



Testimonials



From MdM beneficiaries and health professionals



Μητέρα & Παιδί



MSD for mothers
Committed to Saving Lives

Table of Contents

Page

Disclaimer	3
Preface	4
MdM Greece Mission and Vision	5
Awards	6
Third Country Nationals – The Case of Greece	6
MdM Interventions to face the refugee-migrant crisis	7
Beneficiary Testimonials	8
“My travel – My story”	8
“Surviving”	9
“Everybody deserves to live decent life”	9
“Maybe there is hope”	10
“Maybe someday I will make it”	10
“They would kill me”	11
“Why are you doing this to me?”	11
“I must not give up”	12
“I want to make a new start”	13
“Sharing”	14
“War”	15
“I want to forget”	16
“God is testing me”	16
Healthcare Professionals Testimonials	18
“Gratitude”	18
“Thank you”	18
“A mother”	19
“It can’t possibly rain all the time”	19
“Family ties”	20
“When you feel that you don’t have a choice”	21
“A day as an interpreter”	22
“That smile”	23
“Multiple efforts to escape”	23

Disclaimer

The statements and positions presented in this document, mirror only the views and perspectives of project beneficiaries and do not represent opinions and statements by MdM Greece.

Preface

Doctors of the World – Greece is a humanitarian organization following its own path based on the particularities of Greece, and maintaining its economic and administrative independence. Operating continuously for the past 28 years it has earned a place in people's mind as a reliable and efficient organization promoting the sentiment of solidarity of the Greek society. With dozens of humanitarian aid missions in Greece and developing countries, Greek doctors, health workers, and administration staff offer their voluntary services. At the missions' field, MDM, maintaining their independence, both operationally and financially, organize, staff, and finance missions aiming to provide humanitarian aid to populations in need. MDM Greece, in difficult times of budgetary cutting for NGO's in Greece, have managed to expand their activities with limited funding, by promoting voluntary work via beguine planning, following accurate and transparent implementation standards. On alert...Doctors of the World are and always be on the alert, as they have all these years, to monitor closely, step by step, the developments. It is certain that, with the implementation of the right policy on health, we can achieve maximum sustainability in the healthcare system, and safeguard public health. Doctors of the World ...wherever people are...

MDM Greece Mission & Vision

Médecins du Monde Greece was established in 1990 and they constitute a unique Greek Organization. At the same time, however, they remain part of the International Network of MDM which consists of 15 chapters. The guiding principle underlying MDM's activities is that every human being has a right to humanitarian assistance, irrespective of their ethnic origin, religion, ideology or political persuasion. MDM are, therefore, guided by the principles of neutrality and impartiality. Being neutral, however, does not preclude MDM from speaking out. MDM fight injustice in all its forms. Constant defenders of human rights MDM object decisively to social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups. MDM rely on the commitment of volunteers and the financial support of its donors. The resources that emanate mainly from donations of individuals ensure the independence and the effectiveness of our action. Unfortunately, the recent severe financial conditions in Greece have led the Organization to the conclusion that activities within the country have to be intensified to meet the massive needs that have been created.

Awards

In 2016 MDM were awarded with the Superbands award as the most effective humanitarian organization in Greece. In 2014 the organization was awarded by the Academy of Athens for their contribution in promoting humanitarian care and social welfare in Greece. The Onassis Foundation instituted the Onassis International Award "Estia" in order to honor the remarkable social and groundbreaking initiative. The "Open Polyclinic" of Médecins du Monde won the award in 2009. Completing 27 years of continuous action, in 2017, MDM have been recognized to the conscience of the citizens as a reliable and effective organization which promotes the feelings of solidarity of the Greek society.

Third Country Nationals – The Case of Greece

Europe is currently facing the biggest wave of migration since the Second World War. This big-scale influx of refugee and migrant populations challenges the very cohesion, values and ideals of Europe and demands coordinated action between all its member states and the global community. More than 90% of the arrivals in Europe come from countries involved in wars and conflicts, such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Fleeing death, violence, oppression and persecution in their countries of origin, these people are desperate to reach the European continent and, in some cases, have found themselves in the need to risk their lives in doing so. Syrians represent the majority of the arrivals (55% of the arrivals in 2015 and 47% in 2016), as a result of a fierce civil conflict, which has ravaged their country since 2011. Greece is the main gateway to Europe, followed by Italy and Spain in the Mediterranean region. Refugees and migrants reach Greece both through its land border with Turkey in the North and, mainly, through the Greek-Turkish sea frontier in the Aegean. During 2015, almost one million refugees and migrants arrived in Greece, in their majority viewing Greece as their first stop and as a transit country towards their final destination to central and northern European states. Gradually and, especially, in February 2016 the situation on the borders along the Balkan migratory routes changed drastically, with a border clo-

sure, resulting in people being stranded in Northern Greece or more people being sent or trying to get back to Athens. Furthermore, the accommodation facilities which were initially created to serve temporary needs, have been used as permanent structures, hosting far larger numbers than they should. At the same time, the populations that were hosted in the islands were forwarded to mainland Greece, Attica, Central and Northern Greece, which resulted to the establishment of more accommodation sites, but also to the creation of unofficial settlements, such as the port of Piraeus and Victoria square. The 20 March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement had further significant consequences in the refugee crisis in Greece. According to this deal, undocumented migrants and those who do not apply for asylum or their application is rejected will be sent back to Turkey, which is considered as a “safe third country” while the hot spots were turned into detention

MdM Interventions to face the refugee-migrant crisis

Doctors of the World – Greece (MdM Greece), having completed 28 years of continuous humanitarian action this year, is standing by all persons in need of protection and assistance. MdM Greece has, since the first moment, been present and active in the refugee-migrant crisis, reinforcing its ongoing and already existing structures and programs to respond to the increasing and pressing needs of the high numbers of refugees arriving daily and residing for longer periods in Greece. At the same time, MdM Greece has undertaken new initiatives intervening in those places where TCNs concentrate, such as the usual entry and exit points for refugees in Greece. That is the Aegean islands by sea, especially Lesvos. Building on its experience and ongoing needs assessment, MdM Greece currently continues to operate with its Open Polyclinics, its Night Shelters, Day Centers, and Mobile Units in Athens, Piraeus, Perama, Thessaloniki, Patras, Kavala, Chania as well as implementing new activities where needed.

Beneficiary Testimonials

Refugees and asylum seekers are ordinary people facing extraordinary struggles. These are some of their stories...

“My travel – My story”

My name is R.M. and I am a refugee from Syria. SI traveled from Turkey to Greece through sea with a boat in January of 2016. I traveled with my 2 underage children and was eight months pregnant. I gave birth in Greece during the period of accommodation in the refugee camp in region of Attica. MDM had provided medical care and have secured access to prenatal and maternity care during the period that I was accommodated in another refugee camp in Central Greece. Two months after the birth of my baby, I found myself homeless along with 3 children in Victoria Sq. for more than 1 week. My compatriots expelled me from a refugee camp in Attica after their requirement to give them money in order to continue to reside there. Having left the camp, I spent three weeks in an apartment in Athens with a family of compatriots that was being selected for the relocation program. I shared a room in the apartment with two other families, a total of 13 people lived in an small apartment of 2 separate spaces and 1 WC. After the fulfillment of relocation process for the compatriot family I had to leave from the apartment, I stayed at a bench with my children. The baby suffered from skin allergies and severe allergic asthma while I had neglected gynecological problems and panic attacks episodes. The 2 children for more than 18 months were out of educational activities and from school. My family was found again through outreach activities of MDM volunteers and we were referred to MDM central services. Through MDM actions, my family received medical care and psychosocial support while placed directly in the Reception Centre for Vulnerable Asylum Seekers of MDM. In February 2017 I completed the process of family reunification and traveled to Germany, where my husband was granted with the refugee status.

“Surviving”

My name is E.A. and I am a SGBV survivor. I traveled alone from Togo to Greece in the spring of 2016 and I was six months pregnant. Before seeking the services of MDM I was sharing room with 12 individuals in a small apartment in the center of Athens. I visited MDM Open Polyclinic in Athens for prenatal testing and counseling. I was in a very bad psychological condition because the pregnancy was unwanted and I was alone without supportive environment. After I received medical care came into contact with the social assistance department of MDM, I scheduled a meeting with a psychologist and I was placed in the Reception Centre for Vulnerable Asylum Seekers of MDM. In December 2016 I gave birth to my little girl and moved to independent living space after actions of MDM. I continue to receive gynecological and pediatric care within the MSD project and on a monthly basis I receive a baby kit.

“Everybody deserves to live decent life”

Well it's not easy to explain everything I have been through but as simply as I can put it, it was like hell. It was too rough and it is a miracle how I survived from the desert and the sea in a very small overcrowded dinghy. Even after so many years I never forget what I have seen right in my eyes, people dying. I have lost one of my best friends. We used to go together to school in Somalia. I left the country for the same reason, same time and had the same goal in our lives. Unfortunately, she is gone. Not only her but many beloved ones and what makes me worry even today as I am writing in my computer, is that someone is dying or waiting to make this dangerous journey. I hope we will do more to help those who are in need. Amen.

“Maybe there is hope”

I lost my husband in Syria. He was killed by a bomb in front of my eyes. My children were, also, there when it happened. They are 7 and 10 years old. Ever since that day they are very afraid of loud noises, and they are always scared that I will die too. After the death of my husband I decided that we must leave, we weren't safe there. I traveled here with my children and my father. At first, we stayed in a refugee camp in N. Kavala. But, our stay there was difficult. There were fights among the other refugees and my children were getting scared and having nightmares again. I decided that we should move again. Next, we went to Thessaloniki. There we stayed with another Syrian family that gave us shelter, but it was only temporary. That's when I found out about the Polyclinic of the Doctors of the World. The doctors there helped us with our health problems and they also found us a place to stay. Things are still difficult but now I am much more optimistic. My kids are happier here. They want to go to school they want to learn Greek and English.

“Maybe someday I will make it”

I grew up only in the company of my mother and my grandmother. My father died when I was very young, and I knew almost nothing about him. Growing up I loved school, I loved learning new things. However, I made only one true friend, N., with whom we would play, laugh, share our concerns, and our problems, he was like a brother to me. The other kids would mock me because I had no father. They would call me names and beat me. How much that hurt me. I was bullied all the time. I lost my mother in 2012 from an incurable disease. I was left alone with my grandmother. She would die four years later from skin cancer. After that I was left all alone. Some relatives from my father's side approached me because they wanted part of the money that my grandmother had left me, but once I refused they became hostile and started threatening me. I couldn't take it anymore and that's why I decided to leave. My journey began from Guinea. I reached Teheran, Iran, where the smuggler stole my passport.

I made it to Turkey walking, where I stayed for one month and now I am here in Greece. My goal is to go to France (because I speak the language) or to Germany. But once again I have to make it on my own, I have no one to support me. Of course it is enough for me that I am here safe, that I have a room where I can sleep, away from the nightmares and the hurtful thoughts. I want to make new friends. I want to make a new start, to chase my dreams, to find the happiness that some wanted to take away.

“They would kill me”

My name is S. and I am a member of the Bamileke tribe. I left my country, Cameroon, because my life was in danger. I owned a clothing store which got burned down by some people as a punishment. My family had rejected me, except for two relatives that kept contact with. But things got worse after my father died. He was a member of the council of elders of our tribe, and a very respected figure. Some warned me that I was in danger, and that I should leave. I no longer felt safe. I decided to flee. I took the plane to Turkey and then with a boat I came to Greece.

“Why are you doing this to me?”

I had brothers and sisters, I had my parents; we were a happy family. Then one-night, military men broke into our house and started beating my parents and my siblings. They were yelling. I started crying, and screaming. I was petrified I couldn't understand what was happening. Then one of the men came and dragged me out of the house locking me inside a toilet. I listened as my family was beaten, the men were asking them for money or else they would kill them. I heard shootings. I didn't know if anybody had been killed. Afterwards they put me in a car and took me to a forest. There they started beating me while I was crying, asking them why they did that to me. I kept asking if my family was alive, but I couldn't understand what they were saying, I couldn't understand their language. They raped me and threw me in a small hole in the ground that

had iron bars and they locked me there. I stayed there for three months. During that time they would rape me and beat me. However, one of the military men was good to me. He told me that he would help me escape. One day, when nobody was around, he took me out and took me to an American friend of his. He would take me to Turkey. The man told me that if I tried running away he would kill me. When we reached Turkey he told me that he would take me to Greece next. We stayed in Turkey for two weeks and then we made the journey and reached Lesvos. We were together on the trip but he told me that once we reached Greece he would leave me in Greece and he would go back. I was so scared. I didn't want to be alone here. I didn't know anyone here. When there he gave me some money and left. He never hurt me. At first they put me in a big tent. I cried. I couldn't sleep because I was very afraid. Some people came because they wanted to register me, they wanted to know my age. I was afraid that they would make leave. I lied to them. I was anxious all the time. One day one of the other girls who lived there came to ask if anyone wanted to join the dance group that we had in the camp. For the first time I thought that I should get up from my bed. When I came back from the dance I was feeling better. As the time passed the girls I lived with helped me a lot. They gave me courage, they told me to not be afraid, they gave me advices and took care of me. I found a new 'family' in them. One of the organizations helped me find my little sister who was living with my aunt. We spoke, we cried, she asked to go back home. My parents and the rest of my siblings had disappeared. She wants to come find me. I told her to wait.

"I must not give up"

I have a twin sister my name is S. and her name is T. We are twenty years old and I came here for the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was a member of the opposition in my country against the President of the country. A lot of people were killed during the demonstrations. I was abducted for four days by the President's people they abused me physically and sexually. When I returned home I decided that I could no longer stay there, I

had to leave. I paid a smuggler to give me fake documents so that I could travel to Turkey. I got robbed the moment I arrived there by two men who were speaking a language I couldn't understand; they took everything, my things, my money, everything. A man found me and helped me, he took me to his house where other people were staying. I started working at a factory where they abused me physically. I was trying to save money so that I could go to my aunt in Germany. But when I couldn't save enough money to pay the bills and the rent he would rape, me or any of the other girls who couldn't pay. We were so terrified of him. One day he decided that it was time for us to begin our journey. My sister was already in Greece with her husband, waiting for me. As I got on the boat that would take me here I kept saying "I must make it there. I must not give up". It was the happiest moment of my life when I saw my sister again.

"I want to make a new start"

I came to Greece when I was 19 years old. In Athens, I arrived two years ago in 2015. In the beginning, I stayed with a relative. After some time, however, he asked for money, asked to pay him if I wanted to continue staying there. But as I had neither job nor money I couldn't give him anything. This is how I ended up sleeping on the street for nearly four months. At some point, I asked an organization if they could find me a place to stay. They asked me to do some medical exams for them to find me an accommodation, and they referred me to the Social Services Department of the Doctors of the World – Greece (Mdm) telling me that they would arrange everything so that I could stay at their accommodation shelter. That was the moment that I gained back some normality in my life. The reasons why I abandoned my country (Kinshasa, Congo) were political. I was member of political group that opposed to the government. The very reason for my prosecution by the government was my involvement in the campaign in favor of the change in the country's leadership. I was arrested twice. The second time I was able to escape with the help of a priest. Fleeing Congo, I arrived in Turkey where I stayed

for seven months, and worked, and then in Greece. I can only describe my journey from Turkey to Greece as a small death. 47 persons inside a small boat. Each person had to pay 700 euros in order to board. As we were in the water we were caught and transported to the prison. The children were crying. After some time they released us. It took one hour to reach Samos. The waves were huge. We were terrified, we were screaming. The boat had holes and water was filling the boat. I was sure I was going to die that night. When we reached the shore, we were all crying. We didn't even know we had made it to Greece. Then they took us to the port where we slept. They gave us clothes the following morning and then transferred us to the center where we stayed for 10 days. Then they bought us tickets and we arrived in Athens. My husband, and our two small children are still there, in Congo. My son is four, and my daughter was born after I left; I never saw her. In a few months she will be one year old. Every time I think about all that I get extremely sad. This is why I applied for asylum, so that I can bring my family here with me, so that we can be all together once again. I want to make a new start here, with my family. I don't want to go back, even if things changed, even if the political situation changed I wouldn't choose to go back. I don't think that I can have a life there.

“Sharing”

My name is M., and I want to share my story. I was born in a small village of Democratic Republic of Congo in 1997. My father died when I was 12 years old, leaving me and my mother alone. It was a very difficult time for me. Two years later my mother remarried. Her new husband wasn't a nice man. He started sexually abusing me and threatening me that if I told anything to anyone he would kill me. After four years I couldn't take it anymore, this situation was unbearable, I had to tell someone about the horror I was living. After I talked to my mother there were problems in their relationships and he blamed me, he vowed to kill me. My life had turned into a nightmare, I wasn't safe there. I fled

from DRC to Turkey. An old friend there helped me make the journey from Turkey to Greece. I was very scared in the boat. I was sure I would day in the sea, I kept praying to God. A Greek boat saved us and then I found myself in the refugee camp in Moria, Lesbos where I am living for the last 10 months in a tent in a very bad condition for my health waiting to apply for asylum and travel to Athens. I feel destroyed, physically and psychologically. I am sharing my story now because it makes me feel liberated, as if I talk about my past I will no longer suffer by it.

“War”

I haven't seen my parents since the first Congo war in 1997, I was one-year-old then. My name is J. G. and I am from Brazzaville. My parents' families were members of the government. When the government was overthrown they came after my relatives who fled. My sister and I went to live with our grandmother. While we were growing up my cousin would protect us. He got involved in politics but in 2015 war broke out again in my country and after its end they came after him. He was arrested but escaped. It was then that they found us. They beat me and my sister and they raped me. They continued hitting me but my sister stood in front of me to protect me and they shoot her in the head killing her. I was in the hospital for 3 days. The girls who have been raped are marginalized in my country, like they are unworthy. But I had my sister's children to take care now, I had to do something. At the hotel I was working I met a man through a friend who told me he could provide me with fake papers. First I went to Gabon, from there to Beirut, and then to Turkey by plane. But I couldn't leave from the airport because I didn't have legal documents. A woman saw me crying and offered to help me. She paid for my visa and then I was able to leave. I stayed in Turkey where I found a job and I was able to save some money to come here in Greece. Sometimes I can still feel the pain, my nightmares wake me up in the nights.

“I want to forget”

When I was in Saint Dominic a woman promised me and two of my friends a job in Turkey, a job at a restaurant. Wanting a better life for ourselves we decided to take her offer. When we arrived in Turkey the same woman picked us up from the airport and drove us to a hotel where we stayed for a brief time. When we would ask her when we would start working at the restaurant she would reply that the restaurant was under construction and that it was a matter of time to get the job. Afterwards, some men we didn't know took us and led us to a house in an unknown area. We were not allowed to go out and they had taken our legal documents. We were trapped. These men were traffickers. A few weeks later, it was Ramadan, and these men had gone to pray so we took the opportunity and we escaped from the house. Until we reached Greece the traffickers called and threatened us to come back. Here we are safe.

“God is testing me”

My name is N., I am 23 years old, and I was born in Nigeria. I lost both of my parents when I was very young. I lived with my sister's husband, and their children. One day, when my sister and the children were out, he barged in my room and attacked me. I screamed, and I fought him, he must got scared so he ran and left me alone. I didn't say anything to my sister but he understood that something had happened. I really loved school, I was happy to go every day, I wanted to study. But one day after school three men grabbed me as I was leaving and they dragged me to their car. I didn't know what was happening. I cried and screamed to let me go. After some time the car stopped and they pulled me out. We were in a forest. They threw me on the ground and they raped and beat me for hours. I tried to fight them off but I couldn't. They held me for three weeks, three weeks of torture. My body was covered in wounds and gashes. In the end they shaved my head so that I remember them they told, put me back in the car, and threw me on the street near my house. My sister found me a few hours later. She took me to the hospital where

I stayed for 4 days. I didn't want to live any more. I couldn't sleep, I was afraid. One day my sister told me that I had to get better, and that's why she was sending me to Greece. There she told me I could continue school, I could have a better life. She gave money to a man who gave me fake documents to travel to Turkey. When in Turkey a woman, also from Nigeria, told me that everything was going to be fine, that I would go back to school, she would find me a job and that I could stay at her place. I followed her to a house where other girls from Africa lived. I couldn't understand their languages. I stayed there for three days. On the fourth day the woman came and told that I had to start working when I asked her what I would do she told that I was there to provide sexual services to men. I begged her not. She said that if I wanted to stay I had to pay rent and bills and that she should gain something out of it as well. I paid her for the days I had stayed and left. I started walking down the streets, I didn't know what to do, but my sister's words were in my mind, so I decided to go continue to Greece. The night we would make the journey to Greece 48 of us got in a small dinghy. I was terrified, it was cold, some people were crying. Sometime along the way another boat stopped and men with uniforms got us out of the boat. They told us "welcome in Greece". When I heard that I cried. Now I am here in Greece, I'm learning Greek, I feel safe.

Healthcare Professionals Testimonials

The following stories are from the personal experience from MdM Greece healthcare professionals that have assisted beneficiaries in MdM Open Polyclinics and refugee camps.

“Gratitude”

A year ago a young Syrian woman around 22 years old asked for help and requested a doctor. I remember her coming in our Polyclinic trembling, looking exhausted, so we of course gave her priority. After some time the doctor asked for me and informed that the patient was alone and he had been sleeping on the street for more than ten days. It was with great difficulty that we managed to find her a temporary place to stay as all the accommodation shelters were overcrowded. As we were waiting together in the Polyclinic I gave her something to eat, which she ate in seconds (the young woman hadn't eaten for days), and when the nurse offered her water she kept kissing her hands and thanking her. The gratitude that this woman showed for the water that we gave her, shocked me. It made me feel ashamed for the way we treat each other. Her face will forever be etched in my memory.

“Thank you”

About a year ago a woman came to our Open Polyclinic in Athens, she was around 40 years old. She had cancer and she was in need of a very expensive medication. We provided her with the necessary medicines, and I helped her fill out the necessary papers that she didn't know she should have in order to receive her medication covering only part of the cost and not paying entirely for it as she did in the past. A few months passed, and she once again visited our Polyclinic, this time with her mother who had too fallen ill. There were times that I would mediate for her to receive the needed treatment as she wouldn't be able to come to the Polyclinic herself, either due to not feeling well or being

hospitalized. Every time she would come or we would talk she would thank me thank me profusely and say how grateful she was for everything the Organization and I had done for her. Especially moving was the fact that even after she went back to her home-country – which was quite far from Greece – so that her mother could have a very specific surgery, she would call me on the phone only to thank me and to tell me that she was thinking about me and about how much I had helped her.

“A mother”

Our medical team had been sent on the island of Agathonisi, a small Greek island located at the northernmost point of the Dodecanese, in order to provide primary healthcare services to the island’s habitants. While there we were informed that a boat carrying refugees had sunk near the island. Our first priority after getting everyone safely out of the water and on the shore was a young woman and her 10 days old baby, that she had given birth to while in Turkey. Her husband wasn’t with her on the boat. The shock from the journey with the boat and the consequent shipwreck caused her milk supply to stop (she couldn’t breast-feed) and a breast bleeding. Fortunately, the little baby was not hurt. As we were waiting for the ambulance we tried to stop the bleeding, and in the same time calm her down. But she wouldn’t stop yelling for her baby even though we assured her that her baby was safe and well’ she wouldn’t stop fighting and thrusting. Her eyes. That’s what has stuck with me ever since that day. The fear in them, the panic, the despair.

“It can’t possibly rain all the time”

During 2015 in the island of Lesvos the refugee flows had increased to thousand arrivals per week and no one was really prepared for that. The weather was good, which made the journey through the sea easier. 7,500 people were waiting in line for the registration. Many people who were in need of medical help refused to abandon the line in order to be examined. So, what we did, was to transfer the medical unit to them.

The result was an enormous queue of thousands of people, already exhausted from their journey, getting more and more tired from waiting to complete a procedure that would now take more than three days. And as the time passed, October came along with some clouds, and no one knew what could follow. When the rain started, it didn't stop for three days. 7,000 people (women, children, men, and elderly people) were still standing in line, exposed to really bad weather. We would make makeshift impermeable shoes, with a bag inside the shoe and a piece from a rescue blanket, and we would spread across the camp to gather the small children. There was no point in dressing them in dry clothes as the moment they would step again outside of the medical office (which had been converted into a shelter with blankets on the floor) they would once again be soaked to the bone. The second day of the rain the upper and lower limbs of the people had swelled up from the extreme humidity. They were pale and exhausted. What the rain left behind wasn't the nice smell or the sense of rebirth, it was cold, and fear. I used to romanticize the rain, and I used to love walking in the rain, but now I almost hate it, it reminds me of disfigured hands and pained faces.

“Family ties”

As I had the duty of Assistant to NFI's distribution, I had to be on the field every day, for the biggest part of the day. My contact with the people was direct. But that also was the best part of our work. Despite the tension that was inevitable sometimes, the inhuman conditions, even the deaths that took place, one of the most difficult moments we had to face, were the refugees leaving the camp. That was so, mostly because we knew they were leaving to meet a smuggler and try to pass the borders to reach their relatives in Europe. We would try to discourage them most of the times, but you can't say much to a person who doesn't see any glimpse of light down the tunnel whatsoever. One such case was my encounter with M. N., a young Afghan boy and his family. M. N. approached me from the start, always asking if I needed any help with anything, or if he could just sit there with us. He later told me

that I reminded him much of his older sister, Z. At first, I thought the girl was not with them, but later I found out that she was at the camp as well, but had just gotten married, thus she didn't have further contact with her former family. The girl looked always gloomy. At some point, M. N. and his parents announced that they were leaving, on an attempt to pass the borders of FYROM, Serbia and somehow end up in Germany. We lost contact for about a month, and the news we got from other refugees who attempted the same were not encouraging. After two months, I finally got a message from M. N. They had managed to reach Serbia, but they got stuck there and the smuggler had stolen all their belongings. I was only receiving bad news, and there was nothing I could do to help the boy and his family. I kept working on the same camp, and M.N. was asking if I would have seen Z. every now and then, if she was doing ok. At some point, I managed to get them to speak to each other. That was the only time I saw her smiling. She -and even her husband- would hug me every time they saw me ever since. The fact that I was the one that had made them smile or gave them even the slightest of joy filled me with satisfaction. I had offered something more than material goods. Almost a year later, Z. managed to leave the camp with her husband and move to an apartment, through the service of an NGO. M.N. and his parents are still stuck in Serbia.

“When you feel that you don't have a choice”

The story is about a woman from Afghanistan who has been living in a refugee camp near Athens with her husband and her children for the past five months. She used to visit our medical team for several health issues. On February 2017, she visited the doctor and she was very upset. Her period had delayed and she was very afraid that she was pregnant. When the pregnancy test came out positive she burst into tears. She was very afraid that her husband would force her to keep it. When she calmed down she explained to us that the cause of her reaction was the fact that she didn't want to have another child, she was feeling exhausted due to her residency status and due to having already too many children to raise.

But her husband wanted more children against her own will. It was particularly disturbing to me, as well as to the other female colleagues of our team, the fact that a woman residing now in a democratic country has no choice over her own body, no right to take her own decisions and faced the risk of gender based violence every day. Through the counseling process I informed her about the legal options she has in a European country. She was pretty shocked as she didn't know that an abortion was a possible option for her. She immediately picked this path but she was still very afraid that her husband would find out about it. This was quite challenging for our team but we assured her that we would provide all the needed support. We felt the need to support and empower this woman so that she would not feel alone and helpless during this process. I escorted her along with a female interpreter to a public hospital. Thankfully everything went well.

“A day as an interpreter”

It was a long day at work, the people coming to the Polyclinic were many and many issues were constantly arising. There were times that when needed due to work overload I had to take on the role of the interpreter (French). The patient I had to translate for was a woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo who had made the journey to Greece while pregnant (she had given birth to her baby boy here in Greece). Her baby was very small and under-weight. As the pediatrician was examining it he started realizing that the baby was not responding to the visual tests he was performing. As the minutes past the atmosphere in the room had become quite heavy. I had to translate to the mother the doctor's diagnosis, trying to be accurate in my translation of the medical and scientific terms. The doctor said that the child had serious visual impairment but he would know the exact extent of the problem after he had run more tests. It was the most difficult part of my job; having to inform a mother that her child might be blind, to see the look on her face, her worried and sad eyes. It was horrible. I couldn't stop thinking about the baby, he was constantly on my mind. Every time his mother would bring him back to have him examined I was happy to see how he had grown, how he had put on a little bit more

weight. In time, there were changes in his condition and he got better.

“That smile”

Being in a medical humanitarian NGO within the years of refugee crisis, I came across a large number of people who were in need of specialized support. People that migrated from their countries with destination EU, but also people with EU citizenship that faced social exclusion and extreme poverty. One of the stories that had the biggest impact on me was that of a 15-year-old girl from Bulgaria. She came to our Polyclinic escorting her father who was blind and had come to us to receive his medication as he suffered from a severe chronic and complex disease. This child, having no other relative to turn to for help – her mother had left the family three years ago – devoted most of her day to the care of her father. She had dropped out of school and she had stopped any other personal activity. The little money they received from the state barely covered the day-to-day expenses. However, despite all the hardship she was facing and the anxiety for her father’s welfare and care, she was very emotionally stable, she wasn’t complain, she only smiled. I can still recall her face, and every time I think about her I cannot help but feel respect for that teenage girl.

“Multiple efforts to escape”

She was only 16 years old and she had made it to Greece from Afghanistan alone. She had no family with her. She arrived in Greece the summer of 2013, believing that it would be just a stop on her journey to central/northern Europe. Being the first of her family to make the journey, she was pressured by her father to continue until she reaches her final destination. She made six efforts in total to escape from Greece in a period of 15 months, trying twice from different points of entrance in Northern Greece, and four times from Patras port. As she didn’t have any money to pay the requested sum to a smuggler, she counted on the promises of his acquaintances that they would take her with them or that they would cover the necessary sum or on her own powers. After each

try she would get arrested by the police and relocated in an accommodation shelter for unaccompanied minors (a different one each time). Despite the efforts of the accommodation shelters' staff to persuade her to remain there, and to explain to her the dangers and risks that the journey she wanted to do entailed, she insisted to continue trying as it made no sense to her that she would be in danger in Europe when she had made it from Afghanistan to Greece safely. During one of her tries to escape via a point in northern Greece she was found by the police and was put in "protective custody" in a frontier town where she stayed in very bad living conditions for two and a half months until the authorities could find a place for her in an accommodation shelter for unaccompanied minors. In her efforts to escape via Patra she boarded on a ship where she was found by the police and consequently returned to Greece. She then tried to hide inside a truck but she was found by the driver, who fearing arrest (as there was a chance to be charged as a smuggler), he handed her over to the police after beating her badly. On her third effort she was arrested and beaten by the port police. On her last effort she was detected by the port police along with another unaccompanied minor in the port. In order to not get arrested they started running away from the police who was chasing them (if they made it out of the port and consequently out of the port police's jurisdiction they would escape arrest). Getting out of the port and whilst still running they tried to cross the road without checking leading to her friend being hit by a passing car. The friend was injured and transferred to the hospital. Both minors were placed once again in an accommodation shelter. After this last effort she said he was too exhausted to keep trying to escape, she accepted the situation, and our help, and decided to let us help her file an asylum request and remain in Greece.



Mother & Child



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