camp Schisto Athens - The Syrian Hamad in the doorway of the container where he is staying with seven other family members



Athens - Food distribution point of Apostoli



Athens - Garden in the room of one of the boys in the Synyparxis shelter



Athens - Reception by Archbishop Ieronymos II

## 9. Letter of Synyparxis thanking the delegation for visiting



# SYNYPARXIS

Athens, 29/03/2022

Dear Geert,

Dear Cristine,

Thank you so much for your letter.

Your kind words, your genuine interest and compassion have touched us deeply and filled us with strength and optimism to continue our mission.

On behalf of the Church of Greece and our President, Metropolitan of Ilion Athenagoras, I would like to extend once more our sincerest and most heartfelt thanks to you and all the members of your delegation for your visit to Greece and our organization.

When, a few years ago, I was appointed by the Holy Synod as the Director and legal representative of SYNYPARXIS, committed as I might have been, I could not have imagined neither the range and magnitude of the challenges that laid ahead nor, however, the fulfillment and satisfaction I would receive by putting into practice the evangelical words of supporting our brothers and sisters in need regardless of race or religion.

I can assure you that our organization, the heart of which is our dedicated and experienced professionals, is doing everything within its power to provide the best possible support to refugees and migrants and especially unaccompanied minors. The difficulties and challenges, as we've discussed and as you very aptly mention in your letter, are various and complicated, however we feel that it's our duty as humans and as Christians to not be overwhelmed by them.

We believe that by working together, we can make a difference and keep the hope for a better future alive.

Your encouragement and support are definitely very much appreciated and we are always at your disposal for exploring ways of cooperation to promote our mutual goals.

God bless you!

Yours in Christ

Arch. Panteleimon Papasynefakis

General Director



SYNYPARXIS - ECUMENICAL REFUGEE PROGRAMME - NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE  
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