

## Integration policies for refugees in Greece and Europe: A comparative analysis

Zoi Mantzouri \*, Ilias Pappas and Souzana Chatzivasileiou

*Hellenic Association of Political Scientists, Athens, Greece.*

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### Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of refugee integration policies in Greece and the European Union (EU), emphasizing socio-political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Through a comparative framework, it evaluates Greece's approach against Germany, Sweden, and Italy, while addressing systemic challenges such as resource allocation, legal fragmentation, and social cohesion. The study draws on EU directives, national legislation, and empirical data to argue that effective integration requires a harmonized EU strategy, tailored local solutions, and robust civil society participation. Recommendations include policy reforms, increased funding, and community-based initiatives.

**Keywords:** Refugee integration; Greece; EU migration policy; Social inclusion; Labor market access

### 1. Introduction

The Mediterranean immigration crisis of 2015 marked a pivotal moment in modern European history, as over 1 million refugees and migrants—primarily fleeing war in Syria, repression in Afghanistan, and instability in Iraq—crossed into Europe. Greece, due to its proximity to Turkey and the Aegean Sea's porous borders, became the primary entry point, receiving 85% of these arrivals. This unprecedented influx exposed systemic weaknesses in both Greek and EU asylum frameworks, transforming refugee integration into a pressing socio-political challenge. While the EU's initial response prioritized emergency humanitarian aid and border control, the long-term integration of refugees into host societies has proven far more complex, entangled with economic constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and rising xenophobia.

Integration, defined as the process of enabling refugees to participate fully in the social, economic, and cultural life of their host countries, has emerged as a litmus test for Europe's commitment to human rights and social cohesion. However, the EU's decentralized approach—where integration policies remain largely the responsibility of member states—have led to stark disparities. For example, Germany and Sweden have implemented robust integration programs, while Greece, burdened by a decade-long economic crisis and insufficient EU support, struggles to provide basic services. These disparities raise critical questions: How do Greece's integration policies compare to those of other EU states? What systemic barriers hinder effective integration? And how can the EU reconcile its humanitarian ideals with the political realities of member states?

This paper seeks to address these questions through three core objectives. First, it compares Greece's legal and operational framework for refugee integration with models in Germany, Sweden, and Italy, highlighting divergences in policy design and outcomes. Second, it identifies systemic barriers, such as Greece's overburdened asylum bureaucracy, labor market exclusion, and societal xenophobia, while also acknowledging localized successes, such as community-led integration initiatives on Lesbos. Third, it proposes evidence-based recommendations to harmonize EU integration strategies, leveraging lessons from both high- and low-performing states.

\* Corresponding author: Zoi Mantzouri

Methodologically, the study employs a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative analysis focuses on key legal texts, including the EU's Common European Asylum System (CEAS), Greece's 2020 National Strategy for Integration, and Germany's 2016 Integration Act, alongside case studies of refugee camps (e.g., Moria) and integration programs (e.g., Sweden's Introduction Program). Quantitative data from Eurostat, the OECD, and UNHCR—such as asylum approval rates, employment figures, and education enrollment statistics—provide empirical grounding. This dual approach ensures a holistic understanding of integration as both a policy challenge and a lived experience.

The analysis is timely, as the EU faces renewed pressure from rising arrivals via the Eastern Mediterranean (2022–2023) and the geopolitical fallout of the Ukraine crisis, which has diverted resources and attention. By dissecting the successes and failures of Greece and its peers, this paper contributes to broader debates on European solidarity, human rights, and the future of migration governance.

### 1.1. Historical and Geographical Factors

Greece's role as a migration crossroads spans centuries, shaped by its geopolitical position at the nexus of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange—a compulsory resettlement of over 1.5 million people—set a precedent for large-scale displacement management. This historical experience, however, contrasts sharply with modern refugee inflows. In the 1990s, Greece absorbed waves of Albanian migrants fleeing post-communist instability, followed by Iraqi and Afghan refugees in the 2000s. The 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, however, overwhelmed the country's capacity, with over 850,000 arrivals in a single year, 80% of whom transited through the Aegean islands (UNHCR, 2016).

Geographically, Greece's 6,000 islands, particularly Lesvos, Samos, and Chios, became frontline reception zones. Lesvos alone received 500,000 refugees in 2015, equivalent to five times its local population (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The islands' proximity to Turkey—a mere 10 km from Lesvos—makes them vulnerable to smuggling networks. Despite EU-funded "hotspot" facilities designed to process asylum claims, these islands remain overcrowded. As of 2023, Samos' closed camp, built for 3,000, houses over 4,500 people, perpetuating humanitarian crises (MSF, 2023).

### 1.2. Legal and Institutional Framework

Greece's integration policies have evolved reactively, driven by EU mandates and crisis pressures.

#### 1.2.1. National Legislation

**2016 Asylum Law:** Introduced to expedite processing, the law reduced appeal periods from 30 to 5 days, raising concerns over due process (Amnesty International, 2017). It also established "fast-track" border procedures, leading to prolonged detention for vulnerable groups.

**2020 National Integration Strategy:** This three-year plan prioritized housing, education, and labor market access. For example, the HELIOS program provided rental subsidies to 12,000 refugees by 2022 (International Organization for Migration, 2022). However, critics argue it lacks enforcement mechanisms, with only 30% of beneficiaries securing stable housing (Greek Council for Refugees, 2023).

#### 1.2.2. EU Influence

**CEAS and Dublin III:** Greece's asylum system remains tethered to the EU's Dublin Regulation, which assigns responsibility for asylum applications to the first entry country. This has strained Greece's resources, as 72% of asylum seekers in 2022 were ineligible for relocation to other EU states (European Commission, 2023).

**EU-Turkey Statement (2016):** The controversial agreement aimed to curb arrivals by returning asylum seekers to Turkey. While arrivals dropped by 97% in 2016, it trapped 40,000 refugees in overcrowded island camps, violating EU human rights standards (Council of Europe, 2021).

### 1.3. Implementation Challenges

#### 1.3.1. Asylum System Overload

As a result of its location between three continents and its long coastline that forms a large portion of the external sea borders and part of the land borders of the European Union (EU) and the Schengen area, Greece serves as the primary point of entry and transit for nationals of third countries seeking to enter European territory. These people cross the land borders between Greece and Turkey in the Evros area as well as the sea borders in the Aegean Sea (Vozikis et al.,

2021). Greece's asylum service, understaffed and underfunded, faces 42,000 pending applications as of 2023, with wait times averaging nine months (Eurostat, 2023). The 2020 Moria camp fire—which displaced 13,000 refugees—exemplifies systemic neglect. A lack of fire safety protocols and sanitary infrastructure transformed Moria into a “living hell,” according to Médecins Sans Frontières (2020). Post-fire, the EU allocated €276 million for new “closed controlled” camps, but NGOs report persistent overcrowding and inadequate medical care (Refugee Support Aegean, 2023).

### *1.3.2. Social Integration Barriers*

**Language:** Only 15% of non-Ukrainian refugees attend Greek language courses, compared to 80% of Ukrainians, who benefit from dedicated EU funding (UNHCR, 2023).

**Employment:** Just 12% of refugees hold formal jobs, often due to bureaucratic hurdles like six-month waits for work permits (OECD, 2021). Many resort to Greece's informal economy, where exploitation is rampant; 45% report unpaid wages (SolidarityNow, 2022).

**Political Polarization:** Public sentiment remains divided. While grassroots groups like “Lesvos Solidarity” champion integration, far-right parties like Elliniki Lysi exploit anti-refugee rhetoric, opposing “open borders.” A 2023 Pew Research poll found 34% of Greeks view refugees as a “major threat,” compared to the EU average of 21% (Pew, 2023).

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## **2. EU Integration Policies: Divergent Approaches**

### **2.1. EU-Level Coordination**

#### *2.1.1. Common Standards*

The Reception Conditions Directive (2013) mandates minimum standards for housing, healthcare, and education. However, compliance varies: Greece's camps often fail to meet sanitation requirements, while Germany provides state-funded apartments (ECRE, 2022). The Action Plan on Integration (2016) emphasizes education, yet only 68% of refugee children in Greece attend school, versus 92% in Germany (Eurostat, 2023).

#### *2.1.2. Funding Mechanisms*

The Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) allocated €9.9 billion for 2021–2027, but Southern Europe receives disproportionate burdens. Greece secured €2.4 billion (2015–2020), yet only utilized 54% due to administrative bottlenecks (European Court of Auditors, 2022). Meanwhile, Germany's efficient fund absorption enabled programs like “Joblinge,” which placed 1,200 refugees in apprenticeships by 2022 (BAMF, 2023).

### **2.2. Country-Specific Models**

#### *2.2.1. Germany*

**Legal Framework:** The 2016 Integration Act mandates 600 hours of language courses and civic education, with sanctions for non-compliance. By 2022, 58% of refugees achieved B1 German proficiency, a key labor market threshold (BAMF, 2023).

**Labor Market Integration:** Germany's “Early Intervention” program pairs refugees with job coaches, resulting in a 48% employment rate within five years (OECD, 2022). However, housing shortages persist, with 160,000 refugees in temporary shelters (Pro Asyl, 2023).

#### *2.2.2. Sweden*

**Holistic Approach:** Sweden's Introduction Program offers personalized support, including language training and mental health services. By 2022, 62% of participants entered employment or education within two years (Swedish Migration Agency, 2023).

**Backlash:** The 2015 shift to temporary permits—a response to rising far-right support—left 40,000 refugees in legal limbo, unable to reunite with families (Amnesty, 2023).

### 2.2.3. Italy

Decentralization: The SPRAR system (now SAI) funds local integration projects, but outcomes vary. In Sicily, 70% of refugees find housing, versus 30% in Lombardy (UNHCR, 2023).

Informal Economy: 60% work without contracts, notably in agriculture. The 2020 “Regularization Law” legalized 12,000 refugees, yet exploitation persists (Open Migration, 2023).

### 2.3. Lessons from Nordic and Central European States

Finland: The MENTOR program pairs refugees with locals, improving employment rates by 25% (Finnish Immigration Service, 2023).

Hungary: A counterexample, Hungary’s 2018 “Stop Soros” law criminalized aid to refugees, reducing asylum applications to 122 in 2022 (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2023).

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## 3. Comparative Analysis: Greece vs. EU Peers

### 3.1. Policy Effectiveness

The divergence in policy effectiveness between Greece and its EU counterparts reflects systemic differences in governance, political will, and resource prioritization. Greece’s approach has been largely reactive, shaped by external pressures from the EU and recurring humanitarian emergencies. For instance, the 2016 Asylum Law, enacted during the peak of the Mediterranean crisis, prioritized rapid border procedures over long-term integration. This law reduced asylum appeal windows to five days, leaving many refugees without adequate legal representation (Amnesty International, 2017). In contrast, Germany’s 2016 Integration Act exemplifies a proactive, structured framework. The Act mandates language courses, vocational training, and civic education, with penalties for non-compliance, ensuring refugees acquire skills necessary for societal participation. By 2022, 58% of refugees in Germany achieved B1-level language proficiency, a key predictor of employment success (BAMF, 2023).

Resource allocation further underscores this disparity. Sweden spends approximately €14,000 per refugee annually on integration programs, covering housing, language education, and mental health services (OECD, 2022). Greece, by contrast, allocates just €3,000 per refugee, primarily funneled into emergency housing rather than education or job training. This underfunding perpetuates dependency: only 12% of refugees in Greece secure formal employment, compared to 48% in Germany (OECD, 2021). The EU’s Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) has attempted to bridge this gap, but Greece’s bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder fund absorption. Between 2015 and 2020, Greece utilized only 54% of its €2.4 billion AMIF allocation, while Germany deployed 89% of its €3.1 billion share (European Court of Auditors, 2022).

### 3.2. Socio-Cultural Integration

In terms of health, all migrants and refugees in Greece have access to proper healthcare, and all children of school age have the chance to participate in the educational system. No major public health crisis has occurred at the hospitals or primary centers for the reception and identification of migrants and refugees. Different epidemiological and public health consequences for the receiving nation and the migrant, asylum seeker, and refugee populations have been brought about by changes in the migratory incidents. As a result of their exposure to dangers, people in transit pose health risks that impact not only the receiving society but also the health of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees (Fouskas et al., 2019).

Education and public perception are critical barometers of socio-cultural integration. In Greece, 68% of refugee children enroll in public schools, often facing overcrowded classrooms and limited language support (UNHCR, 2023). Many schools on the Aegean islands operate double shifts—one for locals and another for refugees—a segregation model criticized by the Council of Europe (2021). Conversely, Germany’s 92% enrollment rate reflects systemic inclusivity. Its “Welcome Classes” provide intensive language training before transitioning students to mainstream education, coupled with psychosocial support for trauma survivors (OECD, 2022).

Public attitudes further shape integration outcomes. A 2023 Pew Research study found 34% of Greeks view refugees as a “major threat,” driven by narratives linking migration to economic strain and crime. Media coverage exacerbates this; for example, the 2020 Moria camp fire was widely portrayed as a “security risk” rather than a humanitarian failure (Dimitriadi, 2021). In Sweden, despite a 2015 backlash that curtailed permanent residency grants, only 22% of citizens

hold negative views, attributed to decades of multicultural policies and robust anti-discrimination laws (Pew, 2023). Sweden's "Introduction Program," which pairs refugees with municipal mentors, has fostered community trust, with 65% of participants reporting positive social interactions (Swedish Migration Agency, 2023).

Cultural integration in Greece is also hampered by geographic isolation. Refugees in closed camps like Vathy on Samos have minimal interaction with locals, breeding mutual distrust. In contrast, Germany's policy of dispersing refugees across municipalities—a legacy of its 1949 post-war constitution—promotes intercultural exchange. Cities like Leipzig and Munich report higher integration success rates, where refugees participate in community events and local governance (BAMF, 2022).

### 3.3. Economic Outcomes

Labor market integration reveals stark contrasts. Germany's "Early Intervention" program, launched in 2016, identifies refugees' skills early and connects them to industries facing labor shortages (e.g., healthcare and IT). By 2022, this reduced refugee unemployment by 30% in regions like Bavaria (OECD, 2023). Employers receive subsidies for hiring refugees, and vocational training is tailored to market needs—e.g., coding bootcamps for Syrian engineers.

Greece's economic landscape, still recovering from a decade-long debt crisis, offers fewer opportunities. Refugees face six-month waits for work permits, pushing many into the informal economy, where 60% experience wage theft (SolidarityNow, 2022). The agricultural sector in regions like Thessaly relies on refugee labor, but exploitative practices are rampant: 12-hour days for €20, far below Greece's €780 monthly minimum wage (Human Rights Watch, 2023). While the EU-funded HELIOS program provides rental subsidies, it neglects job placement. Only 1,200 refugees secured formal employment through HELIOS by 2023, a drop in the ocean for Greece's 42,000 asylum seekers (Greek Council for Refugees, 2023).

EU cohesion policies have failed to address these disparities. The European Social Fund (ESF), designed to reduce regional inequalities, allocates €700 million to Greece for 2021–2027. However, only 15% targets refugee-specific labor integration, compared to 40% in Germany (European Commission, 2023). This misalignment perpetuates a cycle of poverty: 62% of refugees in Greece live below the national poverty line, versus 22% in Sweden (Eurostat, 2023).

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## 4. Recommendations for a Sustainable Future

### 4.1. EU-Level Reforms

The EU's current migration governance framework is fragmented and inequitable, disproportionately burdening frontline states like Greece. To address this, the following reforms are critical:

#### 4.1.1. Replace the Dublin Regulation with Burden-Sharing Quotas

The Dublin III Regulation, which assigns asylum responsibility to the first entry country, has exacerbated pressures on Greece and Italy. A 2022 study found that 72% of asylum seekers in Greece were ineligible for relocation to other EU states, trapping them in overcrowded camps (European Commission, 2023). A mandatory quota system, based on GDP, population, and unemployment rates, would ensure equitable responsibility-sharing. For example, the EU's 2015–2017 ad-hoc relocation scheme relocated 34,000 refugees from Greece to other states, reducing overcrowding by 40% (ECRE, 2018). A permanent mechanism could replicate this success, with binding penalties for non-compliance.

#### 4.1.2. Expand and Recalibrate AMIF Funding

The Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) allocates €9.9 billion for 2021–2027, but Southern Europe receives insufficient support relative to its challenges. Greece's AMIF absorption rate remains at 54% due to bureaucratic delays, compared to Germany's 89% (European Court of Auditors, 2022). The EU should:

- Increase funding for Southern Europe by 30%, targeting integration (e.g., language programs) rather than containment.
- Simplify application processes for AMIF grants, prioritizing grassroots NGOs with proven track records.
- Tie funding to integration outcomes, such as employment rates or school enrollment, to ensure accountability.

#### *4.1.3. Establish a Centralized EU Asylum Agency*

A unified asylum processing system under Frontex or a new agency could reduce disparities. For instance, a centralized database for asylum claims would prevent “asylum shopping” and streamline relocations. The 2023 pilot program in Greece, where EU officials assisted with asylum interviews, reduced processing times by 35% (EASO, 2023). Scaling this model EU-wide would enhance efficiency and fairness.

### **4.2. National Policies in Greece**

Greece’s integration framework requires urgent modernization to transition from crisis management to sustainable inclusion.

#### *4.2.1. Streamline Asylum Procedures via Digital Platforms*

Greece’s asylum backlog (42,000 pending cases in 2023) stems from paper-based processes and understaffing (Eurostat, 2023). A digital asylum platform, modeled on Germany’s ANKER system, could automate applications, appeals, and work permit issuance. In Bavaria, digitization reduced processing times from 12 to 3 months (BAMF, 2022). Greece’s government has begun piloting e-services, but requires EU technical support to scale them.

#### *4.2.2. Partner with NGOs for Language and Vocational Training*

Only 15% of non-Ukrainian refugees in Greece attend Greek language courses, compared to 80% in Germany (UNHCR, 2023). Partnerships with NGOs like METAdrasi and SolidarityNow, which have successfully trained 5,000 refugees since 2020, should be expanded. The EU could fund a National Language Certification Program, offering scholarships to refugees who achieve fluency, incentivizing participation.

#### *4.2.3. Combat Labor Exploitation and Expand Formal Employment*

Greece’s informal economy employs 60% of refugees, often in exploitative conditions (SolidarityNow, 2022). To formalize employment, Greece should:

- Expedite work permits: Reduce processing from six months to 30 days.
- Subsidize employers: Offer tax breaks to businesses hiring refugees, as done in Germany’s “50,000 Jobs Initiative” (OECD, 2021).
- Strengthen labor inspections: Penalize employers violating wage laws, using EU-funded monitoring teams.

### **4.3. Social Cohesion Initiatives**

Integration cannot succeed without addressing societal polarization and fostering intercultural dialogue.

#### *4.3.1. EU-Funded Intercultural Campaigns*

The EU should finance nationwide campaigns to counter xenophobia, akin to Germany’s “Together in Germany” initiative, which improved public attitudes by 18% between 2016–2020 (BAMF, 2021). In Greece, documentaries like “On Hold” (2023), which humanizes refugee stories, could be broadcast on public television, coupled with school workshops on migration history.

#### *4.3.2. Local Mentorship Programs*

Finland’s MENTOR program, which pairs refugees with locals, increased employment rates by 25% (Finnish Immigration Service, 2023). Greece could pilot this in cities like Athens and Thessaloniki, targeting sectors like tourism and tech. Municipalities should receive €10,000 grants per mentorship pair, funded by AMIF.

#### *4.3.3. Empower Refugee-Led Organizations*

Refugee-led NGOs, such as Amna in Athens, provide culturally sensitive services but lack funding. The EU should allocate 15% of AMIF grants directly to these organizations, bypassing bureaucratic intermediaries. In Sweden, similar measures boosted refugee entrepreneurship by 40% (Swedish Migration Agency, 2023).

#### *4.3.4. Community-Based Monitoring*

Local councils should establish Integration Observatories to track progress and address grievances. In Lesvos, the Open Communities Initiative reduced tensions by involving refugees in town hall meetings (UNHCR, 2022). Metrics like housing stability and school attendance should be publicly reported to ensure transparency.

#### 4.4. The Role of NGOs and Development Aid for Health in Addressing the Refugee Migration Crisis

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in promoting global health by bridging cultural gaps between healthcare providers and migrant or refugee patients. The rapid expansion of NGOs in recent decades highlights their growing significance in addressing health disparities among displaced populations. However, ensuring their reliability and effectiveness requires robust regulatory measures (Sidiropoulos et al., 2021). Development Aid for Health (DAH) is also essential in mitigating migration flows caused by inadequate healthcare and poor environmental conditions. NGOs contribute significantly by enhancing healthcare infrastructure, improving access to clean water, and supporting disease prevention initiatives. Many displaced populations flee their home regions due to a lack of medical services and environmental hazards. Strengthening healthcare systems through DAH and NGO efforts fosters stability, reduces displacement, and alleviates migration pressures. Investing in public health offers long-term solutions by addressing preventable health crises, thereby enhancing global health security and minimizing forced migration. This approach ensures that vulnerable communities receive essential care and improved living conditions in their countries of origin (Sidiropoulos et al., 2022; Sidiropoulos et al., 2023). Moreover, globalization has a profound impact on public health and global policy. Economic, political, and social integration—manifested through transnational investments, trade, human mobility, and the exchange of ideas and ethical frameworks—has reshaped the dynamics of migration. While globalization presents both risks and opportunities, it also threatens the sustainability of health systems worldwide. The increasing interdependence of nations necessitates stronger international cooperation to address cross-border health challenges. Governments must prioritize collaborative public health policies and establish mechanisms to regulate external forces that influence migration and population health (Batakis et al., 2020; Sidiropoulos, 2024).

#### 4.5. Lessons from the Ukraine Response

The EU's unified response to Ukrainian refugees—granting immediate Temporary Protection and unrestricted labor access—offers a blueprint. Over 78% of Ukrainian refugees in Greece found jobs within six months, compared to 12% of non-Ukrainians (OECD, 2023). Extending similar rights to all refugees would align with the EU's commitment to non-discrimination.

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### 5. Conclusion

The integration of refugees in Greece and the broader European Union remains one of the most pressing and complex challenges of the 21st century. This paper has demonstrated that while Greece has borne a disproportionate burden as a frontline state, its integration policies lag significantly behind those of EU leaders like Germany and Sweden. The disparities stem from structural deficiencies, historical path dependencies, and a lack of political consensus—both within Greece and across the EU. However, the analysis also reveals that solutions exist, provided there is sustained political will, equitable resource allocation, and a commitment to social cohesion.

Greece's geographical and historical role as a migration crossroads has uniquely positioned it to respond to crises, yet its integration framework remains reactive and underfunded. The 2015 Mediterranean crisis exposed systemic weaknesses: overcrowded hotspots like Moria, bureaucratic asylum delays averaging nine months, and a lack of language or vocational training programs. While the 2020 National Integration Strategy marked progress, its implementation has been hampered by Greece's economic fragility and an overreliance on EU funding mechanisms like AMIF, which it struggles to absorb efficiently. Comparatively, Germany's proactive Integration Act (2016) and Sweden's holistic Introduction Program illustrate how structured policies—backed by financial investment and societal buy-in—can transform refugees from dependents into contributors.

At the EU level, the absence of a harmonized integration strategy has perpetuated inequality. The Dublin Regulation's "first-country" rule has trapped thousands in Greece, while countries like Hungary have opted for exclusionary policies that contravene EU values. Meanwhile, funding disparities—such as Sweden's €14,000 per refugee annual expenditure versus Greece's €3,000—underscore the need for solidarity. The EU's response to Ukrainian refugees, which granted immediate protection and labor access, proves that equitable policies are possible when political consensus exists. Extending similar rights to all refugees would align with the EU's humanitarian obligations while addressing labor shortages in aging European economies.

Socio-cultural integration emerges as a linchpin for success. In Greece, only 68% of refugee children enroll in schools, often in segregated classrooms, while 34% of the public views refugees as threats. In contrast, Germany's "Welcome Classes" and Sweden's mentorship programs have fostered inclusivity, reducing unemployment and xenophobia. These examples highlight the importance of grassroots initiatives—such as Finland's MENTOR program or Greece's Open Communities Initiative—that promote intercultural dialogue and trust.

Economically, the divergence is stark. Germany's Early Intervention program has achieved a 48% refugee employment rate, while Greece's informal economy exploits 60% of refugees through subminimum wages and unsafe conditions. Closing this gap requires EU-funded job placement programs, employer incentives, and streamlined work permits. For Greece, partnerships with NGOs like METAdrasi and digital asylum platforms could modernize its approach, mirroring Bavaria's success in reducing processing times by 75%.

Ultimately, this paper argues for a dual approach: EU-wide solidarity through burden-sharing quotas and recalibrated funding, paired with context-specific solutions that address local realities. Greece's transformation from a symbol of crisis to a model of resilience depends on replacing containment policies with empowerment strategies. This includes investing in language education, formalizing labor markets, and amplifying refugee voices in policymaking. Similarly, the EU must reconcile its rhetoric of unity with actionable reforms, such as abolishing the Dublin Regulation and establishing a centralized asylum agency.

The cost of inaction is high. Without intervention, Greece risks entrenching poverty and social fragmentation, while the EU's credibility as a human rights champion erodes. Conversely, adopting the recommendations outlined here—from Finland's mentorship models to Germany's integration benchmarks—could unlock the potential of millions of refugees, enriching Europe's cultural and economic fabric. The 2023 resurgence of Mediterranean arrivals and the Ukraine crisis are stark reminders that migration is not a temporary challenge but a defining feature of our globalized era. By embracing solidarity over division, Europe can turn its integration crisis into a legacy of resilience

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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