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## **Greece: vaccination centres in front of Orthodox Churches. Pilot programme in Athens, Thessaloniki and Crete. “The Church supports science”**

A pilot vaccination programme has been launched yesterday, 29 August, in the major cities of Greece, including Athens and Thessaloniki, to allow people to get the jab on the squares in front of the country's Orthodox Churches. The initiative, run in cooperation with Orthodox priests and the Holy Synod that are very influential in Greece, relies on mobile vaccination units. The pioneers in this field are the religious buildings of the Archdiocese of Crete, on the island of Crete, where citizens are being vaccinated on the territory of Saint Minas Cathedral in Heraklion with the support of the local hospital. According to Father Andreas Kalioncakis, a local Orthodox priest cited in the Greek media, “the Church does not want to sabotage science; rather, theology wants to go hand in hand with science. The Church, who cares about the mental and physical health of people, is not against vaccination”. At the end of the summer, as many Greeks return from vacation to the islands, the authorities are taking new measures to encourage vaccinations. From today, all those who have just returned from holiday will receive two free Covid tests within one week. Restrictions, on the other hand, are aimed above all at non-vaccinated people who will have to get tested twice a week. Also, several indoor facilities will be accessible only with a vaccination certificate or proof of recovery from Covid-19 in the past six months. “Over 90% of ICU patients are unvaccinated”, said Greek Health Minister Kikilias. Furthermore, as of 1 September, healthcare workers and nursing home workers who refuse to be vaccinated will be suspended from work.

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