

Your Eminence,  
Excellences  
Dear Colleges,

My name is Panteleimon Papasynefakis and I am the newly appointed Director of Integration Center for Migrant Workers- Ecumenical Refugee Program of the Church of Greece.

First of all I would like to share my honor for being here today with all of you. I would like to start by saying a few words about the organization I am representing.

KSPM-ERP is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1978 within the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, to assist, initially, the reintegration of Greek returning migrants from Western Europe. Since the '90s it has extended its scope to include foreign immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. It aims at contributing to the improvement of their situation through legal and social assistance offered to individuals, research, lobbying, and collaboration with immigrant communities, information and sensitization activities; it also aims at informing the Church of Greece on critical issues relating to the migration and integration of migrants in Greece. For this purpose it conducts researches on issues such as trafficking, Muslim migrants in Greece, the second generation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Athens and border areas so as to provide advocacy as well as plan and implement projects to meet identified needs. KSPM-ERP has implemented a significant number of projects regarding legal aid and social support of migrants and refugees and has been a UNHCR implementing partner since 2011 providing legal aid and assisting family reunification procedures

As you know the last few years the refugee issue has become very acute in Greece. According to UNHCR data, almost 200.000 people have arrived to Greece by sea since the beginning of 2016. As reception and registration procedures are being stabilized, the need for a solid integration policy will soon arise.

Social integration is a multileveled and complex procedure. It has to do, among others, with the policies of the receiving country and especially with the institutional context defining residence and labor and the setting and operation of supportive structures staffed with adequate and specialized personnel. It also has to do with the nationality of the refugees, their cultural and religious heritage, their gender and level of education which influence the attitudes of the society of the receiving country.

In this framework, KSPM-ERP, because of its ties with the Church of Greece, has a broad scope of intervention on many levels.

More specifically, our Center, as an organization representing the Church of Greece, can enhance acceptance of religious differences in the general population by engaging in dialogue and associating with refugee communities and representatives of Muslim populations. This way it contributes effectively in the integration process for refugees and their families in a way that it's both fair for them and beneficiary for the receiving society.

However beyond this symbolic level, KSPM-ERP has been active in the field by implementing specialized projects providing legal and social counseling and support. Through our highly experienced collaborators, we can detect possible discriminations against refugee populations tampering with their smooth social integration and we intervene so as to protect and ensure their rights. Whenever, while handling individual cases, institutional inadequacies are detected, we contact the relevant authorities with fully substantiated reports so as to inform them and propose possible solutions.

Finally, we must stress that institutional regulations supporting the integration of refugees and migrants or combating discriminations, important as they might be, are not enough. KSPM- ERP can undertake actions in the micro level of parishes. These activities either promote the integration of refugees on a practical level (for example providing food, medicine, clothes and other basic necessities, assisting in finding safe and decent housing, as well as education and assistance to finding jobs) or encourage the understanding of religious differences, the creation of a positive image of the refugees and the expression of word that assists the acceptance of Muslim refugees and promotes the necessity of harmonious coexistence between the parishioners and their refugee neighbors.

I would like to finish with the words of Apostole Paul, reminding us that everybody is a unique image of God:

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”*

Thank you