



“The material of the project reflects only the author’s views. The European Commission’s support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission or the Hellenic National Agency cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.”.

CONFERENCE MINUTES

DAY 1 – Monday 26/5/2025, morning

Welcome address by the Headmistress of the 19th Primary school of Katerini, Ms Zoi Koutsoura

We welcome you to the proceedings of our conference titled **Volunteering & Humanitarian Crisis**, which is implemented within the framework of the 3rd mobility of the European program "**Walking the Paths of Volunteering: Taking Action for Solidarity, Sustainability, an Inclusive Society, and a Fairer World**" that started in September 2023 and concludes with the end of this conference.

During the 21 months of the program’s operation, three European countries have worked together to achieve common goals:

- **Greece**, represented by the 19th Primary School of Katerini and Kapnikos Stathmos of Katerini, a non-governmental organization active in volunteer action programs,

- **Romania**, with the University of Pitesti and the Nicolae Iorga School from Ploesti and
- **Croatia**, with the Osnovna škola Grigora Viteza school.

I would like to warmly welcome and greet the educational teams from the three countries who are with us today. We have worked together for about two years, united by our common goals to promote the concept of volunteering and an active citizen society, to develop an inclusive culture, environmental awareness, the need to apply innovative teaching methods, and to strengthen soft skills such as teamwork, extroversion, communication, collaboration, problem-solving ability, empathy, and mental resilience.

I would also like to warmly greet and thank the students of the three schools who are with us today to participate in the experiential workshops: the 11th Primary School of Katerini, the 13th Primary School of Katerini, and our own students from the 19th Primary School of Katerini, who have come today as supporters and multipliers of the workshops, as they themselves have been trained in the activities of the experiential workshops that will be delivered.

A special thanks to the teachers accompanying the children and the principals of the two schools, Mr. Panagiotis Sapidis and Mr. Lefteris Papadopoulos. Thanks to all of you who are here today, the experiential part of the conference is taking place.

For the students, we have prepared certificates of participation in the conference, which their teachers will receive upon departure. Certificates for teachers will be sent nominally to your schools.

I would also like to sincerely thank the Municipality of Katerini for supporting this two-day conference and personally thank Mayor Mr. Ntoumos and the Deputy Mayors Mr. Kokavidis (Education), Deputy Mayor of Culture Ms. Diamantopoulou for their close cooperation, Deputy Mayor of Green Spaces Mr. Tsokanis, and Deputy Mayor of Sanitation and Recycling Mr. Tapras for their assistance in implementing the activities.

Special thanks to Mr. Ilias Tsolakidis, Head of Kapnikos Stathmos, as program partner and co-organizer of the conference, for the cooperation we have had during these 21 months, as well as his entire team (Alexandros, the ladies, and all the children who helped with the experiential workshops we implemented, including today's preparation of the venue to host the conference).

I warmly thank the pedagogical team of our school for the wonderful activities they created and successfully implemented, for the personal time they devoted for the school's benefit, and all the teachers of our school unit who have contributed and continue to do so, helping us to carry out this ambitious European program.

I also warmly thank the Parents and Guardians Association of our school, the president Mr. Dimitris Karaiskos, and the very active board members, as well as all the parents and guardians of our students, who are supporters and promoters of all the actions undertaken by our school.

This two-day conference, starting its sessions today, aims to:

A. Promote the concept of volunteering and an active citizen society, highlighting the program's actions and the assumption of individual and collective responsibility to achieve social change,

- B. Highlight the role of volunteer organizations and NGOs in managing humanitarian crises,
- C. Raise community awareness on environmental issues.

The experiential workshops planned to be carried out will:

1. Showcase the added value of experiential learning in informal settings,
2. Achieve the widest possible dissemination of the program's results,
3. Open the school to the wider community.

The program concludes with this conference, but for all of us, educators in our school unit, its goals will remain active, because experiential learning, inclusive culture, and the understanding of individual and collective responsibility require continuous and coordinated effort to build a **SOCIETY OF ACTIVE CITIZENS**.

Thank you.

THOMI MARGARITI , teacher in the the 19th Primary school of Katerini. *“Walking the Paths of Volunteering, we take Action for Solidarity, for Sustainability, for an Inclusive Society, and for a Fairer World.”* Brief overview.

Our program is implemented in collaboration with five partners:

- Our school, the 19th Primary School of Katerini
- The Kapnikos Stathmos (Tobacco Station) of Katerini
- The National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA of Bucharest, Pitesti, Romania

- Nicolae Iorga School, Ploiești, Romania
- Grigor Vitez Primary School, Zagreb, Croatia

Introductory Activities on Volunteering. On October 10th and 11th, 2023, 5th grade students participated in introductory activities about the concept of volunteering, both in the classroom and in the schoolyard. Through games and Q&A sessions, our students were introduced for the first time to the concept of volunteering.

Visit to the Plaka Observatory in Litochoro. We visited the Plaka Observatory in Litochoro and learned about the voluntary action “I give a day of mine to the forest.” At the same time, we carried out a beach cleaning activity in the area.

Support for Flood Victims. During the devastating floods in the region of Thessaly, many people lost their lives, their homes, and all their belongings. Our students responded immediately to our call to collect essential supplies for the flood victims. Working together, teachers, students, and parents sorted the collected items and delivered them to the volunteer group from Pieria, “O Topos Mou” (“My Homeland”), which transported and distributed them to the victims in Thessaly.

Empathy Workshop. Our students participated in a very interesting empathy program for the elderly, organized by the “Good Samaritans”

association, a care structure for the elderly, and prepared by social worker Mrs. Matina Patsi. The students actively participated through role-playing as grandparents, which helped them understand the difficulties elderly people face and how much they need our love and support.

Class Councils. Through Class Councils, following Freinet's pedagogy, our students are activated, communicate, collaborate, express themselves freely, and participate in democratic decision-making, fostering active involvement in these processes.

1st Bicycle Tour. Our school organized a bike ride on November 5th, 2024, in the area of the Pelekas River in Katerini, in collaboration with “Cycling Escape Katerinis” and “Merimna Paidiou” (“Child Welfare”), an organization that hosts and educates children with special needs. Students, teachers, and parents rode their bikes safely and cleaned up the Pelekas River area from litter.

December 5th – International Volunteer Day. In celebration of International Volunteer Day (December 5th), we created bookmarks with our students and distributed them to all the pupils of our school, raising awareness about volunteering.

Visit to the “Christmas Village of the World”. On December 22nd, 2023, our school visited the “Christmas Village of the World,” organized

annually in our city by the Volunteer Action Group of Pieria “O Topos Mou.” As an entrance contribution, students brought their favorite doll or book, which was intended for children from families facing economic hardship.

Social Pharmacy – An Action of Solidarity and Circular Economy.

Students and teachers collected unused medicines from their homes. Using these as raw material, we visited the volunteer team at the “Kapnikos Stathmos” for a hands-on workshop. There, students and teachers learned about the sorting stages of medicines until they reach the shelves of the Social Pharmacy. They helped classify and record the medicines and were given a guided tour of the space to understand the entire sorting process and how the pharmacy is organized. The students realized how important is the existence and support of the Social Pharmacy.

Volunteering – Our Film. During the second trimester of 2024, our 6th-grade students, with the help of their teachers, collected material, photos, and videos from our volunteering activities, our collaboration with the NGO “Kapnikos Stathmos,” and conducted interviews with volunteers. With the help of their teachers, they edited the material and produced a digital film on the topic of VOLUNTEERING.

2nd Bicycle Tour – Art Installations – Pelekas River Cleanup

On Sunday, April 21st, 2024, our school organized its 2nd bicycle tour in

the Pelekas River area in Katerini, in collaboration with the Parents and Guardians Association, the “Cycling Escape” Club, the “Pelekas Initiative,” and the “Child Welfare” Association. Accompanied by parents and teachers, our young students cycled along the river and were informed by the representative of the “Pelekas Initiative” about the local history and the group's actions for its revitalization. Then, the students’ artworks, themed around Volunteering, were displayed in a public spot for all Katerini residents to admire. Together, students and parents also cleaned the area of litter.

Spreading Happiness – Fueling the Flame in the Heart

Our students hung up the “clothes of happiness.” They took a white T-shirt and painted it, sending messages of love and support to the children of “Floga”, “Flame”. “Floga” is an organization that brings light and warmth to children with cancer across Greece. It stands by families and fights for the best medical, psychological, and social care for children suffering from cancer. Through experiential learning, our students felt the value of giving and volunteering and donated a small amount from their pocket money to support these children.

Mr ILIAS TSOLAKIDIS, HEAD OF THE TOBACCO STATION OF KATERINI. Civil Protection and Volunteering: A Key Factor for Resilience in Humanitarian Crises Caused by Natural Disasters

Civil Protection is a fundamental mechanism of any organized society for the prevention, preparedness, and management of natural disasters and the resulting humanitarian crises. It comprises of a set of institutional, organizational, and operational measures aimed at protecting human life, the environment, and property, during emergencies.

Within this framework, the role of volunteers is invaluable. Volunteering does not replace the state mechanism—it strengthens and complements it, often serving as the first link in the chain of social solidarity. Volunteers are the ones who mobilize immediately, who understand local needs, and who can operate flexibly, providing support at every stage of crisis management: from distributing food and medicine to offering psychological support, conducting rescues, sheltering affected individuals, and recording needs.

In 2023, the devastating floods in Thessaly highlighted the strength of civil society. Thousands of volunteers, both organized and individual, mobilized from across Greece to support residents affected by unprecedented rainfall and widespread destruction. Volunteer teams helped remove mud from homes, distribute essential goods, provide medical supplies, and assist elderly and vulnerable citizens—often more swiftly than official state agencies.

A similar scene unfolded in Valencia, Spain, in 2024, where floods spurred thousands into action. Citizens, students, local associations, and professionals assisted public authorities in cleaning public spaces, delivering supplies, and offering social care. This collective mobilization served as a model of how an organized society can significantly contribute to risk management and resilience.

Internationally, there are numerous examples that underline the need for the institutional integration of volunteers into Civil Protection. Good intentions are not enough—what is needed is planning, training, structured inclusion in action plans, and the definition of clear roles.

Effective Civil Protection relies not only on technical infrastructure but also on social cohesion. Strengthening volunteering through training programs, emergency drills, the creation of volunteer databases, cooperation agreements, and the provision of adequate equipment must be a strategic priority for every municipality, region, and state.

Volunteers are the human soul of Civil Protection: present, coordinated, and determined. In every natural disaster, the societies that have invested in volunteering prove to be better prepared, more efficient, and—most importantly—more humane.

I am especially pleased that through our conference, we have the opportunity to present our own preparations and plans—plans we sincerely hope will never have to be implemented.

DAY 1 – Monday 26/5/2025, afternoon

VOLUNTEERING AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

PRESENTATIONS

WELCOME – BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE PROGRAM by Ms Zoi Koutsoura, Headmistress of the 19th Primary school of Katerini.

We welcome you to the proceedings of our conference entitled **“Volunteering & Humanitarian Crisis”**, which began this morning and is being implemented as part of the **3rd mobility of the European program “Walking the Paths of Volunteering: Taking Action for Solidarity, for Sustainability, for an Inclusive Society, for a Fairer World,”** which started in September 2023 and concludes with the end of this conference.

Over the course of the program's 21 months of implementation, three European countries collaborated to achieve common goals:

- **Greece** with the 19th Primary School of Katerini and the **Tobacco Station** as a non-governmental organization.
- **Romania** with the University of Pitești and the Nicolae Iorga School from Ploiești.
- **Croatia** with the school Osnovna škola Grigora Viteza.

What were the objectives that united us?

- Familiarization with the concept of volunteering and the society of active citizens.
- Raising awareness of community issues and acknowledging our responsibility for social change.

- Highlighting the important role of volunteering in Crisis Management.
- Engaging with volunteer organizations and participating in their initiatives.
- Adopting democratic decision-making processes.
- Collaborating with organizations that support vulnerable social groups.
- Integrating green practices into the program's projects and activities.
- Raising community awareness on environmental sustainability issues.
- Creating innovative digital projects with inclusive and educational character.
- Promoting experiential learning in informal environments.
- Opening the school to the local community.
- Implementing innovative teaching methods.
- Strengthening soft skills: teamwork, extroversion, communication, collaboration, problem-solving.
- Enhancing students' empathy and emotional resilience.
- Fostering an inclusive culture.
- Reducing ecological footprint.
- Enhancing digital skills.
- Promoting the European orientation of the school unit and the professional development of educators.

The central axes targeted by our activities were:

- The environment
- Digital media and volunteering
- Inclusion

- Addressing the humanitarian crisis

Taking into account the strengths and unique characteristics of each partner's student population, each partner undertook specific roles:

- The 19th Primary School of Katerini was responsible for promoting experiential learning in informal environments to bring students into direct contact with volunteering and solidarity, with a special emphasis on the role of volunteering in addressing humanitarian crises.
- The NGO "Tobacco Station of Katerini," which is also a co-organizer of this Conference, contributed by implementing workshops focused on managing humanitarian crises, as well as explaining the functioning of the Social Pharmacy and Social Grocery Store.
- The University of Pitești in Romania focused on educating and informing participants about digital volunteering, presenting digital tools that support volunteering worldwide, and providing theoretical support for the program's final practical outcome (*"Epistemological Guide for Successful Volunteering"*).
- The Nicolae Iorga School in Romania promoted initiatives aimed at the integration of Roma students and children of economic migrants.
- The Osnovna škola Grigora Viteza in Croatia focused on the inclusion of students with special needs through inclusive activities.

Two years later, with the organization of this two-day conference, our European program concludes. The conference is meant to serve as the culmination of all our work and initiatives, significantly contributing to the achievement of its goals.

The conference proceedings began this morning with:

- The presentation of our actions by Ms. Margariti,
- A tour by Mr. Tsolakidis of the facilities where humanitarian aid is organized,
- Experiential workshops attended by around 100 students from schools in our city.

They continue this afternoon with excellent presentations from key participating organizations and conclude tomorrow morning with experiential workshops for volunteers, parents, and citizens of our city. During these workshops, participants will practice how to properly collect, sort, package, and send humanitarian aid.

What do we achieve through this conference?

1. The hands-on format of the conference highlights the added value of experiential learning in informal environments.
2. It ensures maximum dissemination of the program's results and maximizes its impact.
3. It opens up the school to society.
4. And lastly, it has brought together important stakeholders who will contribute their expertise in both volunteering and addressing humanitarian crises.

As we conclude this journey, what we take away as lasting impressions from the program – among many others – are:

- The outward-looking stance and integration of the school into society.
- The increased awareness of students and parents regarding volunteering and environmental issues.
- The understanding of both individual and collective responsibility in achieving social change.
- The value of experiential learning and teaching beyond the traditional school setting, in non-formal learning environments.
- The European identity and outreach of our school.
- Our collaboration with institutions over the two school years of this program has left us with exceptional memories.

Let me begin with the outstanding, multi-dimensional collaboration we developed with the Merimna Paidiou of Katerini, through their participation in our events and actions. A highlight of this collaboration was the joint theater performance at Agios Fotios, where we staged Aristophanes' "Peace"—a co-teaching initiative at school with a mixed group of our students and learners from Merimna.

Also noteworthy is our collaboration with the Blood Donation Department of Katerini General Hospital with which, we successfully organized two blood drives, collecting a total of 35 units of blood. These events were co-organized with the Parents and Guardians Association of our school and the 19th Kindergarten, with whom we enjoy excellent cooperation.

We also worked with the Cancer Patients Association of Katerini, the Hellenic Red Cross — delivering First Aid training to both students and parents — and the Kapnikos Stathmos, where we conducted a variety of experiential workshops.

Our partnership with the Good Samaritan and the Elderly Care Unit allowed us to implement the program “Grandpa and Grandma,” addressing the needs of the elderly.

With the local cycling group *Podilatiki Apodrasi Katerinis*, we organized two bicycle rides. Together with *Merimna Pediou Katerinis* and the *Pelekas Initiative*, we contributed to cleaning the area around the Pelekas river.

We thank the Municipality of Katerini for their support.

We also successfully carried out the project “The Laundry of Happiness,” during which each child wrote a hopeful message on a T-shirt. The funds collected were donated to the Association of Parents of Children with Neoplastic Disease “Floga” Flame and to the charitable meal service of our local Metropolis.

Special thanks are due to our Holy Metropolis and especially to our Metropolitan, His Eminence Georgios, for the generous and multiple forms of support provided throughout the realization of our initiatives.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Parents and Guardians Association of our school — especially to its president, Mr. Dimitris Karaiskos, and the highly active members of its board — for the volunteer and clean-up days we co-organized, as well as for their unwavering support and collaboration. We are equally thankful to all

parents and guardians of our students who consistently stand by our school and support every initiative we undertake.

This two-day conference may be concluding, but our efforts are far from over. The goals of this program align perfectly with the vision and values of our school and will serve as a foundation for our future actions. The road to shaping active, engaged citizens never ends. It requires continuous and coordinated efforts.

In closing, I would like to warmly thank our esteemed speakers, who graciously accepted our invitation and are here today to represent their respective organizations and share with us their valuable expertise.

- Mr. Charalampos Stergiadis, Head of the General Directorate of Planning & Infrastructure of Central Macedonia and Regional Coordinator of State Aid in the Region of Central Macedonia.
- Our Regional Vice Governor, Ms. Sofia Mavridou, for her continuous support of our school unit and her contribution to the success of this conference.
- Our Director of Primary Education in Pieria, Ms. Nopi Triantafyllidou, for her daily support in the functioning of our school.
- The Municipality of Katerini and, personally, Mayor Mr. Antonis Ntoumos, whose support made this two-day conference possible.
- Deputy Mayors Mr. Kokavidis (Education), Ms. Diamantopoulou (Culture) for her valuable cooperation, Mr. Tsokanis (Green Spaces), and Mr. Tapras (Sanitation) for their contributions to our practical activities.
- Ms. Mariza Antonakopoulou, Head of Civil Protection of the Municipality of Katerini, for her essential assistance.

- Mr. Ilias Tsolakidis, Head of Kapnikos Stathmos.
- Mr. Dimitrios Katirtzis, representative of the Hellenic Red Cross.
- Ms. Vivi Xystra, former President of the Women's Association of Palamas and educator, who traveled from Palamas to be with us today and share her experiences of the devastating Daniel storm that struck Thessaly in 2023.

1.

Dr. Charalampos Stergiadis

General Director of Planning & Infrastructure,
Regional Coordinator of State Aid
Region of Central Macedonia

VOLUNTEERING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A volunteer is someone who offers their services without financial compensation, of their own free will, typically supporting the activities of a non-profit organization, institution, group, or community. Volunteering strengthens collective action, social cohesion, and environmental awareness. It is a tool for active citizen participation in the protection of the environment. Volunteering transforms personal awareness into collective action with measurable outcomes. It can inspire and mobilize communities, support science, and enhance advocacy for change at all levels.

In particular, volunteering:

- Empowers the local community.
- Creates networks of cooperation and solidarity.
- Brings immediate results at the local level.
- Cultivates ecological consciousness.

Climate Change

Climate change is defined as the alteration of the global climate, specifically referring to the rise in the average temperature of the atmosphere and oceans observed over recent decades. It is one of today's most significant global environmental challenges.

Causes of Climate Change:

- Human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels (oil, coal, natural gas), which release carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases.
- Deforestation, which reduces the ability to absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂).
- Industrial pollution and agricultural practices that release methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

Impacts of Climate Change:

- Rising temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events (storms, droughts, floods).
- Melting polar ice and rising sea levels.
- Changes to ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Effects on health, the economy, and society.

What We Can Do to Slow Down Climate Change:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Transition to renewable energy sources (solar, wind, hydroelectric).
- Protect and restore forests.
- Improve energy efficiency and sustainable agriculture.

The Link Between Volunteering and Climate Change

The relationship between volunteering and climate change is vital and dynamic, as volunteering can play a crucial role in addressing and raising awareness about climate change.

Key Points: Volunteering and Climate Change

1. Education and Awareness

- Volunteers can organize awareness campaigns about climate change, helping citizens understand its causes, consequences, and solutions.
- Participation in educational programs in schools and communities.

2. Environmental Protection

- Waste collection in public areas, forests, and coastlines.
- Tree planting and reforestation.
- Maintenance and cleaning of parks and natural areas.

3. Support for Sustainable Practices

- Promoting recycling, energy and water conservation.

- Supporting local initiatives for green energy and sustainable agriculture.

4. Disaster Response

- Providing aid during natural disasters related to climate change, such as floods and wildfires.
- Volunteering to assist affected communities.

5. Policy and Social Action

- Participating in advocacy campaigns for the implementation of environmental policies.
- Creating networks to share knowledge and resources.

Examples of Volunteering and Climate Change Actions

1. The Role of Volunteering in Preventing and Addressing Climate Change

- **Reducing Carbon Footprint:** Volunteers promote practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as the use of renewable energy, energy conservation, and support for sustainable transport (e.g. cycling, walking, public transportation).
- **Public Education:** In many countries, organizations host seminars, workshops, and campaigns in schools and communities to increase climate crisis awareness. This helps society adapt and change habits.

2. Examples of Volunteer Activities

- **Protests and Awareness Campaigns:** Many young people take part in global events like the “Fridays for Future”

demonstrations, aimed at pressuring governments to take meaningful climate action.

- **Tree Planting Programs:** In urban and rural areas, tree planting helps absorb CO₂ and improve local microclimates. For example, in Greece, volunteer groups organize reforestation efforts in burned areas.
- **Beach and River Cleanups:** Removing plastic and other waste helps protect biodiversity and reduces environmental pollution.

3. How Volunteering Enhances Social Cohesion and Local Resilience

- In areas affected by natural disasters (e.g., wildfires, floods), volunteering helps not only with immediate relief but also with the community's recovery.
- Actions such as creating community gardens, organizing barter exchanges, and supporting local eco-markets promote a more sustainable and resilient lifestyle.

4. Volunteering and New Technologies for Climate Change

- Crowdsourcing platforms and apps allow citizens to record environmental data (e.g., air quality, temperatures, flooding events), supporting scientists and decision-makers.
- Volunteers with IT skills contribute to projects that promote sustainable development and green technology.

CIVIL PROTECTION AND VOLUNTEERING

The Civil Protection Volunteering System, established by Law 3013/2002 and enhanced by Law 4662/2020, aims to support the civil protection

mechanism in preventing, responding to, and recovering from disasters through voluntary organizations. These organizations become part of the operational framework and contribute human resources, materials, and equipment. The mission of Civil Protection volunteer organizations involves assisting state agencies in the areas of:

- Prevention: contributing to risk assessment, awareness campaigns, and education of citizens regarding natural and technological hazards.
- Preparedness: participating in exercises, training, and planning for emergency response.
- Response: assisting in the coordination and implementation of rescue, firefighting, first aid, and evacuation operations.
- Recovery: supporting affected communities in the restoration of infrastructure, the environment, and social life.

These organizations are registered in the official registry of the General Secretariat for Civil Protection and operate under specific standards and responsibilities. They collaborate with state authorities and other organizations to ensure a coordinated and effective response to emergencies.

Volunteerism in civil protection is a significant expression of active citizenship. Volunteers often act as the first line of defense in rural, mountainous, and remote areas where the presence of state mechanisms may be limited. Their contribution enhances the resilience of local communities, strengthens trust, and creates a sense of solidarity and cooperation.

Conclusion

Volunteerism is a powerful and dynamic tool in addressing climate change and environmental protection. It bridges the gap between knowledge and action, transforming concern into tangible impact. Whether through local clean-ups, reforestation programs, awareness campaigns, or support during natural disasters, volunteers offer their time, energy, and passion to serve a greater cause.

In the face of the climate crisis, civil society must mobilize. Volunteerism, supported by institutions and empowered by knowledge and solidarity, is a vital ally on the road to a more sustainable, fair, and resilient future.

Region of Central Macedonia

REGIONAL UNIT	NAME OF GROUP	REGISTRATION DECREE
Imathia	Radio Amateurs Union of Veria, Alexandria, Naousa	26/2012
Thessaloniki	Hunting Association of Epanomi	59/2001
Thessaloniki	Armed Forces Reserve Club Thessaloniki - Metropolitan	21/2007
Thessaloniki	Civil Protection Elite Volunteer Emergency	04/2018

	Team, under the distinctive title "ELITE RESCUE TEAM"	
Thessaloniki	Civil Protection Volunteers of the Municipality of Thermi	03/2012
Thessaloniki	Civil Protection Volunteers of Mikra, Municipality of Thermi	13/2010
Thessaloniki	Voluntary Disaster Response Rescue Team	17/2001
Thessaloniki	Voluntary Civil Protection Disaster Response Team of Epanomi	56/2008
Thessaloniki	Volunteer Team of Filyro, Municipality of Hortiatis	52/2001
Thessaloniki	Voluntary Corps of Greek Firefighters and Reforesters of Lagadas	22/2019
Thessaloniki	Hellenic Rescue Team (HRT)	06/2001
Thessaloniki	Disaster Response Team – Volunteers of Oraiokastros	03/2015
Thessaloniki	Friends of Hunters of Thermaikos Coast, Thessaloniki	55/2008
Thessaloniki	Disaster Response Team – Volunteers of Kalamaria	12/2013

Thessaloniki	Greek Rescuers – Rescue GR	19/2006
Thessaloniki	Panorama Civil Protection Volunteers	22/2010
Thessaloniki	Hellenic Scouts / Civil Protection Scout Team of Thessaloniki Regional Headquarters	21/2001
Thessaloniki	Elite Special Mission Team of the Municipality of Thessaloniki	16/2005
Thessaloniki	Voluntary Disaster Prevention and Response Team of the Municipality of Thermaikos	06/2008
Thessaloniki	Hellenic Union for Research and Rescue	19/2001
Thessaloniki	Volunteers of Greece	06/2017
Thessaloniki	Greek Urban Search and Rescue Team – USAR HELLAS	19/2016
Thessaloniki	The Smile of the Child (Branch)	16/2007
Thessaloniki	Thessaloniki Rescue Team (THESS RESCUE TEAM)	
Thessaloniki	Voluntary Hellenic Rescue Team of Drymos	
Thessaloniki	Action & Relief Team	

	Asvestochori – Exochi – Hortiatis	
KILKIS	Hunting Association of Paionia "To Paiko"	33/2009
PELLA	Mountaineering Club of Aridaia	14/2008
PELLA	Radio Club of Edessa	13/2003
PELLA	Special Forces Association of Pella – Candidate Achilles Mimilidis	
PIERIA	Radio Amateur Association of Pieria	83/2001
PIERIA	Rescue Team of Pieria	
PIERIA	Nature-Loving Association of Litochoro "Olympus"	5/2018
SERRES	Aero Club of Serres	28/2008
SERRES	Radio Amateurs Association of Serres Prefecture	5/2008
SERRES	Association of Reserve Officers of Serres Prefecture	3/2020
SERRES	Special Forces Club of Serres Prefecture "Lieutenant Colonel Georgios Katsanis"	78/2001
SERRES	Selected Special Missions Team (EPOMEA) of the	01/2012

	Municipality of Sintiki	
HALKIDIKI	Hellenic Rescue Team (HRT) – Readiness Base of Kassandra (Halkidiki)	06/ 2001
HALKIDIKI	Hellenic Rescue Team – Halkidiki Branch	03/2003
HALKIDIKI	Reserve Armed Forces Club of Halkidiki Prefecture	09/2014
HALKIDIKI	Volunteer Fire Protection and Nature Conservation Group of the Municipality of Toroni	
HALKIDIKI	Friends of Hunters Club of Thermaikos Coast – Kassandra Branch	

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the state needs volunteerism and the contribution of its citizens — not merely as a complementary force to the main governmental mechanisms, but as two pillars working together as a family to achieve the outcomes we all need for a prosperous society.

2. Chinopoulos Nikolaos - Independent Directorate of Civil Protection \ Civil Protection Department of the Regional Unit of Pieria on behalf of **Ms Sophia Mavridou**, Deputy Regional Governor of Pieria.

"The Role of Regional Units in Civil Protection"

This presentation analyzes the role of Regional Units in Civil Protection—a sector of vital importance for the safety and well-being of local communities. The institution of Civil Protection in Greece aims to safeguard citizens and the environment from natural and man-made disasters, based on four fundamental pillars: Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. The General Secretariat for Civil Protection (GSCP) is the main coordinating body, operating in collaboration with agencies such as the Fire Brigade, the National Emergency Aid Center (EKAV), Municipalities, and Regional Authorities.

In recent years, Civil Protection in Greece has been significantly strengthened in response to the growing challenges posed by climate change and natural disasters. Regional Units, as institutional entities of the Regions, play a central role in prevention, response, and disaster recovery.

The main responsibilities of Regional Units include implementing prevention projects, activating mechanisms for combating fires and floods, carrying out infrastructure maintenance works, and cooperating with all involved stakeholders. Specifically, the Regional Unit of Pieria actively participates in risk management projects and undertakes actions during periods of high risk, also mobilizing the volunteer network.

Civil Protection requires ongoing collaboration and coordination, with the aim of building a resilient and safe society. Strengthening Regional Units and continuously upgrading infrastructure and operational capacity are fundamental steps towards ensuring public safety.

3. **Ms Parthena Triantafyllidou.** Director of Primary Education in Pieria.

.....

4. **Ms. Mariza Antonakopoulou**

Civil Engineer, MSc Hazard, Disaster and Crisis Management
Deputy Head of the
Independent Civil Protection Department
of the Municipality of Katerini

VOLUNTEERISM AND CIVIL PROTECTION ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Definition of Disaster

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material, and environmental losses that exceed the affected society's capacity to cope using its own resources. (Art. 1, Law 4662/2020)

The National Civil Protection Mechanism covers the entire disaster management cycle and constitutes the totality of operational and administrative structures and functions of Civil Protection.

Purpose of the National Civil Protection Mechanism

The National Mechanism prioritizes the following (Art. 2, Law 4662/2020):

- the prevention, preparedness, and protection of human life, health, and property; the environment; cultural heritage; infrastructure;

natural resources; critical services; and both tangible and intangible assets from natural and technological disasters and other related threats that cause or may cause emergency situations during peacetime

- the risk reduction as well as the response to, recovery from, and minimization of their consequences

Disaster Management Cycle

Preparedness- Prevention-Response-Recovery

General Secretariat for Civil Protection

The National Authority for the Maintenance of the Unified Register of Civil Protection Volunteering, which is part of the Civil Protection system,

Independent Directorate of Volunteering and Training

Organizes, utilizes, promotes, supports, and supervises volunteer activity, Designs and implements training programs in civil protection subjects through the Civil Protection Academy and public or private sector entities.

Unified Register of Civil Protection Volunteering (U.R.C.P.V.)

It is maintained by the Directorate of Volunteering and Training of the General Secretariat for Civil Protection (G.S.C.P.) and includes:

- **Registry of Volunteer Civil Protection Organizations (R.V.C.P.O.)**", where Volunteer Civil Protection Organizations are registered.
- **"Registry of Civil Protection Volunteers (R.C.P.V.)"**, where the members of the Volunteer Civil Protection Organizations are registered.
- **"Registry of Equipment and Resources of Volunteer Civil Protection Organizations (R.E.R.V.C.P.O.)"**, where the materials and resources of the Volunteer Civil Protection Organizations are registered.
- **"Registry of Partner Organizations and Entities"**, where organizations and entities — of a non-governmental and non-profit nature — are registered when they sign Memoranda of Cooperation. Their actions must align with the goals of civil protection and be supportive, not operational.
- **"Archive of Evaluation Reports of Volunteer Civil Protection Organizations"**, where evaluation reports of volunteer organizations are recorded.

Actions of Civil Protection Volunteer Organizations

Operational Actions

- Forest protection actions for the prevention of forest fires (Forest Prevention Action - FPA).

- Forest firefighting actions for the suppression of forest fires (Forest Firefighting Action - FFA).
- Urban firefighting actions for the suppression of fires in urban environments (Urban Firefighting Action - UFA).
- First aid actions to apply a sequence of steps to prevent the worsening of injured or ill persons' conditions (First Aid Action - FAA).
- Search and rescue actions involving locating and providing assistance to people at risk or threatened by imminent danger (Search and Rescue - SaR).
- Aid and support actions (Aid and Support Action - ASA).

Supportive Actions

- Telecommunications actions (Communication Support Action - CSA).
- Psychological support actions (Psychological Support Action - PSA).
- Public information and warning actions to provide timely, coordinated, and uninterrupted citizen information (Public Awareness Action - PAA).
- Relief and support actions to ensure basic needs of affected individuals (Relief and Support Action - ReSA).
- Transportation actions (Transportation Action - TRAct).
- Actions for the organization and operation of gathering areas for the development and management of temporary camps (Shelter Monitoring Action - SMA).

Objective of Civil Protection at the Local Government Level

Support of the operational units of the National Mechanism for Crisis Management and Disaster Response.

Assumption of key responsibilities in the overall operation and actions of the National Mechanism and implementation of activities aimed at optimal response during all phases of the disaster management cycle.

Public information and awareness-raising.

Volunteering

A volunteer is a person who offers their time, energy, or knowledge, without payment, of their own free will, to help society as a whole. Volunteering involves actions of a social, humanitarian, environmental, or cultural nature. It is an act of giving, participation, and solidarity.

Volunteering and Humanitarian Crisis

The importance of volunteering becomes especially evident in times of humanitarian crisis.

War conflicts, migratory flows, and severe natural disasters

Contribution of Volunteer Organizations During Humanitarian Crises

Humanitarian aid (food, clothing, medical support)
Psychological and social support for the affected

Support in coordination and hosting of vulnerable groups
Hope, presence, and solidarity for those in need.

Volunteering and Local Government

- connect the state with the citizen
- promote solidarity, social cohesion,
and the resilience of society in the face of any crisis

Examples of How Volunteering Connects Local Government and Citizens

Fires and Fire Prevention:

- Participation in the prevention, control, and extinguishing of fires.
- Training of residents. Assistance in the evacuation of residents.

Floods and Risk Management:

- Participation in flood prevention and management.
- Assistance in mapping dangerous areas, installing warning systems, and evacuating citizens.

Emergency Reception Stations:

- Assistance in providing first aid, food, and psychological support.

Training and Public Awareness:

- Participation in seminars, events, and activities to inform the public about self-protection measures in case of natural disasters.

Psychological Support in Crises:

- Volunteer psychologists and social workers can offer psychological support to residents of affected areas, in cooperation with local health services and Civil Protection.

Rescue and Emergency Response:

- Participation in search and rescue operations under the guidance of the responsible operational agencies.

Volunteerism in Civil Protection

Volunteers actively assist—during emergencies and political mobilizations—in the prevention, preparation, response, and recovery from natural and technological disasters such as fires, earthquakes, floods, and other emergencies. They receive proper training to be ready to act in coordination with state authorities and services (such as the Fire Department, Police, and Emergency Medical Services), offering valuable support during critical moments. They also participate in training sessions and public awareness activities.

Civil Protection Volunteer

An individual — member of a volunteer organization — who is part of the Civil Protection network.

Provides unpaid and non-profit services for the benefit of the community,

in cooperation with Local Government authorities and other operational agencies.

Requirements:

- Good physical and mental health
- Certified training and certification from the Civil Protection Academy

Volunteering is vital for Civil Protection:

- It strengthens the immediate response to disasters
- It promotes prevention
- It empowers social solidarity

Why Become a Volunteer?

- I develop social and personal skills.
- I contribute positively to society and the environment.
- I gain experience and knowledge.
- I meet new people and collaborate in teams.
- I feel satisfaction and empowerment through giving.

How to Attract Young People

Education and Awareness

- Understand the real needs of people affected by natural disasters or crises.
- Integrate volunteering as a subject in school curricula.
- Create seminars, workshops, and activities focused on solidarity, the benefits, and the importance of volunteering.

Use of Social Networks and Technology

- Launch campaigns on social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) using volunteer stories, videos from activities, or interviews with people positively impacted by volunteering.
- Develop platforms or mobile apps where young people can easily find volunteer opportunities and actively participate.

Public Recognition and Rewards

- Create reward programs for volunteers, such as volunteer awards, that acknowledge their contributions.
- Recognizing volunteer work in academic programs and issuing volunteer certificates can motivate young people to participate.

Linking with Global Incentives and Goals

- Organize events that connect local volunteering with global objectives, such as poverty alleviation, refugee assistance, or environmental protection.
- Encourage participation in activities related to humanitarian crises on a global scale.

Engagement and Open Invitation

- Organize open events where young people can get involved without complicated procedures, such as volunteer festivals or volunteerism workshops, allowing them to learn and act on the spot.
- Provide guidance to young people from experienced volunteers through educational seminars related, for example, to first aid and crisis management.

In conclusion

The experience of the recent past, along with the natural disasters that occurred during this time, painfully revealed the vulnerability of humans in the face of nature's power, as well as the importance of collective crisis management at every level. With the protection of human life and property as their guiding principle, volunteers often battle against time and prevailing conditions, collaborating with local authorities and operational teams, giving true meaning to the term "Civil Protection."

Volunteering

Is an Act of
Responsibility and
Love

Together we protect –
Together we prevent

Be the Strength
of Civil Protection

5. Mr Ilias Tsolakidis Head of the Tobacco Station of Katerini.

**How Ready are we? Contingency Plan
for Dealing with the Effects of a Potential Natural Disaster in the
Pieria Prefecture**

The experience of the members of the Volunteer Action Group of Pieria Prefecture “My Homeland” from their participation in emergency response activities—from the Idomeni and refugee camps of Chráni, Kato Milia & Petra Olympou (2015 to today), to the catastrophic fire in Mati (2018) and the floods in Karditsa (2020)—as well as their daily involvement with the Social Structures of the Katerini Tobacco Station (Medical Clinic, Pharmacy, Grocery Store), constitutes a significant body of knowledge. With this proposal, the team offers its support to the local community in the form of a disaster response plan for Pieria Prefecture.

Thus, in accordance with Law 4662/2020, the Volunteer Action Group “My Homeland” has studied and is ready to implement, in case of emergency, the following plan to support and assist the state mechanism:

A. Relief and Support Action (ReSA)

Aid for affected individuals and meeting their basic needs, through the provision of medical/sanitary supplies and temporary food distribution.

Social Pharmacy

The Social Pharmacy “Alekos Ftikas” in Katerini holds around 15,000 pharmaceutical items accessible to the public via an online searchable database.

Medical Supply Warehouse

The stock includes: 3 portable first-aid kits, emergency suitcase with medical tools, outpatient equipment, ECG machine, aluminum blankets, gauzes, dressings, gloves, syringes, IV fluids, insect repellents, disinfectants, personal hygiene items, baby and adult diapers, baby formula, and cleaning supplies.

Mobile Kitchen

A mobile field kitchen (from the Swiss army) using firewood, includes two 100-liter cooking pots and can produce up to 700 meals in two hours. It is fully operational and equipped with new cooking containers.

Social Grocery Store – 22,500 Meals

Long-lasting food stock includes 5 types of canned goods, pasta, legumes, rice, tomato paste, olive oil, salt, vinegar, and lemon juice—sufficient for preparing 22,500 meals. All materials are quality-checked and within expiry.

B. Shelter Monitoring Action (SMA)

Organization of gathering spaces for the creation of temporary shelters for affected populations.

Courtyard of the Tobacco Station

Fenced area for up to 400 people, includes outdoor kitchen and wood oven for baking bread during power outages, plus hygiene facilities.

Tents

Space available for 4 large tents hosting up to 100 people (tents not currently available).

12 Mobile Units

Can host vulnerable citizens and children during emergencies.

Social Restaurant

Indoor dining space for up to 80 people; outdoor area can serve up to 250 using 30 tables with benches.

Sanitary Facilities

Includes 3 women's WCs, 2 men's WCs, 1 accessible WC, 1 shower, and a solar water heater.

C. Forest Prevention Action (FPA)

Fire prevention activities

- “I Give a Day of My Summer to the Forest” – A permanent institution for fire prevention in Olympus and the Pierian mountains.
- Public awareness campaigns
- Volunteer recruitment pool

D. Public Awareness Action (PAA)

Public information and emergency alerts

For timely and coordinated communication, including:

- Distribution of printed materials
- Targeted SMS & Email campaigns
- In alignment with the National Civil Protection Plan

Mass Notification Mechanism

- Website & mass message system

- Citizen groups for coordinated messaging
- Database of 35,000 email addresses

E. Red Code – Training and Resource Organization

Support for Level 4 emergencies and maintenance of materials and facilities.

- Volunteer training
- Formation and role-specific training of teams
- Regular emergency drills (e.g., kitchen, tent setup)
- Sorting and quality-control teams
- Citizen engagement campaign: “Share your plan with us”

6. Mr Dimitrios Katirtzis Certified Trainer in First Aid and CPR/AED at the Regional Branch of Katerini.

The Hellenic Red Cross is part of the largest volunteer organization in the world. It was founded by Henri Dunant in 1863, is headquartered in Geneva, and comprises 183 memberstates. Greece has been a member since 1877, thanks to the initiative of Queen Olga, and has Regional Branches across the country, divided into four sectors:

- The Health Sector
- The Youth Sector, which serves as the nursery of the Red Cross
- The Social Welfare Sector
- The Volunteer Samaritans, Rescuers, and Lifeguards Sector, which is the operational rescue unit of the Red Cross

Each sector specializes in its field of action, but when needed, they all collaborate to fulfill the mission. The Hellenic Red Cross is part of Civil Protection, supporting the work of state services, and is called upon to provide assistance both in Greece and abroad.

The strength of the Red Cross lies in its Volunteers – everyday people who stand out for their ethos, kindness, and above all, their strong desire to offer help to anyone in need, even under the harshest of conditions. They are always on standby, 24 hours a day.

All volunteers receive the same training, which is what makes the Red Cross the foremost volunteer force in the world. Each Regional Branch, Sector, and individual Volunteer has a wealth of experience and valuable contributions to present.

However, to keep a volunteer team strong and effective, continuous training and teamwork are essential. Some operate on the front lines, while others work behind the scenes, ensuring training, equipment readiness, organization, medical supplies, logistics, planning, and managing endless bureaucracy.

We cooperate closely with public services, and we take part in emergency responses for:

- Natural disasters
- Mountain and sea rescue operations
- Search and rescue for missing persons
- Wildfire protection
- Blood donation campaigns
- Road accident response
- Care for the elderly and vulnerable groups

- First aid training, and much more – wherever there is a need, in Greece or internationally.
- Because pain knows no borders.

As the Regional Branch of Katerini, we have participated in missions to:

- Ukraine, for humanitarian aid
- The earthquake-affected areas of Turkey
- In the past, we supported missions in Sarajevo
- A three-month humanitarian mission to Sri Lanka, for the victims of the catastrophic tsunami
- The wildfires in Mati, the Peloponnese, and Rhodes
- The refugee crisis, with missions to Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Diavata, and Idomeni, among others

There are many more missions I could mention, but I don't want to tire you.

We firmly believe that a nation is only as strong as the number of active volunteers it has. Citizens must be continuously educated in prevention and emergency response.

Imagine if everyone knew how to prevent fires or how to react during any emergency.

Volunteers support the firefighter by giving him water, pulling the heavy hose, giving him a moment of rest, cleaning his wound, or putting eye drops in his smoke-filled eyes.

Every household should know what to pack in case of evacuation and temporary shelter in tents:

- A bag by the front door with three months of essential medications

- A fully stocked first aid kit (with fever reducers, antihistamines, painkillers, soap, hygiene items)
- Non-perishable food for a week
- A flashlight with extra batteries
- A radio, magnifying glass
- One sleeping bag per person
- A portable water pump
- A camping stove, and so on

We must train people on how to act in accidents, how to call emergency services, and how to give first aid to keep someone alive until the ambulance arrives.

Dear friends, Through volunteering and offering, you may not earn money, but you become a valuable citizen. You gain the respect of others, learn to appreciate simple things, develop team spirit, grow in self-confidence, feel proud of your contribution, and receive the deepest reward: the voice of your own conscience.

Thank you.

7. **Vivi Xistra** former President of the Women's Initiative of Palamas, Kardisa.

VOLUNTEERISM AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Our Association was founded in 2009 in Palamas, Karditsa. It was created out of the need of a group of women to offer support to other women in the region and to society as a whole. Information, assistance, entertainment, interpersonal relationships, friendships. The time we dedicate comes from our personal

sacrifice, as we are all working women. Being involved in associations—whatever the field—is a form of volunteerism. Time and willingness to offer, social solidarity, coexistence as a fundamental factor of socialization, skills development, good cooperation among individuals with social sensitivity - We discovered and cultivated parts of ourselves.

Clearly, volunteerism cannot solve the complex problems of modern societies, but it gives temporary relief.

The catastrophic weather phenomenon, Daniel, arrived in Palamas at dawn, on September 7, 2023. Torrential rains for two consecutive days (Tuesday and Wednesday, September 5th and 6th) caused the Pinios River and its side-rivers in Western Thessaly to overflow. Some flood protection barriers collapsed, and Palamas, Vlochos, Metamorfosi, Koskinas, and Marathea turned into an immense lake. 1.4 million stremmata (approx. 140,000 hectares) were flooded throughout Thessaly.

We could not believe our eyes. By Thursday noon, the entire town was underwater—depths ranging from 1 meter to 2.5–3 meters. The first day we needed time to realize what was happening—but also to survive, by going by any way possible to higher locations (for those who had one, or to the homes of relatives, friends, and neighbors). Water flooded at night and we were not informed. We woke up to find water levels inside our homes. Many people were transported with the help of fellow citizens who had large tractors, small sea boats, or canoes used for river fishing. There were elderly individuals who were found trapped in water and were rescued by others with self-sacrifice and risk. Some remained as guests for days because their own homes

were destroyed. Families cohabited under the same roof thanks to the humanitarian spirit and solidarity of these people.

The area was a lake. The Hellenic Fire Service's Special Disaster Unit (EMAK) arrived with boats, rescuing people at the same time. Some individuals didn't even have a change of clothes...

The destruction was total. Houses, cars, businesses, crops, animals. By next morning, the water level started receding (not everywhere in the town), and the extent of the damage began to show, along with countless problems. Helicopters transported the elderly and sick to the hospital in Karditsa (the Palamas Health Center was flooded...). All of this was done with the help of the locals, especially the young people. The indoor gym was converted into a shelter for the homeless. Trucks began arriving mainly with water, as we had neither water nor electricity.

We couldn't see the full picture nor communicate. It felt like a war zone. The young people volunteered from the very beginning to help in every possible area. We were all mobilized to assist in the distribution centers—food, water, clothes, hot meals, medicine and even food for surviving animals. Volunteers took charge of cooking for the residents of Palamas and the surrounding villages. Of course, we also had to clean what was left in our own homes and businesses.

Soon, friends, acquaintances, and strangers began calling to send help. Some knew us as an association, and others found us by asking around. They wanted personal contact with trustworthy people to collect and send essential supplies. People from all over Greece called us. They organized musical, theatrical, and sports events and raised awareness to encourage people to contribute. The

floods had gone viral on social media, which continued to focus on us for a long time. The images spoke for themselves.

Our office had also flooded, so until it was cleaned, we redirected shipments to the municipality's distribution center or to the Philoptochos (Charity) of the parish of Saint Athanasios—especially bulky items like mattresses, duvets and blankets. Later, we began receiving goods at our office and handled their distribution ourselves.

People entrusted us with money. They transferred it to our account, and we distributed it (with transparency) to families in need. We applied social criteria and dedicated a great deal of time to make the right choices, minimizing errors. Everyone expressed their joy and relief, and of course, their gratitude. The amount each family received wasn't large, but it offered temporary relief at that moment. We were able to support 40 families financially. I must mention, with great respect, that the Greek Community of Brussels sent us a significant amount, and it is an honor for our Association to have been entrusted with its donation.

Through Helpellas, following a public announcement, local citizens reported their needs. We became their local partners. We had to allocate many days to distribute the essential goods they had sent. They also gave us the opportunity to help those with the most severe needs.

I must make a special reference, with deep respect for their contribution to our region, to the Tobacco Station – Volunteer Action Group of Pieria Prefecture, and to Ilias and Kostas. They contacted us from the very beginning through the Secretary of our Association—your very own Zoi Kastori—for immediate help. They organized house cleaning operations. People with the greatest

needs were identified through the Deputy Mayor for Social Policy. A bus full of volunteers came—with Alexandros and the whole team. It was a Saturday. They worked from morning till night. They absorbed the emotions of the people—relief, satisfaction, empathy, comfort, a little rest in the daily unequal battle against the mud!!! ... but also the frustration of lives turned upside down.

The Tobacco Station help kept coming to Palamas every month, from October to April. Aid packages for 20 families. Then 30. Then 40. Every time we anticipated with hope the little white van. We felt we were not alone—and that lifted our spirits. They brought us hope and joy.