

Changes in Greek Attitudes and Policies Towards Refugee Reception Between 2020 and 2024

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Abstract:

The study examines changes in policies and attitudes related to refugee reception and survival migration in Greece between 2020 and 2024. We analysed the changes in migration policy in Greece during the 2020-2021 pandemic, the situation in refugee camps and the government's response measures. Putting the information together, we can see that Greece has been handling refugees and migrants in accordance with international and EU standards. Greece is constantly improving conditions in refugee camps and improving life security. By understanding the situation of Greece's reception of refugees from war-torn countries in the Middle East from 2023 to 2024, we can also understand that Greece has linked its policy on refugee immigration with its national conditions, striving for mutual benefit, and providing assistance to displaced refugees as much as possible. The study sorted out and analysed the refugee migration policies and government measures in Greece from 2019 to 2024, and more directly compared the changes in Greek policies and laws under different challenges. At the same time, we also analyse the impact of these changes from a sociological perspective.

Keywords: Greece; refugee; European Union; policy.

1. Introduction

Europe, as a geographical and cultural region, attracts immigrants from different countries and regions. Among the migrants in Europe are refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East who have left their homes in search of safety and stability due to war, political persecution, natural disasters or economic hardship. Greece, as a European country near the Mediterranean Sea, has a long and diverse history of immigration. In recent decades, Greece has become a destination for many refugees from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia [1]. These migrants mainly enter Greece via illegal migrant boats in the Mediterranean or through legal refugee policies, seeking asylum and better living conditions [2].

This research examines the policy changes between 2020 and 2021 because currently, when the COVID-19 outbreak is relatively serious, Greece, as a host country of migrants, has made adjustments and changes to its immigration policy. For example, under previous policies, applicants who wanted to file a Greek immigration application needed to land in Greece at least once before they could file their application. Affected by the epidemic, most countries have introduced corresponding travel restrictions. To this end, people from abroad who want to apply for a Golden visa

in Greece can apply directly and do not need to have any experience of landing in Greece.

The reason for choosing the years of 2023 and 2024 is that many refugees from the Middle East have come to Europe under the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Greece has also built refugee camps and has adjusted its refugee immigration policy in response to the call of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to the amendment, undocumented foreign citizens who have resided in Greece for three consecutive years before November 30 of this year can be issued a residence permit for a period of three years as long as they can provide proof of employment. This study primarily focuses on the changes of Greek policies on survival migration in different stages and social contexts and analyses the various reasons for these changes.

2. Immigration Policy Change in 2020-2021

Between 2020 and 2021, Greece's policy towards refugees and migrants underwent significant changes. Greece played an important role in Europe's response to the challenge of migrants from the Eastern Mediterranean. During this period, the Greek government enacted concrete legislative actions and secured the border, effectively reducing

immigration pressure and curbing the inflow of illegal immigrants. For example, taking in unaccompanied refugee minors to ensure the rights of children and limiting the maximum length of time refugees can stay in reception centres.

Before these changes, the Moria refugee camp on Lesbos was severely overcrowded and short of resources. By the end of 2020, five new reception centres for refugees were opened on the island with funding from the European Union. It brought much-needed relief to the migrant crisis in Greece. However, the government's new policy made it more difficult for refugees entering the mainland of Greece to obtain refugee status. Those applicants who were rejected are more likely to be deported. Many migrants struggled with the stringent conditions and obstacles for obtaining residence permits.

As a result, in the second half of 2021, tens of thousands of refugees who had already been granted international protection in Greece once again applied for asylum in countries such as Germany, France, Italy and Cyprus [1]. Courts in more than two EU countries have chosen to accept refugees who have received international protection in Greece to avoid the risk of unfair treatment and threats if they return to Greece.

Asylum applications in EU countries have fallen by about a third in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. In light of the COVID-19 emergency, Greece has also jumped into action. While ensuring the health of Greek citizens on the mainland, the Government is preventing major health crises in refugee camps and other areas. At the start of the coronavirus epidemic, the Greek government announced that it would move 20,000 refugees from island camps to the mainland, but the transfer was not carried out due to overcrowding and other reasons. As sanitary conditions in Greek refugee camps have been judged to be highly susceptible to the spread of the virus, Greece has decided to restrict the entry and movement of refugees and migrants [3]. This includes, but is not limited to, a moratorium or restriction on new refugee admissions, as well as tighter controls on existing refugee and migrant flows. In addition, the processing of asylum claims by refugees may be delayed or adjusted to new health and safety standards during the pandemic.

In summary, between 2020 and 2021, Greece's refugee and migration policy underwent significant transformations in response to humanitarian concerns and logistical challenges. The Greek government implemented stricter border controls and revised asylum procedures, resulting in a decrease in illegal immigration and enhanced conditions within refugee camps. Nevertheless, refugees encounter increasing obstacles in securing asylum and residence permits, with rejected applicants facing height-

ened risks of deportation [1]. The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the landscape, prompting Greece to limit refugee inflows and modify asylum processes to align with health and safety standards. These measures, including the suspension of plans to relocate refugees from camps to the mainland, illustrate the dual pressures of managing public health while addressing refugee needs. Consequently, many refugees who had already received protection in Greece sought asylum in other EU countries, underscoring persistent concerns regarding the equity of asylum procedures and conditions within Greece. Overall, although Greece has made substantial strides in addressing the refugee crisis, the interplay between policy changes, pandemic-related restrictions, and refugee rights continues to shape the migrant situation across Europe [1,2].

3. Immigration Policy Changes in 2023-2024

At the end of 2023, the Greek government drafted a law linking residency to proof of employment, which applies to all migrants who have lived in Greece for at least three years without a residence permit. Granting residence and work permits to tens of thousands of undocumented immigrants and refugees took place amid labour shortages in Greece. This policy has been applauded by the United Nations agency for Migration and Refugees. UNHCR stresses that creating legitimate employment opportunities for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers is mutually beneficial, especially in the face of labour shortages in several sectors of the Greek economy. This law cannot only bring win-win results, but also express positive political will [4]. At the beginning of 2023, more than 10,000 refugees and migrants are staying in admission centres in Greece. Most of these refugees are from Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine and other countries. Because of ongoing civil wars, prolonged political conflicts or terrorist activities in these countries, many people choose to flee their own countries in search of a safer living environment. As a member of the European Union, Greece's asylum system remains open to these refugees.

In the year of 2023, the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict has gradually drawn people's attention. As a result, the refugee problem has become a very important issue in this region. With the change of the global situation and the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the task of accepting refugees in Greece has become more difficult and complex. During the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, due to the ongoing violence and instability, many refugees have looked to Greece as a destination for escape, especially the Aegean islands of Kos and Samos [5]. These islands located near the Turkish coast and have become now crucial locations for the entry of refugees into Greece.

The influx of these new refugees resulted from the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict has placed immense strain on local resources and infrastructure. The plight of the refugees underlines the broader crisis resulting from the ongoing wars and the significant challenges and difficulties faced by receiving countries like Greece.

In the autumn of 2023, more refugees arrived in Greek camps than the number in the entire year of 2020. It has also put Greece's asylum system under enormous strain. In the face of a large number of asylum applications, Greece also takes special humanitarian considerations when accepting Palestinian refugee applications. During the asylum application process, Greece usually processes all refugee applications in accordance with European Union's standards. However, Palestinian refugee applications may receive priority or extra attention due to their particular background and current situation at home. The Greek government will ensure that these refugees have access to basic living conditions and medical services, while supporting family reunification applications. These measures help refugees reunite family members in other countries, which reflects Greece's understanding of and respect for the emotional and financial needs of Palestinian refugees.

Overall, Greece has shown flexibility and humanism in its handling of the refugee issues. Policies and laws relating to refugee migration are being adapted not only to international and European Union asylum standards, but also these regulations take into account the country's economic needs and social development. In the face of the changing international situation and the complex reception of refugees, Greece's policy is also adjusting to the changes in the specific situation and the development of the global situation, in order to ensure effective protection and support for refugees.

Greece's approach to the 2023 refugee crisis reveals a complex and adaptable strategy to meet changing challenges. Introducing legislation linking residency to proof of employment would both address labour shortages and provide a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants. This move is not only in line with international standards, but also reflects Greece's pragmatic response to its economic needs.

4. Conclusion

Driven by the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the number of refugees has increased significantly. The situation has tested Greece's asylum system and local infrastructure. With more than 10,000 refugees in reception centres, the new arrivals have put more strain on resources

and Greece has had to cope with a rapidly changing global landscape. To that end, Greece had adjusted its asylum policy to give priority to Palestine refugees, ensuring their speedy processing and adequate support, including access to basic living conditions and medical care, and promoting family reunification.

This approach demonstrates Greece's determination to strike a balance between humanitarian obligations and practical considerations. By adapting policies to the humanitarian needs of refugees, the socio-economic situation of the country is also taken into account. Greece not only adhered to international and EU standards, but also ensured effective and compassionate support. The country's flexibility in addressing these challenges highlights its determination to manage the impact of increased refugee flows in a complex and changing global landscape while providing protection.

Overall, Greece has been active and effective in its policy and attitude towards refugee reception. From 2020 to 2024, the policy changes are adapted to the international situation and the development of the country. This has not only increased the efficiency and quality of refugee reception but has also led to the development of national societies and the realization of mutual benefits.

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