



The Refugee Situation in Greece: The Problem and Embrace Relief's Response

Since 2014, Greece has experienced a constant influx of migrants seeking to escape political and ideological persecution. Most of these refugees come from countries in the Middle East and Africa like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, the Congo, and Somalia. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were over 60,000 refugees in Greece by the end of 2018 ("Greece"). Despite fluctuations in the total number of refugees each year, the crisis continues. The UNHCR data also shows that 2019 has already seen a total of over 18,000 new refugee arrivals in Greece ("Mediterranean Situation: Greece"). While Greece currently contains thousands of displaced refugees, thousands more are arriving each month.

Although there are refugee camps in Greece which are designed to temporarily house the migrants of the refugee crisis, the status of these camps is a crisis in and of itself. Most of them are overcrowded, resulting in inhumane living conditions. For example, the New York Times provided a report in October of 2018 of the most overcrowded refugee camp in Greece - the Moria Refugee Camp on the island of Lesbos. Despite being designed to contain only a little over 3,000 refugees, the camp currently contains over 9,000 refugees (Kingsley). With residents over triple its capacity, the Times reported that there are over 70 people per toilet and over 80 people per shower (ibid). Furthermore, with so many people living in such a confined space, the report notes that "Sexual assaults, knife attacks and suicide attempts are common"(ibid). In addition to living in unsanitary and unsafe living conditions, the brutal circumstances have been conducive to widespread mental health issues. The understaffed team of psychiatrists at the camp told the Times that there are numerous cases of psychosis and post-traumatic stress disorder (ibid). While these refugees flee their countries in an attempt to escape brutal living conditions and even death, these are the exact issues which they face while living in these horrible refugee camps.

The unfortunate circumstances surrounding the Greek refugee camps are due to several factors besides simply the large number of refugees entering the country. One of these factors is that Greece is not financially capable of effectively addressing a refugee crisis. With a gross national debt of more than \$320 billion, according to the World Bank's latest numbers, and a federal government which has struggled to collect tax money, Greece simply does not have the

funds to properly finance a system of refugee camps (“General Government Gross Debt”). Being aware of how financially hamstrung Greece is, the United Nations did provide about \$1.9 billion towards the Greek asylum effort over the past half decade (Kingsley). However, as the New York Times report notes, corruption within the Greek government has prevented much of that funding from reaching its intended purposes.

While Greece is in fact financially incapable of providing sufficient funds to its refugee camps, some might argue that constructing refugee camps to address the refugee crisis is the wrong approach entirely. After all, refugee camps are prone to overcrowding which can result in sanitary, safety, and mental health issues within the camps. Furthermore, refugee camps are more of a short-term remedy as opposed to a long-term solution to the refugee crisis.

Embrace Relief is currently implementing a holistic approach to help provide these long-term solutions to the refugee crisis in Greece. One major component of this holistic approach is helping refugees find and pay for housing. The organization not only helps refugees locate suitable housing for them and their families, but Embrace Relief provides rent assistance so these refugees do not have to live in a refugee camp. Another major component is providing free legal assistance to help guide the refugees through the asylum-seeking process. This process can be very daunting and confusing which is why Embrace Relief also provides courses for learning English. Facilitating this legal process and helping to break down the language barrier allows refugees to find their new permanent home as soon as possible and start their new life. In addition to housing and legal assistance, Embrace Relief also provides food and psychiatric support to refugees. After all, the journey these refugees make is both physically and mentally exhausting. By providing this simple form of aid, in addition to addressing the larger issues, Embrace Relief helps refugees in Greece to regain a sense of normalcy and comfort as all people deserve.

Works Cited

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