



LIGHT  
HOUSE  
RELIEF

# ANNUAL REPORT 2016



# WHO WE ARE

Lighthouse Relief (LHR) is a humanitarian, Swedish, non-profit, non-governmental organisation with a Greek branch Lighthouse Relief Hellas (LHRH).  
And another sentence here.

Lighthouse Relief© Org No: 802503-7444 / Lighthouse Relief Hellas© VAT: 997083101



Our mission is to provide  
immediate crisis response as well as  
long term relief, for the most  
vulnerable groups, in a dignified, respectful  
and empowering way



# HOW IT ALL STARTED...

In September 2015, volunteers from all over the world came to Skala Sikamineas – a tiny fishing village on the North Eastern shore of Lesbos – to support the thousands of refugees arriving every day by rubber dinghies from Turkey.

At the time, no NGOs were present. Fishermen were out at sea at night rescuing people from drowning, and local residents were doing what they could to help the constant stream of people arriving, needing information, shelter, transportation, dry clothes, medical attention, water and nutrition.

The road between the Northern coast and the registration camp in Moria was full of people; families with infants, elderly and injured, walking every day and

night, a walk that could take up to three hot days and three cold nights.

Some of the volunteers saw a need for a structured response and organised themselves under the name of Lighthouse Relief, inspired by the lighthouse in Korakas where volunteers hiked night after night to find people in need.

Fazeela Selberg Zaib, Gunnar Björklund and Johan Mellström, three of the volunteers with a background in humanitarian aid, emergency response and camp construction returned to Sweden and officially founded and registered Lighthouse Relief on the 28th of September 2015.

The main focus at the start was to provide coordination


and a structured emergency response to the area and to support the most vulnerable people by providing shelter, nutrition, water, emergency medical support, coordination of boat landings and organised transportation.

In order to support the local community, a clean up operation was initiated to clear the beaches from thousands and thousands of discarded life jackets and abandoned rubber dinghies, relieving some of the burden for the local residents, facing this crisis, every day and night.

Even though the influx of arrivals has now decreased Lighthouse Relief is still present, active and needed in Skala Sikamineas, where our story once started ●



## HISTORY: LHR HIGHLIGHTS

A photograph of a lighthouse on a cliffside at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The lighthouse and other buildings on the cliff are silhouetted against the bright sky. Several people are visible standing on the cliff edge to the right. The foreground shows the dark, rippling water of the sea.

Our goal is to act like a lighthouse;  
to stand firm in harsh conditions,  
lighting the way to guide people in need

**September 2015** – International volunteers in Skala Sikamineas, Lesvos, coordinates emergency responses under the name of Lighthouse Relief (LHR).

**October 2015** – LHR opens a first reception camp in Skala and starts the night watch operation from Korakas lighthouse, assisting arriving boats.

**February 2016** – Enters an official partnership with Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and works in Moria registration site on Lesvos. A team is sent to Idomeni

makeshift camp in northern Greece for urgent support.

**March 2016** – EU-Turkey deal goes through and borders to EU are closing. LHR leaves Moria as it becomes a detention center and expands into mainland Greece with emergency support programs in two makeshift camps close to the border; Idomeni and EKO.

**April 2016** – Establishes support programs for vulnerable populations in official refugee camps, from Katsikas in the north to Ritsona in central Greece.

**May 2016** – Upscaling and re-launching of the clean-up operation on Lesvos; introducing Lighthouse ECO Relief and Upcycling project.

**August 2016** – Enters partnership with Oxfam for Women and Girls safe spaces in Epirus region.

**September 2016** — Registering our Greek branch as Lighthouse Relief Hellas with head office in Athens.





## LHR EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM SKALA SIKAMINEAS, LESVOS



**Every boat landing** is different from the previous. Refugees including children, women, disabled and elderly face risks of drowning, hypothermia and being stranded in secluded areas with need for immediate emergency relief.

Our Emergency Response Team in Skala Sikamineas is ready 24/7 to support arriving refugees on the North-Eastern coast of Lesbos in close collaboration with the authorities, local

residents, UNHCR, sea rescue teams and medical teams.

Good communication and coordination is key for a quick response, and we have been present in this area since fall 2015, coordinating with all other actors.

Through our mobile emergency team and vehicles, we are present to give water, nutrition, emergency blankets, dry clothes and first aid at the shores as well as in our own reception camp and at the transit camp called Stage 2, where the arrivals wait for transportation to Moria.

In Stage 2 we also help accommodate those that might have to stay overnight with food and sleeping arrangements when needed.

Apart from giving emergency relief to vulnerable people fleeing war and conflicts, we also offer a warm, compassionate welcome ●











## LHR FIRST RECEPTION CAMP SKALA SIKAMINIAS, LESVOS

**In October 2015** the island of Lesvos had its highest amount of arrivals ever. 135.063 refugees arrived on the shores that month and there was a massive need for immediate emergency aid and shelter.

LHR decided to build a reception camp in Skala Sikamineas to better accommodate and support the emergency arrivals. People arriving in the middle of the night had a place to stay until transport could be provided to Moria in the morning. Emergency blankets, food and water, dry clothes and shoes was stored in the camp and distributed 24/7.

During winter cases of hypothermia increased and the heating tents was frequently used and the LHR medical team worked closely with other medical teams in the area to give first aid.

The camp has grown organically through volunteers tirelessly contributing to improving it, whilst giving a warm, dignified welcome to the most vulnerable.

After the EU-Turkey agreement, leading to all arriving refugees being detained, the First Reception Camp now serves as a base for our Emergency Response Team. The camp is fully functional and ready to open at any time ●



## PORTRAIT: STRATOS THE FISHERMAN

In 2016, two local residents of Skala Sikamineas were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for their humanitarian efforts helping refugees. One of those was fisherman Stratos Valiamos.

During the peak of the refugee influx on Lesbos, Lighthouse Relief was working alongside him every night to provide aid to arriving refugees.

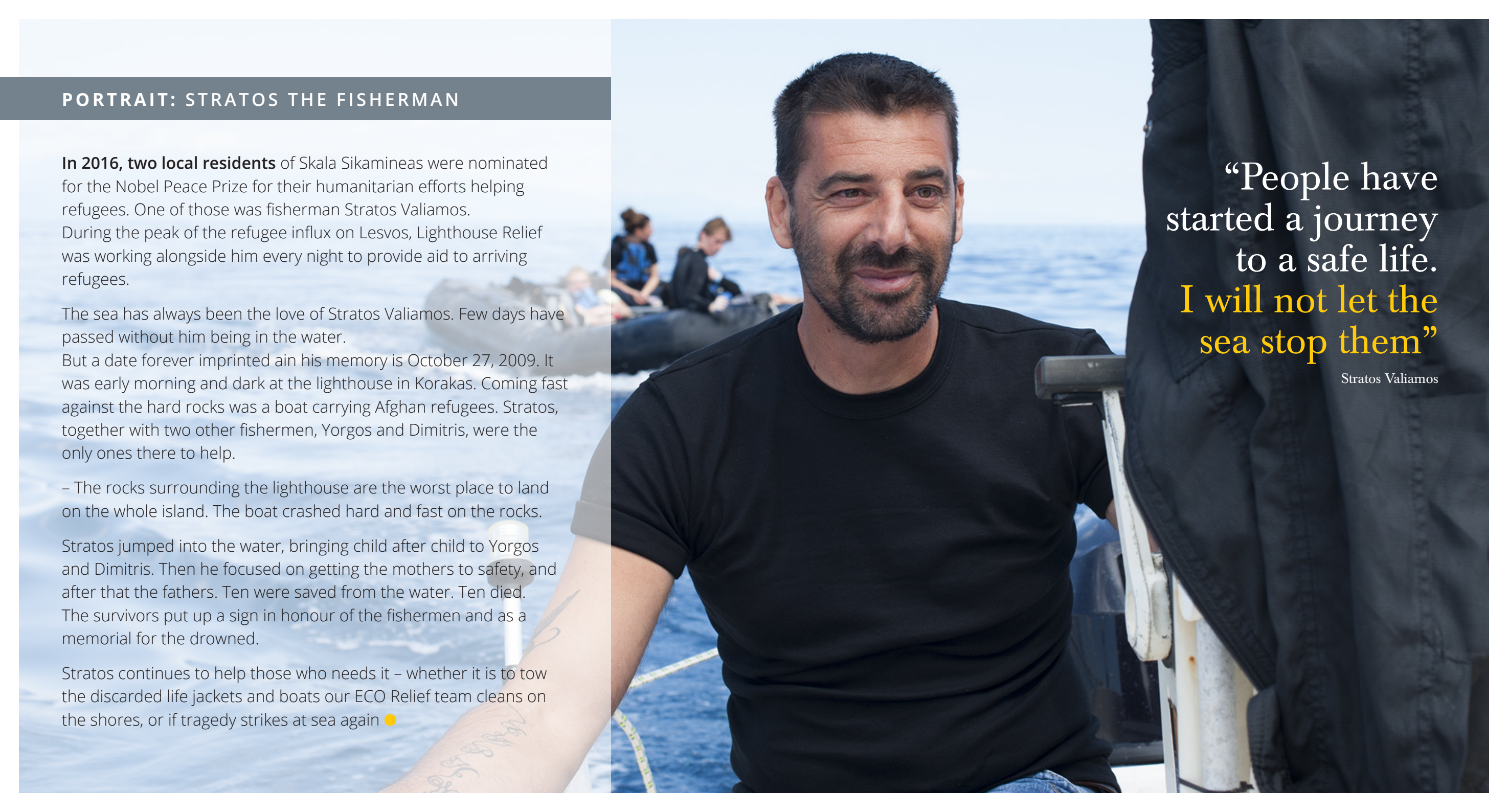
The sea has always been the love of Stratos Valiamos. Few days have passed without him being in the water.

But a date forever imprinted in his memory is October 27, 2009. It was early morning and dark at the lighthouse in Korakas. Coming fast against the hard rocks was a boat carrying Afghan refugees. Stratos, together with two other fishermen, Yorgos and Dimitris, were the only ones there to help.

– The rocks surrounding the lighthouse are the worst place to land on the whole island. The boat crashed hard and fast on the rocks.

Stratos jumped into the water, bringing child after child to Yorgos and Dimitris. Then he focused on getting the mothers to safety, and after that the fathers. Ten were saved from the water. Ten died. The survivors put up a sign in honour of the fishermen and as a memorial for the drowned.

Stratos continues to help those who need it – whether it is to tow the discarded life jackets and boats our ECO Relief team cleans on the shores, or if tragedy strikes at sea again ●



“People have started a journey to a safe life. I will not let the sea stop them”

Stratos Valiamos





## LHR KORAKAS NIGHT WATCH SKALA SIKAMINIAS, LESVOS

**At the most North-East point** of Lesvos, in a distant shoreline of sharp cliffs, stands a lighthouse shining out at sea.

The rocky water and the steep cliffs makes it the most dangerous landing spot on the island. Unfortunately the close distance to Turkey and the light from the lighthouse often attracts boats with refugees, attempting to land here. A remote and weathered place that can only be reached with 4x4 cars.

At this high point of the island, there is also a very good view over the sea to spot boats heading here. In fall 2015 LHR started the Korakas Night Watch Operation.

With thermal night vision the watch team spots boats at sea and alerts sea rescue teams to guide the boats to a safer landing spot.

The team also give emergency relief to the people that still arrives here, despite the dangerous conditions, attracted by the bright light from the lighthouse ●







# MORIA

## Entering a hotspot, leaving a detention center

**In Moria registration site** on Lesbos all arriving refugees had to register before continuing their journey to the mainland. After informally supporting Moria with volunteers during the winter months, LHR entered an official partnership with Danish Refugee Council, DRC, in February 2016

The LHR teams worked 24/7 with welcome service, shelter allocation, information and distribution in a very difficult environment for the arriving people. Our main focus was on the family compound, where LHR supported with construction, activities for the children and a gardening project. The construction team also built ramps all over the camp to make it more accessible for disabled people.

On the 20th of March 2016, a new deal between EU and Turkey regarding refugees was implemented. Less than 48 hours after it was reached, Moria was emptied of both refugees, NGO staff and our volunteers and the registration site turned into a detention centre.

During our time there, the volunteers worked hard to make Moria a more humane place for people who were in desperate need of human dignity and basic services.

Until today, Moria still remains a detention center ●







## WHEN THE BORDERS CLOSED: EMERGENCY RELIEF IN NO MANS LAND

**On the 22d of February 2016**, the borders suddenly closed for all refugees except those of Syrian and Iraqi nationality. Two weeks later, they closed completely, leaving over 45.000 people stranded in Greece in terrible, unsafe conditions. In the Idomeni/Polykastro area, close to

the Macedonian border crossing, makeshift camps housed 15.000 people in miserable conditions. In order to respond to the urgent need for humanitarian support, Lighthouse Relief expanded the operations into the mainland and deployed a team in Idomeni.

LHR worked alongside UNHCR with shelter allocation for vulnerable families. Cleaning teams were mobilised to prevent the spread of disease and emergency aid and nutrition for small children and babies was distributed. Here is also were our protection work

started. This led to an expansion of our operations into the official camps in Greece, in order to prepare for the refugees that were going to be evacuated from the area, making sure they would be able to access basic, necessary services ●