

01/06/2021

"Refugee Cityscape", a project with GCR (Greek Refugee Council) | Oct. 2020 - May 2021

Here you can watch the final video (in Greek): <https://youtu.be/e-vALLniOK0>

05/06/2021



I cannot believe that the camp in which we were going a couple of years every day, where we knew every stone and every corner is now surrounded by a wall. First the busses did not stop there anymore so that residents could not meet easily with locals in the city center, now locals even cannot see them behind the wall. This is the Greek and European way to treat people who seek asylum.

Pictures: www.alterthess.gr

11/06/2021

When I am calling the families for the distribution, I heard so many times "Asylum office?", because I am calling from a landline. So much hope everytime. And disappointment.

The daughter speaks Greek and said: "look at my mom. Where can she go?" The mother lifted her mask and a swollen cheek appeared. Since 2 weeks they have to leave their house, no money for the mother of 2 and obviously that pain did not begin today.



Luckily I have a friend who is a dentist and still have donations. He will see her this afternoon.

"You know work for me?" she asked and I replied that it is not so easy in Greece. "For me easy. I like work. Me learn Greek easy."

Maybe it's better to overrate oneself but to have hope.



01/07/2021

From today on asylum seekers who are not living in a camp structure (poor places with in many cases now a concrete wall around), will lose their financial support.

Last year the government already decided not to give any support for those who already have asylum in Greece and let many

people homeless and in desperate situations.

From today on the situation in Greece will be even worse than it has become over the years.

From today on more men, women, families don't have food, clothes, money for the doctor, so cannot cover their basic needs.

This will affect especially refugee in the 2 big towns Athens and Thessaloniki, where people are not - as they are on the islands - forced to live in a camp, but if relatives sent money could stay in an apartment. And could feel a little more like a human being.

Dignity disappears a bit more in Greece.

The rest of the European Union doesn't care.

They should.

I don't know the exact numbers, but recognized refugees are leaving this situation, trying to get as quick as possible their passport and go to other European countries, applying there again for asylum.

For them wasted time.

For the countries soon a problem.

#EuropeMustAct

20/07/2021

Donations...

...are things that you would still use, that you would give to your children or to your beloved ones.

...everything else is "giving things away" or "getting rid of things".

(That's what I thought when I tried to sort out this bag full of mixed s*** that stole my time today.)



23/07/2021

Whenever I meet people who left their home when they have been 15, 16 or even younger and made it then to some point, I feel...

...well, what do I feel?

Sadness, thankfulness, anger, shame... a lot of shame. No one should grow up displaced. Nor unaccompanied.

And all I can tell them within all the feelings is: "you managed so many difficulties in your life, you can reach whatever you want."

26/07/2021

Everyone is tired.

Refugees in inhumane camps. In the streets. Without support. In danger of losing their home. Again.

Employees in organisations. "I am payed to help, but I cannot do enough." - "I had kind of a burnout last year." - "I like to work in that field, but it is so difficult.", I am listening...

Volunteers. Too long. Tiredness and exhaustion. And disappointment. I see. I am experiencing...

There is no end in sight. It is crystal clear: governments don't want to end or improve the situation.

Everyone is tired. From the situation. From migration politics.



27/07/2021

We had a discussion about the current numbers of refugees. As every summer many people don't stay very long in Thessaloniki, begin their way north and try to make it to Europe.

"And in general less people are coming to Greece due to the border-/Frontex-/pushback-situation", I added.

After a pause he said "They are coming, but

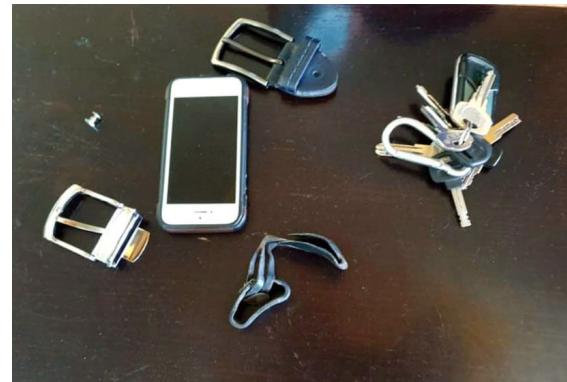
they are not arriving".

First I thought I had used the wrong verb in Greek, but then I understood: Yes. They are coming. But they cannot arrive because the illegal push-backs take place every day. At sea and on the land borders.

09/08/2021

Refugees in Greece don't get support. So they even steal from each other. A friend of us lost that way his phone. The guys who stole his phone maybe got 5€ for it, for him it was the loss of all his saved papers etc. For us it is again the challenge to find money to finance the new mobile and time to help to restore the data.

People are not bad when they are born. People begin to steal when they are in desperate situations.



11/08/2021

When I am walking through the streets, when I am going for different reasons to various organisations, I experience many times that men or women recognize me and



greet me friendly. Many times I don't remember the person at all, or I have only a vague idea from when and where I know him/her.

It is not that I don't look at them, not that every face under a hijab looks the same for me. But during the years I met so many people, I gave so many clothes, foodstuff, pampers, sleeping bags etc. etc. to people, had so many conversations, heard so many stories, tried so often to understand the few words in English or Greek.

Whenever I meet people during solidarity activities, I really feel what I try to do: That the person in front of me is for that moment the most important person in the world for me.

Unfortunately after so many hundreds and thousands of encounters I am not able to remember every man and every woman.

Until now I did not find myself in embarrassing situations, I always could compensate it. Phew.

15/08/2021

There are all the afghan men, women and families I am thinking these days. Already in a difficult situation as asylum seekers or recognized refugee in Greece. Now with the fear what is happening with their relatives and friends they have left in Afghanistan...

All the men I met during the last years who worked for foreigners as translators and who made it out of the country, but so many of their colleagues could not make it and are now more than ever in danger...

It needs a safe passage now and urgent for those and for those working in human-/women's right. "For the world afghan life doesn't matter" a friend wrote me today. She and her little daughter are safe. Her family in Kabul isn't.



16/08/2021



It was strange today to see and meet Afghans. Wondering which people they have in their mind that are less safe than ever in their home country. Wondering how they can after leaving their country, after being on the flee, after being treated in Greece as they are treated... how after all these experiences and the news of the last days they still can get up every morning and trying to survive every day, getting food, shelter, clothes - and peace.

Picture translation: "We want peace"



10/09/2021

„How is the situation now“, she asked. She has been in Thessaloniki and Lesvos four years ago with a group, observing projects with and for refugees. “Well, actually it’s worse than 2017”, I answered, leaving her shocked. “You cannot find anything in the newspapers or the news in Germany”, she said, proving what we know: Other countries are not really interested in what is happening

in Greece.

To be honest, although I am glad if someone from abroad is interested, I am very tired of telling again and again how the situation is, how the government acts, how Europe doesn’t act.

11/09/2021

“We just finished. 55 families came to take fruits, vegetables and foodstuff. We are exhausted.”

In the morning I had packed rice and lentils in small bags and oil in small glasses.

A group went as every Saturday at the market and collected fruits and vegetables.

All morning long people came to ask for “tickets” for the distribution.

Until the evening the distribution took place.

So much work. Voluntary work. Solidarity work.

Of course everyone is exhausted.



12/09/2021

“Maybe we just stop the food- and clothes- distributions”, he said, after he said sorry for not helping me cutting vegetables that have been left after the market on Saturday and that I was cutting this Sunday for the next cooking of solidarity meals.

We are tired of organising, of doing, of never having enough volunteers and

money and as a result not enough items for all the people who are coming to ask for help. After so many years everyone of the few people we are is tired: To ask people for money, to stand in front of unsatisfied people, to upload posts on social media, to ask people to help, to do and to do.

“If we don’t have enough money to buy new stuff and if we will not have enough help, we will not continue and we will focus on all the other topics that we neglected over

the last years because we have been too busy with the solidarity activities", we said. Not happy with it, but a logical consequence.

15/09/2021

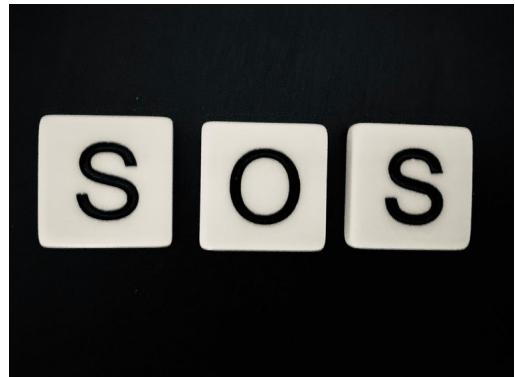
What is solidarity?

If everyone sometimes somehow does something for the community in order to have everyone included in the community.

Thus to implement solidarity people who share the same interests and goals are needed.

We need people!

People who act!



"To act" can be so varied. It can be to give time, money, awareness.

We ask you

To share what we are doing – and to share it with people who are able to support us with money, because this is the base of our solidarity activities.

To find donations (money, food, and hygiene materials).

To come and help us on a regular basis so we can count on you.

We believe in solidarity. We know that solidarity is the only way.

And we want to continue to believe in solidarity.

For that we need people who share with us the same interests and goals.

If we don't have these people, if we do not have money, we cannot continue.



19/09/2021

There is the one side:

How desperate are people to come in the morning to take a „ticket“ to come in the afternoon to take a few vegetables and fruits. It is so important that we find again and again possibilities to support all these people.

There is the other side:

How desperate must we be after all these years with always new people who don't know that we are volunteers, spending our spare time with organising donations and sharing them with people in need, who don't speak Greek or English, who treat us not very nice and who are sometimes aggressive enough that we are thinking to stop our solidarity activities.

There are both sides.

And it is uncertain how we will continue.



20/09/2021

The food- and clothes distribution on Monday:

...“Next week I take ID and then Germany. I need jacket. This no good quality for Germany.” – we are the outfitter for those leaving for Germany?

...“Madame and children ok. No clothes.” – later I learned that he is living alone and just lied to take more foodstuff.

...Asked which clothes they are looking for, they replied “women and women” – two girls from a big family. I gave them some sanitary towels extra.

... 2 families that did not appear at all.

Monday.

22/09/2021

The food- and clothes distribution on Tuesday:

...“My wife later another appointment” – no idea if he lied to me in order to get more foodstuff or if they really live separated.

...“My wife is in hospital and I am alone with the 3 children, 2, 3 and 4 years old.” I did not find out, but I think I understand that she is in hospital to give birth to the fourth child. No words.

...“How old are the children?” – “3 children.” – “Yes, but how old? One year, three years...?” – “3 children.” – “girls or boys?” – “3 children.” – I am tired...

...A father coming with three girls from 5 to 8. I give them toys. They want to draw. I give them papers and pens. Before they leave I empty their pockets: They took all the glue, pens and sweets they could find. The father said “no worries” when I took everything back.

... A family that did not understand and could not read what I wrote on their „ticket“, that they had their appointment yesterday

Tuesday



22/09/2021

The food- and clothes distribution on Wednesday:

...“Can I have this bag instead of the transparent one? I will not go directly at home, I will go to the city center, you understand?” – he asked so nice and I understood his need to feel like a normal citizen and not as a refugee in need.

...“I live with my mother, with father and mein Bruder” – I don't know where the German “my brother” came from, but actually she was speaking about her husband.

...the last family was a mother who came with two girls. Her sons are from the first marriage and older. She was so carefully with the clothes and she speaks already a bit

Greek. So do the girls, both so nice and unbelievable polite. The older one, 11 years old, asked me very shy and very soft in Greek: "Can I please have some of the crayons because I really love to draw." – I am so lucky we had a package with good quality crayons I could give her and she was so happy.

Wednesday



23/09/2021

We know each other since the time in Idomeni camp 2016.

A couple of years later we both knew a little Greek.

Yesterday we met the first time after a long while and both of us have a life now in Greece with a home, friends, some work, things we have and want to do. And we speak both quite well Greek now.

„Isn't it amazing how you managed it to

build your life from zero?“ I asked him. „From under Zero, from less than Zero“, he replied.

„No one can understand that who did not begin a new life somehow somewhere“ he completed.

He can be so proud.

And with him I saw that also I can be a bit proud of what I managed the last four years.

24/09/2021

I don't know why, but for some reason I wanted to see the place again where I spent so much time in Summer 2015: that part of the main station in Munich where I said so often „welcome“, „you want water?“, „please wait here.“ etc.

The main station is in the state of renovation, everywhere work, machinery and equipment, and this part will, as I am informed, not survive the transformation to the new station.

Somehow I wanted to see it yesterday - if only from far - to close this chapter also somehow.



01/10/2021

She has been announced by another organisation, so I packed some foodstuff for the next day.

When I arrived at the building she was already to leave, but she recognised me (I guess she came for some other distributions). So we had a short conversation at the elevator. If I can give her pampers, she asked me, and I gave her the paper for the Day Center where she can ask for it. But clothes I could give her right now, I said, and so we ended up almost one hour at our clothing store and I heard her story:



She never knew what the Taliban are when she was a child. She grew up in these 20 years in Herat when it was a bit safer. Her father worked later for the US military and so she got to know the Taliban, because they killed her father and the family had to leave the country. They went – as so many Afghans did over the decades – to Iran, where her mother and the younger brother are still living. She showed me her teeth, broken by the Iranians because she tried to get some bread for the family. That's why she also left Iran.

"Where shall we go?" she said. "In Afghanistan we are Hazara and they hate us because we are no "good" muslims, in Iran we are Afghan and we are worth nothing, here we are refugees and we don't have

anything."

Her older brother tries to get to Europe, tried it already many times at the Bosnian-Croatian border. Also impossible to find that way a life in dignity.

"Sorry" she said when she left with the clothes, a ball for her daughter and a teddybear that I guess she will keep to comfort herself, "I spoke too much."

And from the deep of my heart I could tell her that it was more than ok.

03/10/2021

All these years supporting refugees has been saying „sorry we don't have...“

We stopped for several reasons the collection and distribution of fruits and vegetables. On Saturday it was up to me to tell the people who came to ask for it that we don't have something for them.

Disappointment, anger, incomprehension, despair... I saw many feelings.

Mine?

Well, we are so used to say „sorry, we don't have...“



06/10/2021

We met at a corner, she on her way to work, me on my way to an appointment. We know each other from an organization where she used to work as an interpreter. She is 38 now, she told me when I said that she is still so young, "16 years I am now in Greece. I think they should give me an award that I stayed here and did not leave." I agreed, we laughed (and I asked if she knows where I can make that note to give her that award).

When she said "I am so tired of answering the "Where are you from and why do you speak Greek so well?"" and I could feel her, I saw that every passer-by that came along

and heard us, stared at us: A hijab-wearing woman and another obviously with an accent-speaking woman in a conversation in Greek. Not often to see / to hear because most refugees don't want to stay and never learn the language. I agree. She should have an award!



08/10/2021

She was looking for clothes for the children of a friend. With a videocall she showed what she had chosen. I hope SOMETHING will fit.

...before 3 people with no English at all. It is so difficult. So exhausting. One woman who forgot 2 of the cards she had for the 10 members of her family and who has been desperate until I brought them back to her. I am so sad for the people who are in that situation. And so sad for us that this work is so unsatisfying and not at all fulfilling as people in Europe maybe think.

Winter is coming. I hope we will make it the next weeks when everyone will come to change the wardrobe to winter.

10/10/2021

We wrote a text, translated it in arabic and farsi and put it on the wall. We wanted to let the people know that we are not a big NGO, that we are volunteers and that it is not easy to find and organise donations. Yesterday we began to give this paper to everyone who is asking for something and asked them to read it. Suddenly, when I saw one woman reading, I realised why the last weeks no one read it: She stood in front of the paper and with her finger she followed every letter to read the text like a schoolchild. It took her very long. Really long.

So many people cannot read - even not in their mother tongue. Especially women. Will her 7 children who are growing up in a camp learn to read (in which language ever)?

What a world...



15/10/2021

These children... born as a refugee, lying in their prams (if they exist), crying all the time and being not heard by the parents. The parents always have more other children with them, they have to organise food, clothes and a home for the family and cannot listen to every sound the children are doing.

I always give them a toy to break their crying, but I never have the time or the ambition to stay longer than a few minutes with them.

- I am always in between „they will survive it“ and „it is unbearable“.



16/10/2021

It is this moment when a woman from a family of 4 takes 5 T-Shirts that are new ones.

I don't know, how can I - but it is the moment when we think they will sell it.

I know she has a difficult life, I really know that in these situations everyone just tries to get through - but we cannot accept it.

The situation is difficult for those asking for help, but also for those who are trying to give help.

17/10/2021

„You have 5 more minutes. Then finish! Because if not you will drive me crazy!“

... a friend during the clothes distribution.

I feel him.



23/10/2021

When people say to me "and thank you for..." (the bag, the food, the shampoo, the vegetables, the...) - it is not me, Verena, who gives them whatever. Maybe I give it, but I do it in the framework of a project, of an organisation, of a structure, of a network of people. It is not ME. It is US!!

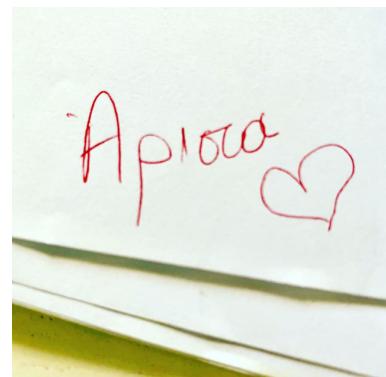
WE give it.

And this is no understatement, this is the reality.

27/10/2021

She began another Greek class for refugees. I met her when it was finished today. „How was it?“ I asked her. „Aaaa, Greek is such a difficult language“ - „You tell ME??“, I laughed. „Well, as difficult as German.“

... I was thinking of all these people all these years who tell us that they don't have to learn Greek because after getting asylum and their passports they will go to Germany. I know they will not learn the language good



enough to get a good job or to build a future or to help their children at school. As long as they don't have asylum (how can they with Dublin III?), no one will pay for their language courses. Alone? It is - as she said - a difficult language.

I am happy about every woman and every man who decides to learn Greek! They are very brave because - it is a difficult language.

30/10/2021



I can speak, present and discuss in four european languages. I am so interested in people and groups and activities and the common ideas and the different cultures. I like that we have the infrastructure, the skills and the willing to help people in our city, and that we are doing it with the help of different people. I am thankful that we are so flexible and quick and can improvise and can make people happy with that.

This - and more - we did today.

Maybe "and more".

P.S.: just sitting here and waiting for my ordered food

31/10/2021

When we have groups who visit the place and want to hear about our solidarity or ecological activities, it is very often me who does the presentations. I like to do it, I love to meet people from all over Europe and elsewhere.

"Thank you for your work" we hear often. And I hear „thank you for being so passionate in what you are doing.“

I began to think about it. Passionate. Hmm. Yes, I guess I am. I guess I cannot do something only a bit. When I am doing whatever, I try to do it as good as possible. Is it German thoroughness, is it my lack of self-care or is it that I really need to love something to do it? I don't know. I know that I like it when people give me that feedback because it means that they took a bit of my passion with them in their lives and in their work.

We need people who recognise passion! We need people who are passionate in what they do!



05/11/2021



She has 3 children, one of them with development delay and special needs. As many other Nigerians in Thessaloniki she doesn't speak Greek and since a while she is unemployed. After a conversation for which she came, she approached me and asked me with a silent voice something I did not understand. She didn't want to make us know what she did then. When I understood the question "you always had a box for donations for refugees, where is it now?" she put a note in it and left the place - leaving us speechless.



06/11/2021

The problem is and will always be how to steer how many people are coming. An organisation sends a woman - and next week she brings 2 friends, the other week 5 more. And none of them with only one word English or Greek. It is good to give away the fruits and vegetables that we are collecting, it doesn't make sense to have them still at the end of the day. But it is difficult to have so many women standing in front of the

place with all the children and their „5 babies, no money“ (no, not always in English, but we heard it so many times, we understand it also in Farsi or Arabic). 23 families we could support yesterday, many of them lovely people.

07/11/2021

If I could help him, he asked me. I know him from my congregation and he tries since many years to get his wife from an African country to Greece where he has to renew his residence permit every couple of years. He is very shy and sometimes he asks me for foodstuff and then he is coming and I give him what we have.

I know he only asks me when he is really in need.

"You want also sugar?", "No, I still have from last time when you gave me some.", "But this is 2 months ago.", "No worries, I don't need".

So I knew, he was really in trouble.

What a blessing that I have donations and could help immediately. Thank you everyone who supports what we are doing here, people who need clothes, food - or some money for a lawyer.



09/11/2021

"They are from the country without thank you. They took half of Oikopolis and left without any thanks."

I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. I laughed, it was more relieving.

Yes, there are many people coming from that „country“. Unfortunately.

11/11/2021

After Lesvos and the sea route, I saw today the first time the borders to Turkey on the landroute. Even though I have a European passport, I did not feel comfortable that hour before the sunset, so I turned the car to go back...

Borders are so random and ephemeral. And they killed already so many people



13/11/2021

Somehow it is funny to see people who give the first time food to refugees. They feel so great 😊

(I decided today that I will not do the clothes distribution anymore. I cannot anymore, I don't want anymore, I don't want to feel what I feel when I am doing it.)

18/11/2021

Of course I feel guilty.

“E... relax!!“ a friend said.

So I try to relax and to enjoy the feeling when I say to people who come for clothes „you have to wait“ because I decided 5 days ago not to do the clothes distribution anymore after all these years.

I feel relieved when I see the clothes now. Or the people. And only a little guilty today.



20/11/2021

There is a list of people we have in cooperation with other organisations in order to avoid difficult people. The others could take today cooked food and we gave them bags with what we had a lot.

To get vegetables, people are lying to us, are shouting and scolding, they are explaining us their difficult situation.

Some of them accept the situation. Others don't.

One even came back to throw the bags with the vegetables in front of our door to show us how much she despises us.

Nothing to add.

21/11/2021

I hate the situation we are in.

We don't have enough to give. We don't have enough people who have the courage to do the distributions without getting burned-out.

People begin to tell lies, people are getting angry, disappointed.

I want to believe what they say, but so many times they don't say the truth, they learned that a lie („this is my sister“, „I am living in the camp and there is no bus later so I cannot wait“, „I am coming from xy organisation“) is helping them.

I want to be like the volunteers who only come a couple of times. I want to feel sorry every time for everyone. I do. In a way. But I also learned to see that the situation is as it is: we don't have enough to give and we don't have enough people.

And people will not do that voluntarily work if people are throwing bags with food in front of our door because they are angry that they don't get more or they have to wait...

Everyone hates the situation. Especially those who expected something else when they seeked asylum in Europe.



24/11/2021

There are people who heard me once reading from my texts about the situation with refugees in Greece. And since then they support us. There are people supporting us every month, others from time to time. Like this woman who every year before Christmas and Easter she sends me a message and tells me that she and the other ladies crafted some things and will sell them at church. And then she sends us the money.

I cannot tell her how much this means to me and to us. It is not only the money, it is the thought and the solidarity.

I am every time very moved.

People say „we cannot do so much“, but they are doing more than they can imagine. It is not about a huge amount of money. It is about the feeling they give us: we are with you. We appreciate your work. You are not alone there.

26/11/2021

Wherever you go in Greece you see some old stones. Wherever you go - if you open your eyes - you also face the refugee issue.

Yesterday I went with a friend for a trip to see some nature, some sea, some archaeological sites. Our first stop has been close to where a refugee camp has been. And on our walk there have been a lot of traces. I see the UNHCR blankets and I see stories. See them and see men, women and children. See their eyes, their



needs, their despair, their hopes to get asylum and to go to Germany. Their traumatic experiences and their strengths, their weakness and their hopelessness.

I wanted to have a day off. I asked my friend to leave the place.

We left and went on to some old stones...



27/11/2021

Distribution I

There is that little boy who is after almost 3 years since we are supporting him and his mother not little anymore but 12 years old.

Sometimes we are losing them, the mother has work and cannot come and they are too polite and shy to ask for an alternative day to come.

He goes to school and speaks Greek, the mother tries and is also able to communicate very well.

Whenever they come - and especially after a break - the boy runs to me and hugs me. I always want to find something special to give him, today we were checking the soccer shoes, but we could not find in his size. I guess next week I will just have some sweets at the side.

"As you call into a forest, so is the echo" is a German proverb. I guess here it fits.

Distribution II

She comes since years to the distributions. She cannot hear. Her Greek is not well. With the masks it is not easier. But what she wanted to tell me today I understood easily: she remembered that I don't like at all the quinces. And that over the last years every winter I made compote which is not easy to make and which I don't even like to try afterwards. She took a lot of them and we laughed together.



02/12/2021

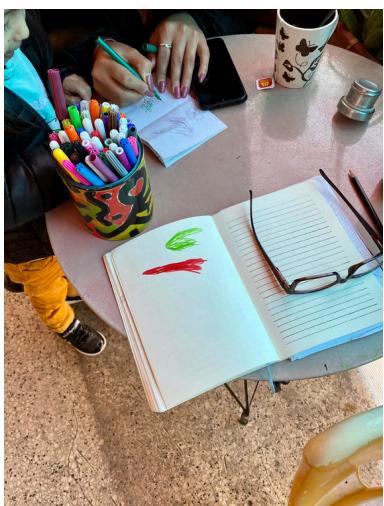
If refugees in Greece don't get asylum they have to leave the country.

If refugees in Greece have asylum they don't get any support anymore (help with the housing, any money, any support).

If refugees in Greece are waiting for their asylum decision they have to stay in a camp, otherwise they don't get any support.

- imagine!

Actually everyone who seeks for asylum in Greece is in need.
That's why we are tired and that's why we cannot stop doing what we are doing.



04/12/2021

It is so beautiful when the refugee children begin to go to school and learn Greek. We can communicate, we have a common language.

Like the little girl that has today her 4th birthday and that came with her mother, who is helping us from time to time, yesterday.

She is very shy at the beginning but I remember other times when she appreciated that I am letting her time and space to adapt. And so there came the moment when she got in contact with me and was drawing in my notebook.

She begins to write her name and we discovered that her and my name have only 2 differences.

Moments like that fill my heart with joy. So rare are these beautiful moments when there is time, when there is a common language. When there is a good moment together that gives hope for the future.

14/12/2021

We are running a place that is known for solidarity activities. But also for ecological activities. We are running both at the moment. Many people (refugees, migrants, locals in needs) are asking for food, for clothes, for everything. We are aware of the climate crisis. Not many volunteers are coming regularly. Sometimes it seems the best to close the place and to get finally some rest from all the activities. But maybe the best is to keep the place open, to find the courage every day again to encourage other people to join us and to make the world a little bit a better place. "We must keep the hope alive" we said today. And we will do exactly that, hoping we can inspire again and again a couple of people to do the same in these somehow hopeless times.



20/12/2021

We got some coupons for supermarkets. What a perfect gift for four families who came yesterday to take some cooked food we got from a restaurants. What a wonderful surprise for these migrant families who will now have the opportunity to buy some stuff for Christmas. Who can buy what they want for 20€ and not what we give them. I was very happy and gave them on top a little tag



21/12/2021

There is that woman that is collecting money for us since 3 years, since I have been in the little town in Franconia, Germany with my texts about refugees in Thessaloniki.

They are crafting stuff on Christmas and Easter and sell them at the local church.

"This year we took 83 Euro. We have been happy about it, as the church visitors this year have been manageable", she wrote me.

"We will top up the amount up to 100 and will send it tomorrow. I read to the other women some posts, I informed them and they are glad, first of all because we know that the money goes straight to the people and there are no administrative expenses as big organisations have it. God willing we will do again something in spring."

I am very thankful for that initiative. Thankful for the money and thankful for the thoughts, the solidarity, the connection we have since years now.

Picture: Ingrid Tretter

25/12/2021

In Greece, a seafarer nation, it is a tradition to decorate boats. The last years the tradition came back and the Christmas trees have - at least in my city, the 2nd largest city of Greece, Thessaloniki - beside it decorated boats.

I learned about that tradition in my 2nd year after I moved to Greece and wanted to have for Christmas also a boat. It was then impossible to find one and so I made a little cardboard one that I put since then on Christmas beside my little Christmas tree.

In Germany the Christmas tree is decorated during the 24th of December and when it's getting dark in the afternoon the candles are lightened and Christmas begins.

This year - as so many years before - on Christmas Eve many refugees tried to reach Europe. To reach Greece by boat. Do they think border police is celebrating Christmas and is not so alert? Was the weather fine?

I don't know.

I don't know because 24th and 25th of December are the rare days I try not to think about refugees and the situation we are in in Greece. I tried yesterday and today not to think about the people who are freezing at the Polish-Belarus borders. At the Croatian- Bosnian, to list only the coldest European borders at the moment, December 2021.

I needed a 2-days-break in order to have the energy from tomorrow on again.

The little boat reminds me that Greece is a seafarer nation. That it's not the people, the fisherman who are doing the pushbacks to Turkey. That the Greek people are a welcoming country. A people who knows about diaspora, about being a nation without a country. It reminds me that Christ is born in a stable and is the one who is



with those who suffer. Who knows about cold and being on the flee from his first moments of life.

The little boat reminds me that Jesus is born for us and that he came to bring peace and not borders. That he came to give also me the energy I am losing sometimes but that I need in order to continue together with all the other people in this country to help the people who are living not even in stables, but in the streets, in camps and in inhumane situations.

The boat beside my little tree and the native place I got 25 years ago from my parents-in-law reminds me that we are humans. And that we should act like humans. As fisherman or as whatever our profession is.



27/12/2021

Walking through the city today, the guys working for UNHCR asked me as so often if I have a minute. They want donations and although I am glad for the guys that they have a job I am getting every time so angry: collecting donations for refugees in a city where so many people donate and/or are volunteers because the big NGOs like UNHCR and the government don't help enough. It is a shame and I even don't reply, I just lift my eyebrows in order to say „no“.

It was ironic because I was on my way to meet a young man who is from Syria and is waiting since 7 years for asylum. Not the 6 months asylum that has to be renewed again and again and that has been refused one year ago, but real asylum.

„When Christmas is coming and then my birthday I get so sad: this year I will turn 30 and since I am 23 I am waiting to begin a life.“ he said.

I am sad for him too.

On the way home I did not walk along the UNHCR guys again.