

# GREECE PRE-LAUNCH PLANNING REPORT

Input provided by EFM's Greece Field Study Group in NWYM  
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**1. In a brief sentence for each of the five CAN GO criteria, what is the latest update concerning each: Champion/s, Affirmation, Need, Gifting, and Opportunity/Openness.**

Champions:

- Kenn Dirrim, Rose Drive Friends Church, CA; Retiring from 17.5 years of service in Greece.
- Josiah and Leisa Muhr, Newberg Friends Church, Oregon; Exploring future missionary service. Josiah has previously worked short-term in refugee camps in Greece with Helping Hands, and Greater Europe Mission.
- A number of members of Northwest Yearly Meeting
- A number of members of Friends Community Church Brea, CA; Friends Southwest

Affirmation, Need, Gifting, Opportunity/Openness:

- Each of these have been reconfirmed by Kenn and Lisa Dirrim who have been serving in Greece. Other mission organizations and leaders are still asking for help.
- Refugees are still seeking, asking questions, open to conversations with believers, and coming to Christ.
- Refugee believers are asking for help in how to reach other refugees; Specifically, Afghan and Iranian Christians are asking for training.
- In the last year there have been teams doing much needed trauma care which has been highly effective and enables quickly deepening relationships which opens doors for the Gospel.
- Opportunities are different from previous years as more refugees are in camps rather than in the cities. Because of the relocation of refugees to the camps, some sending organizations have left Greece and moved their work to other countries.
- Currently, other European countries are closing to immigration and are now returning refugees back to Greece. Our contacts in Greece anticipate that as refugees return to Greece this will overwhelm the camp system and may result in refugees returning to the cities. Until that happens we would need to continue to go to them (the refugees in the camps) rather than the refugees come to us (established ministries in the cities).
- There are a few more refugees coming back to the Athens city parks. Helping Hands is planning to reopen their tea house in November. (They have been closed since June 2023.) Bringing the refugee ministry back into ministry places/buildings enables more conversation opportunities.

**2. Compelling conviction to launch (to build just a short paragraph on top of the CAN GO summary). What is the compelling picture that is worth giving our lives or the**

**lives of our sons and daughters to? How might these peoples or places look different because we paid the price to take holistic Good News? What words would sharpen our Help Wanted sign for this new field?**

- God is working in the lives of refugees. Workers are asking for training in evangelism and discipleship to create a sustainable evangelical Christian movement.
- Christian refugees who move from Greece into other parts of Europe are starting fellowships wherever they go.
- There is a hunger that the refugees have for “something more”. Many have experienced dreams and see miraculous signs that show that God is working in the lives of the refugees.
- Refugees who have left their homes and families and their Muslim faith, need Christian community/Churches to fulfill the need for family and community. Muslim family ties are strong and important and the decision to follow Jesus breaks those ties and leaves them isolated and alone. If Christian refugees don’t find a replacement community for the loss of their family they eventually walk away.
- There is a time limit on reaching refugees as some are only in Greece a short time. Church planting among refugees who stay in Greece can provide community and reasons to stay in Greece.
- Refugees are asking “who will come now that you (Dirrimis) are leaving?”.
- Because of the relocation of refugees to the camps, some sending organizations have left Greece and have moved their work to other countries. With European countries returning the refugees to Greece there is a need for more ministries to move back to Greece.

**3. Strategy: What informal ideas make the most sense at this time for how this mission field will be launched and developed? How does this impact entry strategy?**

- Athens has been a strategic city in the past but since refugees are now mostly located in rural areas it may be best to start in smaller towns nearer camps. With political changes happening frequently this needs to be reevaluated closer to our launch. Starting a ministry near camps (such as on the islands Samos or Lesbos with refugee reception centers) could facilitate relationships in other locations in Greece which could lead to churches planted elsewhere.
- It makes sense to partner with existing ministries, often led by Christian refugees themselves, and work alongside them to develop relationships and to learn the Greek and refugee cultures.
  - We could partner with the organization “Refugee Highway Project”. They are doing humanitarian work, doing trauma care, and planting churches. It would be helpful for us to learn “best practices” from them.
  - Partnering with current persons doing “job as mission” work can teach us how to open businesses in Greece. It is easiest to establish a business location in Greece from an existing business in the US.

- Offering humanitarian aid as well as Bible studies and discipleship courses may be possible near the refugee camps.
- Trauma ministries and trained counselors are definitely making an impact.
- Through the Dirrims, there are currently contacts on the ground now that are willing to help and mentor our new missionaries.
- Where we start and with whom we partner first will depend on the skills and giftings of those we send.

**4. Visa: What are the visa requirements and what are our best options? What, if anything, does this mean for strategy or preparation?**

- Dirrims are on a “financially independent” visa as they are officially retired from US jobs and are self-supporting.
- Other missionaries in Greece enter on “student” visas while they take courses in Greek.
- A self-employed “work or business” visa is possible.
- The laws change often so we need to explore specifics for whomever we send.

**5. Skill Sets: What are the skill sets that stand out as we look for missionary candidates for this field? How might people in your church hear the opportunity and call, including those who never imagined themselves as “missionaries.” How might the call for workers help people discover that their life or work experiences, character and interests fit into the missionary team/s? Young adults? Mid-career? Retired? Long term? One to two years of service?**

- A gifting in languages is invaluable as this is a multilingual environment. Other skills can be learned but communication skills and a love for people are essential.
- There is a need for workers among women and children.
  - There is a need for people who love working with kids. There are many children. Working with the kids is also a good way to reach the parents.
  - There is a women’s skills project that teaches crafts to allow women to earn an income.
    - The current head of this project is leaving soon and needs to be replaced.
- There is a great need for trained trauma counselors.
- There is a need for teaching English or German as a second language.
- There is a need for humanitarian work; medical, mental health, job training, etc.
- There is a need for entrepreneurs who can have mission-through-business opportunities and creating jobs. Starting businesses are also a path to permanent visa status.
- There is a need for both long-term and short-term gifted foundational Bible and Theology teachers. There is a need for teachers of evangelism and discipleship.
- There is a need for church planting since a church family replaces a biological family for those who are rejected when they convert from Islam to Christianity.

**6. Language Learning: First term missionary's objectives will focus on language and culture learning through immersion. What relationships and connections might be available for language helpers for language learning through immersion? Are there formal language school options that should be considered? How much will these options cost? How does this impact what city or neighborhood they start?**

- Those living/working in Greece need a working knowledge of both Greek and at least one of the refugee languages.

For learning Greek:

- There are many routes for learning Greek: University classes, private companies, and even opportunities in Greek Orthodox churches in the USA (Pre field).
- Possible immersion into existing ministries in Athens or Thessaloniki.
- An EFM-provided language helper to provide language learning strategies.

For learning Farsi, and maybe Arabic, or Dari, or French, or Ukrainian, or Turkish etc:

- Current missionaries working with refugees stress the importance of learning the language of the people in order to learn their culture.
- Immersion into refugee communities and connection with local refugee language helpers is possible.
- With so many languages among refugees it may be necessary for missionaries to narrow their focus of whom to reach.

**7. Location: Where will our missionaries live? What is the region, specific city, or neighborhood?**

- For learning language and culture, a start in cities like Athens or Thessaloniki would be preferred. These would allow close work and community with existing contacts established through the Dirrims.
- Eventually moving to towns or villages near current refugee camps could allow more refugee contact and introduction to camp ministry.
- We have been encouraged by missionaries in Greece to consider some of the unreached or underserved parts of the country. These would be away from the major cities.

**8. Lifestyle: What will the missionary lifestyle look like for their first term of culture and language learning immersion? Will they have a car or use public transportation? Will they live on their own or with someone else?**

- Cities such as Athens, have apartments and houses for rent, schools, and public transportation but a car is essential for ministries outside the city. For small towns and access to remote refugee camps a car is essential. Hauling supplies, people, aid, and equipment for tent-type meetings outside camps requires car or van access.

- Smaller towns near refugee camps will have fewer amenities. It depends on which place. There will be Greek public schools but private and English speaking schools are only available in the cities.
- It is stressed by the Dirrims that single missionary units (families included) should not be sent to Athens alone. The Dirrims advise that missionaries coming to Greece need to be partnered with a team of at least 3 units so that when one unit is gone there is still a remaining team. Those not partnered with teams burn out quickly and leave.
- The Greek culture is very child and family-friendly and young children are welcome to even go to work with parents. Kids are a great way to meet people. When kids get to school age there are more demands on a missionary parent's time which can require choices on how best to spend time.
  - School-age children can:
    - go to Greek school: all in Greek,
    - go to British school: all in English.
      - British schools are expensive, and ideologically liberal;
    - Be home schooled.
- There are private hospitals that take American health insurance.

**9. Spiritual Issues: What are the significant spiritual issues in the area? How does this impact missionary self-care and support in this particular environment (i.e. coping strategies)?**

- The Greek culture is highly “over-sexualized” and there is great temptation toward pornography. There is a real sense of spiritual darkness.
- Refugees coming into Greece are primarily Muslim. Although they are free from their oppressive governments where it is illegal to explore Christianity, there is still family pressure, fear of government persecution for family left behind in Islamic countries, and fear of Christians.
- Many refugees have experienced real trauma which can exacerbate spiritual issues, which can lead to depression, mistrust, and fear. This can also result in secondary trauma to the missionaries dealing with refugees in trauma, thus requiring diligent self-care. It's hard to hear sad stories over and over and not internalize those traumas.
- Those ministering among Muslims need training and education in how to reach this group.
- Missionaries among refugees need prayer support both from home and on the field. It is important that missionaries develop local Christian relationships and a prayer/support community in Greece, both with their own team, but also with Christians in the community outside of their ministry team.

**10. Missionary Care: What needs considered for missionary care in the first term of language learning and culture bonding. What support is required? What pace and rhythms should be considered in this immersion context? Where will the**

**missionary/s go for respite? Are there needs for on-site short- or long-term missionary support personnel? What support or camaraderie already exists in the area of service? What options are there for children's education (if applicable)?**

For missionaries serving among refugees in Greece:

- Culture acclimation (getting over culture shock) in Greece can take a very long time. Possibly due to various languages and the combination of many refugee cultures that are drastically different than American cultures. The missionary culture and church traditions are also multiethnic.
- There must be prayer support both locally and from home.
- Missionaries must develop local Christian relationships and a sustained prayer/support community.
- They need coaching from experienced missionaries: Kenn and Lisa Dirrim would be valuable resources and mentors.
- Support for young families: Financial advice, a support system for health benefits, schooling, daycare, etc.
- Current missionaries stress the requirement for regular times of sabbath. Taking days off each week is important. Refugee work is very demanding and draining and can consume life 24/7.
- Rest and retreat options: Possible locations include Greek Islands. Other European countries are also close enough for respite.
- Yearly prayer trips from supporters would be wonderful.

**11. Teams: It is natural to ask “what if” we have one missionary household ready to deploy but we don't have others identified or ready. There are many ways to define teams and each context/scenario will impact the way EFM would have “peace of mind” short or long term in the process of launching and building/developing healthy thriving teams and mission strategy long term. Please identify what missionary or expat personnel outside of EFM are working (or planning to work) in the area of this new field location who could serve as interim or long term “team” support to EFM worker/s. Briefly explain current status of relationship with these persons.**

- Because the Dirrimms have lived in Greece for 17.5 years, through them, we have in-country relationships with national Christians and with Christian refugees.
- A partnership/collaboration with existing ministries such as Greek Evangelical churches, a refugee medical ministry, and other ministries are possible.
- Through Dirrimms we have contacts with a Christian camp outside of Athens asking for help.
  - They are currently looking for a director.
- We are praying for additional team members.

**12. Support Budget: What will the major field expenses be during the first term? Housing? Language helper and/or language classes? Transportation? Any insights concerning income levels and lifestyle in the area of service? What else?**

- The Dirrimms have been living in Athens for 17.5 years. As a couple they have been renting and have a car. They have been currently living on about \$4000 per month which includes medical insurance premiums for the both of them.
- There is public transportation in cities but in general, unless you own a car, transportation outside cities is challenging. A car should be in the proposed budget.

**13. Possible Missionaries: Who are possible missionary candidates for this field that we should be talking with and preparing? This includes people who don't have traditional "call" but are willing and able to serve within EFM's missionary qualifications and within context of type of service.**

Career Missionaries:

- Perhaps Josiah and Leisa Muhr; Northwest Yearly Meeting. They are newly married and exploring options for their future.

Possible Teachers/Trainers for short intensive trainings:

- Kenn Dirrim, Maybe Jim LeShana, Maybe Bob and Lisa Garon?

**14. Partnerships and relationships with other organizations, or collaborations with other regions/yearly meetings in the U.S.**

- Friends Southwest: Several churches have been supporting the Dirrimms through the years and some FSW members participated in the Luke 10 trips. Friends Community Church Brea, and Rose Drive Friends have sent teams in the past and are willing to send teams in the future.
- Barclay College Missions: They have sent several student study trips to Greece in the past. They may be willing/able to send groups again in the future.
- Northwest Yearly Meeting: Jim LeShana has instigated interest in the NW spurred by his history with the Dirrimms at Rose Drive, CA and with groups from Barclay College.

**15. What are other insights, questions, concerns, points which need to be noted and remembered?**

- Without the Dirrimms in Greece fulltime, it will be more of a challenge to send new missionaries. However, relationships established through the Dirrimms are invaluable and provide a definite head start.
- We in NWYM are excited about the potential partnerships with the interested churches of Friends Southwest.