

# Voices of Greece

## Stratis - Journalist (Lesbos island)

*Lesbos is one of several Greek islands struggling to cope with a wave of people arriving by boat from the nearby Turkish coast. All summer, one to two thousand refugees have landed daily.*

'We have to prove that the conditions can change, that we can overcome the crisis. The economical crisis is the real problem, not the refugees. We have a brain drain, Greek scientists are leaving the island, they all go to northern Europe. In some years we are not going to have any doctors left on the island. The refugees only make the existing problem bigger. A few days ago it was like war on the island. No, worse than war. The only thing we did not have was casualties. The locals do not react to the refugee crisis. If they react, we will have a civil war. We wait and can't do anything but hope for change. I can help the local population by keeping calm and remind them that we are sons and grandsons of refugees ourselves.

I have no hope, but what can I do? I am already 53 years old. If I would be 40, I would leave. But I have my family here, my roots here, where should I go? To Germany? To do what? I hope that things change, because I have no other choice than to hope.

5 years ago I had a vision that I would move to a small harbor village when I retire and write children books. Now I don't know what will happen. I don't even know if I can ever retire. I don't know if tomorrow, Friday, the newspaper might close.'

## Eleni - The Athens Community Polyclinic and Pharmacy

*Greece's public health system has been a top target for spending cuts to finance the country's debts to international creditors. Its budget has decreased by almost 50 percent since 2009. One third of the population in Greece is without social insurance. The sav-*

*age cuts have led to the closing of entire hospitals and clinics.*

'All over Greece there are more than 40 'solidarity' health clinics run completely by volunteer doctors and regular citizens. These 'solidarity clinics' – free and unregulated – have sprung up around Greece in recent years to treat people who no longer have access to healthcare. Medicine donations come from ordinary people in Greece and abroad, while equipment comes from retiring private doctors or from abroad. Today, even public hospitals are turning to the solidarity clinics for donations in medicines.

After the crisis hit Greece, many people became homeless, unemployed or were unable to pay their health insurance. We all faced the dilemma of whether to just sit and doing nothing or to participate to help create change. I believe that the political situation will not change unless we all help and do something. Everyone needs to do what they can.

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collected by  
Carole Reckinger  
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It is not a matter of hope. I fight for something. There are losses and victories. If we sit and do nothing, you cannot hope for anything. Only by contributing towards a better future we can start to hope. We always hope that more and more people get interested in the grassroots solidarity movement. When you start contributing you find more and more people around you that create change. No one gains anything by just sitting and doing nothing. Whoever comes to power cannot change the situation quickly. It will be a gradual change over many years. Even if we have a government from the people, it would be very difficult to better the current condition of the health service. Too much damage has been done. The situation is very difficult and we will need many years to achieve a change.'



Eleni (© Carole Reckinger)

### Cristos - Solidarity4all (Athens)

*Since the austerity measures were introduced, Greek households have seen a loss of more than one third of their income. Over 44% had an income below the poverty line in 2013. One third is without social insurance.*

'The biggest challenge working with people who are under huge strain is to rebuild their self-esteem and help them get out of the self-blame and to make them active agents of change and resistance. It is obvious that people who have lost everything that they had built all their lives are psychologically unsettled and it is very difficult for them to take the first step to speak about the problems they have. To take this step to share is the cornerstone on which you can build and create a relationship and help them realize that it is not a personal problem they have but a collective problem. It cannot be solved with a personal solution, but only with a collective solution. What gives me hope is the resilience of the Greek people despite of what they have suffered, despite of what



Christos (© Carole Reckinger)

the elites, both the Greek elites and the European elites have planned without taking into consideration those it affects. I think the Greek people have stood up with dignity despite of all that has happened, including the most recent betrayal of Syriza. Hope in Greece does not have a religious context/notion, but it is something you feel when you are actually doing something concrete, when you are doing things with other people and when you see the response of other people. Then you feel that what you have been doing is worthwhile. And this keeps you going, this feeling slowly grows, even if it is still not as strong as you would like it to be, to be able to turn the tables upside down.

Something that happened in the last few years is that we realize that nothing is certain, and that you cannot plan things. You can have aims, but aims take the form of principles rather than targets. The biggest challenge is to create new alternatives, how to create the conditions for this alternative not to become pockets of humanitarian aid, pockets of ideal communities within a generalized system of inequality. But the challenge is how to create these conditions, to build a solidarity movement from the grassroots to build an alternative. I cannot exactly envision what the alternative would look like, I can feel it but I cannot tell you this is how I envision the future. The future is now, every step you take now, and this is why principles matter and this is why building relations of trust matter, cause this is what has strong roots. The future is unwritten, but we build the future in every decision at every moment.'

The texts have been transcribed the way interviewees expressed themselves, including grammar mistakes.

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