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University of San Francisco

CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS:

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COVID-19'S IMPLICATIONS ON GREECE AND
SPAIN'S MIGRANT AND REFUGEE PROCESSING POLICIES**

An honors thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the distinction of
Honors
in the International Studies Department
in the College of Arts and Science

by

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December 2020

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ABSTRACT

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic came a collective global panic regarding health, safety, and security. Since the major outbreak of the coronavirus in March of 2020, few issues have received scrutiny and attention in the public sphere. Yet, the problems that existed before COVID-19 have not become obsolete, however, they were removed from the public eye. One such issue to receive less scrutiny is the treatment of the most vulnerable populations in the world—migrants and refugees. Spain and Greece’s locations on the Mediterranean Sea mean they are often the first place migrants seek refuge in their journey to Europe. In the past, both have infringed upon their human rights in ways that have invited global skepticism and scrutiny. The research in this thesis examines how COVID-19 has affected Greece and Spain’s migrant and refugee processing policies. I first establish how each country processed migrants and refugees prior to the pandemic. I then draw from news sources, government documents, videos, and first-hand accounts from volunteers, medical professionals, as well as migrants and refugees to show how these policies have shifted since March 2020. One of COVID-19’s defining implications on both countries’ migrant and refugee processing policies is the increased brutality of border protection methods which involve the illegal refoulment of migrants and refugees. Through my research, I find that both Greece and Spain’s policies have become stricter and more brutal in their treatment of migrants and refugees and their negligence of these groups’ human rights.

KEYWORDS

Migrants, Refugees, Spain, Greece, COVID-19, Processing Policies

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List of Acronyms/ Abbreviations

- ACCEM: Spanish Migration Commission Association
- CAED: Emergency Reception and Referral Centers
- CAT: UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- CATE: Centers for the Temporary Reception of Foreigners
- CETI: Centers for the Temporary Stay of Foreigners
- CIE: Centers for the Internment of Foreigners
- COVID-19 or COVID: Coronavirus Disease
- EU: European Union
- H1N1: Swine Flu
- H5N1: Bird Flu
- ICCPR: UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- ICPPED: UN International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- IPA: Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
- MENA: Middle East and North Africa
- NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations
- OHCHR: Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees
- PIPP: Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan
- PP: Partido Popular
- PSOE: Spanish Socialist Workers Party
- RIC: Reception and Identification Center
- SARS: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
- UN: United Nations
- UNHCHR: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- WHO: World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

“We cannot and should not stop people from migration. We have to give them a better life at home. Migration is a process, not a problem.”

—William Lacy Swing, Director-General, International Organization for Migration (IOM)

For many of us, it is hard to remember a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was not the focal point of our lives. The past few months have been increasingly difficult to endure with discouraging news circulating from all around the world about a spike in cases and a plethora of deaths. Many states around the world are facing trying circumstances because of the COVID-19 pandemic. From a shortage of hospital beds and ventilators to an excess of daily infection rates, it is state leaders’ responsibility to think creatively to find solutions to a problem that none of us have ever faced before. Some have suggested lockdowns, others have encouraged the regular usage of masks, and others have dismissed the virus as a hoax. However, while many individuals wait for the next government ruling on lockdowns, curfews, and quarantines at home, the world’s most vulnerable populations have quickly and quietly been forgotten. Media reports and public discussions have surrounded the pandemic and its local impacts as everyone is consumed with the daunting idea that they or a loved one might lose their lives to COVID.

Just as in the pre-pandemic era, the entirety of the European continent is facing trying circumstances because of the refugee and migrant crisis, which refers to the movement of forcibly displaced persons from their home countries because of various human rights violations, wars, internal conflicts, or natural disasters. European leaders were tasked with figuring out the best distribution method for the incoming influx of migrants and refugees in a manner that would not overwhelm states nor violate the human rights of these vulnerable incoming groups. Unfortunately, the European Union (EU) holistically failed to create a successful and coherent plan that accounted for the aforementioned considerations. As a result, some states like Germany, France, Greece, Italy, and Spain took in high numbers of refugees and migrants while countries like Hungary took few. In this thesis, I focus specifically on refugees and migrants in Spain and Greece.

Greece and Spain’s similarities and differences are striking and reveal a great deal about the way in which intentions and reality are rarely ever the same. Both countries transitioned to democracy recently, suffered after the 2007 global fiscal crisis, and face the increasingly tricky

question of how best to manage the migrant and refugee crisis—now with the added stress of the global pandemic as well. Both countries have proven to be incredibly generous with the numbers of refugees and migrants they take in, compared to their European counterparts, since they are both Mediterranean countries. Yet, both have violated these groups’ human rights on several occasions, in manners so grave, they have led to global concern. While their political systems are opposing and their means for handling the pandemic have led to starkly distinct outcomes in each country, their refugee and migrant processing policies are eerily similar.

COVID-19 did not put an end to the problems that have preceded it such as war, poverty, and other instances of infringements on human rights that lead to refugee and migration crises. Instead, COVID-19 has outshined the news of these issues that are fundamental to humanity. A direct result of this is the fact that states begin to shy away from following laws—even ones they have drafted because there is less public pressure on them to serve needs other than their own self-interest. As such, I conduct a comparative analysis of the ways in which COVID-19 has affected Spain and Greece’s migrant and refugee processing policies as I want to find out how both Southern European states are handling the refugee and migrant crisis during this time of the global pandemic. This will help create new knowledge on the ways in which the political and social systems in both countries are succeeding and failing to account for all human beings in this time of collective fear, by asking the question: How has COVID-19 affected Spain and Greece’s migrant and refugee processing policies? To answer this question I assess the intersection of politics, economics, and public discourse with the COVID-19 pandemic to discern between the pre-existing policies surrounding migrants and refugees and understand the implications of COVID-19 on Greece and Spain’s migrant and refugee processing policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Responses to Previous Pandemics

Engaging literature on earlier pandemics is crucial to this study as it provides a window to understanding how governments can be expected to respond to the current pandemic. The global responses to previous pandemics while distinct by state, share quite a few common characteristics emblematic of a lack of preparedness, lack of communication, and a desire to comply with international law. The consensus among global pandemic scholars is that the response plans have been a combination of well-intentioned care and a failure to account for all human beings

especially vulnerable populations. As a result of the H5N1 and the SARS pandemics, international planning for pandemics was placed at the forefront of global discussions (Patrick, Shaban and FitzGerald 2011). The Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plans (PIPP) which were created because of these pandemics have proven that globally, governments have failed to take refugees and migrants into account while creating plans to supply healthcare and prevention protocols to the public. A 2011 World Health Organization (WHO) review of PIPP revealed: “that only 13 of 119 countries (11%) had strategies to address the communication needs of minority groups (defined as ethnic minorities, refugees, migrants, and indigenous peoples)” (Wickramage 2018). This is also a direct result of international law and the United Nation’s (UN’s) lack of pressure on governments to supply any healthcare for their refugee and migrant populations beyond the “emergency” level.

Historically, the world has not been prepared to face a pandemic and will not be ready to deal with another. While the global response and containment of H1N1 were efficient (Patrick, Shaban and FitzGerald 2011), the Ebola outbreak proved that the world truly was not ready to face another pandemic due to its lack of preparation (Moon et al, 2015). There appears to be a consensus by experts who have studied earlier pandemics that there needs to be a reformation of communication systems (Wickramage 2018; Patrick, Shaban and FitzGerald 2011) especially regarding refugee populations who are exceptionally vulnerable since refugee camps are grossly overcrowded (Elias, Alexander and Sokly 1990). According to Patrick, Shaban, and FitzGerald, “Essential and desirable features of pandemic plans include preparation for surveillance, investigation of cases, treatment modalities, prevention of community spread, maintenance of essential services, research and evaluation, and implementation, testing and revision of the plan,” which have not currently been the true global responses (Patrick, Shaban and FitzGerald 2011). Additionally, there remains a great deal of work to be done in to account for all human beings during the time of a global pandemic (Katz and Fischer 2010). This suggests that governments all around the world have failed, multiple times, to consider the needs of all people. This may stem from the fact that they are seemingly unable to provide adequate protection for their citizens and residents.

European Responses to Previous Pandemics

As the world has suffered from a series of global pandemics, three in the 20th century and two in the 21st century, Europe’s pandemic responses have evolved to meet the requirements of every distinct health crisis. Due to the Spanish Flu and later pandemics, Europe has been creating

and recreating its pandemic response systems in a divergent way. In 2009 the H1N1 pandemic plagued the world and gave Europe the chance to create a “real pandemic response” (Hashim et al, 2012). Most European countries relied on the 2005 WHO guidelines to suffice for their pandemic preparation for the 2009 pandemic (Droogers et al, 2016). They relied on “communication, coordination, capacity building, adaptability/flexibility, leadership, and mutual support” to present a robust and careful response to the 2009 pandemic (Hashim et al, 2012; Droogers et al, 2016). These strategies proved to be exceptionally helpful in containing the H1N1 disease and providing a regional response to the pandemic. However, on a continental scale, the divergence of the national plans, the distinctive framing of the pandemic as either a matter of political security or an economic threat, and the lack of revised plans led to the “inoperability” of a proposed EU-wide pandemic response plan (Droogers et al, 2016; Holmberg and Lundgren 2018). Following this pandemic, several European countries continued to rely on the 2005 WHO guidelines and did not update their guidelines or plans thereby resulting in major gaps in future pandemic response capabilities, especially considering that flu and other coronavirus pandemics are considered to be the most likely threat in continental Europe (Droogers et al, 2016).

Spain’s Responses to Refugees Before COVID-19

Due to the rise in civil unrest, terrorist activity, environmental problems, and war in the MENA region and sub-Saharan Africa, there has been an exponentially increasing number of refugees and migrants seeking entry into Europe. Enduring the most direct effects of it all are the countries with borders on the Mediterranean Sea such as Spain, Greece, Turkey, and Italy. In Spain alone, there has been an increasing demand for refugee camps and allocation centers that the Spanish government has not been able to meet. As such they have relied on an increase of spaces that are managed by NGOs as opposed to spaces that are government managed. At first, there was a relatively even split between public centers and centers managed by NGOs but recently Spain has been relying almost entirely on spaces managed by NGOs (Bris and Bendito 2017). Furthermore, those spaces that are government managed include CATES (Centros de Atención Temporal de Extranjeros), which have limited Spain’s ability to take in more migrants and refugees considering that these centers are overcrowded and lead to human rights violations (Boza Martínez and Pérez Medina 2019).

Spain has remained a gateway country for refugees and migrants fleeing from oppression or violence. Its location on the Mediterranean Sea makes it especially accessible to refugees and

migrants fleeing by boat. Unfortunately, this also means that several migrants drown or are fatally injured on their way over to Spain through the Strait of Gibraltar. Several migrants have drowned as a result of the Guardia Civil shooting rubber bullets and throwing smoke grenades at them as they were attempting to reach Ceuta (Cockcroft and Provox 2017). Spain's violation of its refugee and migrants' human rights is especially focused on reprimanding those who arrive through water transport as "over half of the people arriving in Spain by sea are detained in CATES" (Boza Martínez and Pérez Medina 2019). Spain's inability to account for the increasing number of refugees and migrants is not unique in the larger European picture, but it does raise concerns over their increasingly unsatisfactory conditions which have resulted in major human rights violations, death, and abuse of the refugees and migrants that try to enter their country.

Greece's Response to Refugees Before COVID-19

In the past few years, Greece has faced the brutal end of the Euro Crisis while trying to sustain thousands of refugees and migrants within its borders. As such, Greece's ability to support the "basic subsistence needs" of its refugee and migrant populations has drastically decreased recently (Skordas and Sitaropoulos 2004). The state, like Spain, has experienced an exponential increase in migrants and refugees entering its borders as its location on the Mediterranean makes it opportunistic and convenient to enter. Also like Spain, Greece has been experiencing a grave problem with overcrowding and it has resulted in a widespread health issue (Kotsiou et al, 2018). According to Skordas and Sitaropoulos (2004), the situation is so bad that "The urgently needed restructuring and modernization of the Greek asylum regime, as well as the efforts to combat contemporary terrorism, are to be squarely grounded in the fundamental principles of modern international and European law of human rights protection" are necessary for Greece to accept more refugees in the future. In addition to the already devastating circumstances surrounding the treatment of refugees and migrants, there has been a rise in anti-migrant sentiment in the municipalities that were exposed to more refugees, which is not unlike Spain's dilemma with this same issue as well (Sekeris and Vasilakis 2016).

Gaps

Several gaps exist in the preexisting research about refugees, migrants, and their relationship to pandemic responses in Europe and specifically Spain and Greece. There is a lack of academic research regarding the effects of pandemics directly on refugee and migrant

populations. We do not know much about how governments have previously screened their migrants during pandemics, nor the specific policies they undertook regarding refugees and migrants coming in through the Mediterranean Sea, thereby causing Greece and Spain's actions to be entirely unprecedented. There is also a lack of information about the sanitary conditions within the refugee camps and the migrant detention centers. Furthermore, few scholarly articles exist on the human rights issues of refugees and migrants within camps and detention centers during the time of a pandemic. As such, in this thesis, I explore the how government processing policies have changed, and how migrant and refugee treatment has changed as well and compare the pre-COVID-19 era with the information known about the current pandemic as they pertain specifically to Spain and Greece.

BACKGROUND

Distinguishing Between Refugees, Migrants, and Asylum-Seekers

It is vital to distinguish between refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers as all three terms are often, falsely, used interchangeably.

According to Amnesty International, the definitions of these three terms are as follows:

Refugee: A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection.

Asylum Seeker: An asylum-seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

Migrants: Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study or join [a] family, for example. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters or other serious circumstances that exist there. Lots of people don't fit the legal definition of a refugee but could nevertheless be in danger if they went home (Amnesty International 2020).

As such, the crucial distinctions between a refugee and a migrant are the reasons for fleeing their home countries and their rights and protections under international law. Additionally, the main difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee is that a refugee is legally recognized as

fleeing from a dire situation and receives all subsequent protections while an asylum-seeker does not.

Generally, migrants leave their countries in search of better opportunities for themselves and their children as opposed to fleeing from their own countries. Every human has the right to move to a new country to find employment. Migrants may also move to continue their education because they have the means to move to a different country with, what they consider to be, better opportunities than the ones they may have had in their home countries.

Conversely, refugees flee from their countries for several reasons including, but not limited to, violence, war, hunger, extreme poverty, persecution (due to religion, sexual orientation, gender identification, etc.), and natural disasters or climate change. At times, these circumstances are combined, and individuals or families must make the difficult decision to abandon their homes to survive (Amnesty International 2020).

Detention and Internment

It is also crucial to distinguish between internment and detention. According to the Oxford Dictionary, internment is the state of being confined as a prisoner, especially for political or military reasons. Detention is the act of keeping someone in official custody, typically for questioning about a certain crime or in a politically sensitive situation. Both are important because of their distinct qualities, yet they are commonly mistaken for one another. While detention is temporary, internment is indefinite. So, the question is, when does detention become internment? It is precisely the moment when the detainees' human rights are violated that they become interned. They lose their rights to any kind of freedom, they become the property of another person or institution, they are no longer treated with respect, and their fundamental needs of survival are not met. Both detention and internment are in some ways reminiscent of imprisonment (Marco 2020).

Non- Refoulement

Understanding the principle of non-refoulement is essential to understanding international, regional (EU), and local (Greek and Spanish) practices on migrant and refugee processing. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Under international human rights law, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm. This principle applies to all migrants at all times,

irrespective of migration status.” This means that no state may return any migrant no matter the current state of their active asylum application process, to a place where they would face “irreparable harm upon return on account of torture and other forms of ill-treatment or other serious breaches of human rights obligations” (OHCHR 2018). The principle of non-refoulement was first included in article 33 of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees—often referred to as the “1951 Refugee Convention”—and was expanded in the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees—often referred to as the “1967 Protocol” (Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law 2020). This principle later appeared in other UN conventions including in article 3 of the 1984 UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), article 7 of the 1966 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and article 16 of the 2006 UN International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). Over time, the implementation of this principle in both international and regional human rights mediums became a customary practice and further proved its global significance (OHCHR 2018).

The “1951 Refugee Convention” which is a UN multilateral treaty that explicitly defines who qualifies as a refugee, establishes the rights of those granted asylum, and describes the responsibilities of states that grant asylum. The 1951 Refugee Convention is vital to understanding EU-wide policies surrounding migration. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), “For refugees, the principle of *non-refoulement* as laid down in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees is the cornerstone of the international legal regime for their protection. It prohibits the return of refugees to a risk of persecution. It covers also people seeking asylum until a final decision is made on their application” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016). The “1967 Protocol” was a convention that expanded the range of the previous 1951 convention, which applied only to refugees that were displaced preceding 1951, by removing its “temporal and geographical restrictions so that the convention applied universally” (Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law 2020). Both documents which are read in conjunction with one another, form the basis for not only international law relating to refugees and asylum procedures, but also a great deal of regional migration law, especially in Europe.

The inclusion of the principle of non-refoulement is present both in primary and secondary EU law. Both article 78 (1) of the European Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights and articles

18 and 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU—sources of primary EU law—draw inspiration from all the aforementioned documents but most importantly from the 1951 and 1967 conventions. These documents “encompass the prohibition of *refoulement*, which is further specified in secondary EU law...these provisions mirror international human rights obligations by EU Member States.” As such, the EU not only upholds the decrees of the UN but further expands them by supplying its specific laws on the principle of non-refoulement and its expectations for its member states:

The EU asylum *acquis* also prohibits the return of a person to [the] real risk of serious harm deriving from indiscriminate violence in situations of armed conflict. The principle of *non-refoulement* not only prohibits the removal, expulsion, or extradition to a country where a person may be at risk of persecution or other serious harm (direct *refoulement*) but also to countries where individuals would be exposed to a serious risk of onward removal to such a country (indirect *refoulement*). The prohibition of *refoulement* applies also to conduct at borders and at sea. Conduct that may trigger *refoulement* may also engage violations of other fundamental rights, such as the right to be heard, the right to an effective remedy or the prohibition of collective expulsion.

The EU’s expectation that every member state should uphold these laws both internally and externally of their borders is clear not only in the earlier quotations but also in each states’ constitutions or laws. To this day, the EU expects that all its members should uphold these laws to the highest of their ability, regardless of the severity of the problem which they are facing (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016).

Greece and Spain’s relationships to both the UN treaties and the EU policies are crucial to understanding their approaches to refugee and migrant processing both preceding and following COVID-19. Greece ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention on April 5th, 1960 and acceded¹ to the supplementary “1967 Protocol” on August 7th, 1968, and Spain acceded to both the 1951 and 1967 conventions on August 14th, 1978. They subsequently ratified or acceded to all of the aforementioned treaties as well, and both are members of the EU, making them responsible for the EU’s provisions to uphold the principle of non-refoulement (UNHCR 2015). The significance of these facts lies in both states’ wavering maintenance of this principle in their approaches to their migrant and refugee processing policies both the preceding and following COVID-19.

¹Accession has the same effect as ratification and usually occurs after a treaty has entered into force (European Commission).

Spain's Economy Preceding COVID-19

The Economic Crisis of 2008-2014, devastated the Spanish state and left many workers displaced, causing thousands of Spaniards to leave Spain as soon as they could to search for work. An entire generation of highly qualified young adults was never truly admitted into the workforce due to the severe labor shortage present within the country itself during the depression in which roughly 3.7 million jobs disappeared. This generation, aptly named “thousandaires,” for making a thousand euros per month, continues to struggle even today as the economy regains its strength and jobs begin returning to the country (Tripodo 2015). Furthermore, the social-democratic model as it currently stands has failed once before, and many Spaniards fear it may do so once again. This fear is not an irrational one and instead is founded in years of social, political, and economic pressure felt by the Spaniards and the fact that the country still has not recovered fully from the last crisis (El País 2018). Due to the high unemployment rate which was around 26 percent in 2013 and dropped to roughly 14.9 percent in 2019 (see figure 1), the lack of career granting jobs, and the increase in temporary work through the gig economy, many Spaniards are finding it easier to lay the blame on the increase in migration rather than on their economic model or their state leadership. This has led to an increase in xenophobic discourse, anti-migrant sentiments, and a rise in populist parties with radical ideologies (Femmine and Alameda 2017).



Figure 1: Spain's 10-year unemployment rate. CEIC Data 2020.

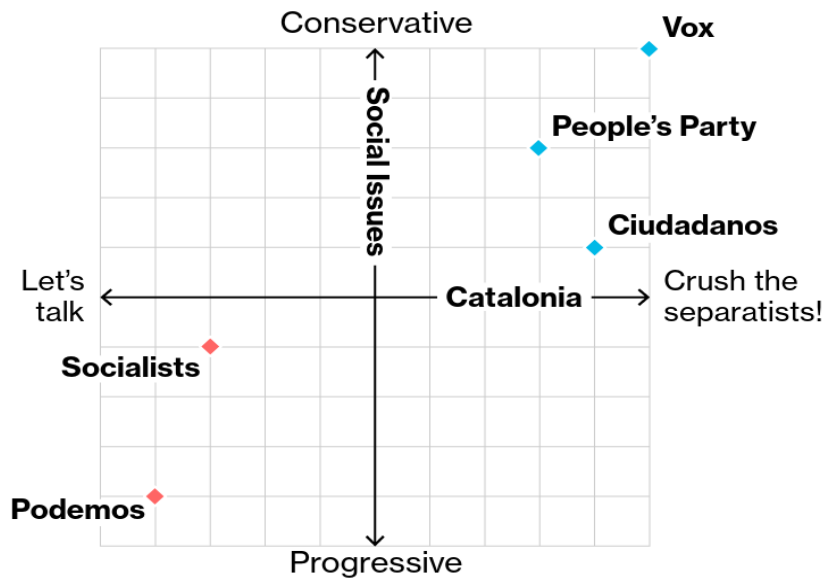
Spanish Politics

The cultural transition to democracy after Franco changed the previously oppressive policies that ruled the country into more liberal policies that promoted human rights, social democracy, and freedom of religion. This era proved that Spain could change for the better but the current support for parties like Vox who champion a more traditionalist ideology proves that sometimes liberalism can be too radical for some. Supporters of parties like Vox feel as though their government has forgotten about them, no longer hears their queries, and cares only about helping others. Vox wants a unification of Spain once again that oppresses the separatist movements in Catalonia and does not afford migrants, especially illegal migrants, the same rights as Spanish citizens (Vox 2019). The other side of the Spanish narrative is in favor of migration and embraces the increase that has taken place recently to help during the time of a humanitarian crisis.

“For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” The third law of motion, although seemingly irrelevant, reveals a great deal regarding Spain’s current political climate. With the recent surge in the refugee crisis in a country that continues to recover from its devastating economic depression that “ended” a mere six years ago, right-wing parties are beginning to seem more favorable. Spain’s political state has not been stable since the 1970s and the transition to democracy (following Franco’s rule), meaning that coalitions between parties are needed to form governments. In the November 2019 election, the leading party, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), gained 120 seats which are three less than its previous holdings, suggesting that confidence in Spain’s socialist party is faltering (Jones 2019). This outcome was also met with faltering support for Unidas Podemos (Podemos), and a dramatic increase in support for the extreme right-wing party Vox, while support for the center right Partido Popular (PP) increased slightly since the last election. The increase in support for Vox, a party that was initially started as a reaction to Catalanian independence yet is now mostly an anti-migration party, shows that a greater part of Spain does not want to take as many refugees as they currently are—if they take in any at all. While it is true that PSOE and Podemos, the most left-leaning parties, have formed a coalition to form a majority in parliament, Vox is still the third most powerful party in Spain following PSOE, and PP respectively (Minder 2019). With this changing political climate and the increase in populism as a response to migration, Spain has begun to take in fewer migrants and refugees while adopting a more radical approach to its policies (see figure 2).

Spain's Political Spectrum

Where parties stand on the key issues (and the economy isn't in there)



Positions compiled by Bloomberg News on the basis of public statements and parties' track records

Bloomberg

Figure 2: "Spain's Political Spectrum."² Bloomberg, "Spain General Election" 2019

Greece's Economy Preceding COVID-19

The global fiscal crisis, the Euro Crisis, and the subsequent Greek Economic Crisis devastated Greece's economy. With the onset of the fiscal crisis in 2007, the entire world began to suffer immensely. However, Greece's case was far worse than most of its European counterparts. In 2009, Greece's deficit was 15.4% of GDP 3% more than the initial expectation (Smith 2010). This quickly resulted in Greece's economic sovereign debt being classified as "junk status"³ by credit-rating institutions by early 2010 (Council on Foreign Relations 2018). During this same time, the EU and the IMF decided to provide Greece with 110 billion euros in loans over three years (Bilefsky and Thomas 2010) in return for Greece's commitment to austerity measures (BBC 2010) "including 30 billion euros in spending cuts and tax increases" (Council on Foreign

² Original text taken from Bloomberg, "Spain General Election" 2019

³ "Junk Status" is the equivalent of the term "non-investment grade speculative," meaning that a government may not have enough money to pay back what it has borrowed (AOTC 2020).

Relations 2018). This meant that Greece agreed to increase its “taxes to 23 percent from 21 percent, to freeze civil servants’ wages, and to eliminate public sector annual bonuses amounting to two months’ pay. Additionally, members of parliament would no longer receive bonuses” (Bilefsky and Thomas 2010). These measures proved to be detrimental to the Greek economy, and they received their second bailout, worth 130 billion euros, in 2012. The main condition of this bailout was that Greece needed to drop its debt-to-GDP ratio from 160 percent of GDP to 120.5 percent of GDP by 2020 (Wearden and Smith 2012). In 2015, Greece received its third bailout of 86 billion euros, from the EU, after defaulting on its 1.6-billion-euro payment to the IMF. While the IMF refused to partake in the new bailout, the EU’s creditors required “Greece to implement tax reforms, cut public spending, privatize state assets, and reform labor laws, among other measures” (Council on Foreign Relations 2018). In 2018 Greece exited this last bailout program but owes the IMF and the EU 290 billion euros (France-Pressé 2018). Its unemployment rates dropped from their highest, 27.9 percent in 2013 to 20 percent in 2018, which was an improvement for Greece but left it at Europe’s highest percentage (see figure 3). Much like its Spanish counterparts, Greece’s economic and political measures have resulted in public unrest, dissatisfaction with the Greek government, a rise in right-wing populism, and anti-migrant sentiments (Halikiopoulou 2020).



Figure 3: Greece’s 10-year unemployment rates. CEIC Data 2020.

Greek Politics

Like Spain, Greece also experienced its transition to democracy (metapolitefsi) in 1974. A ruling military junta had seized control of the democratically elected Greek government in 1967

but collapsed in 1974 because of internal divisions brought on by the Turkish invasion of Northern Cyprus on July 20, 1974 (Council on Foreign Relations 2018). Slightly preceding this fall of the ruling military junta was the abolishment of Greece's monarchy in 1973. In a referendum on the issue of reinstating the monarchy in 1974, Greek voters opted for a presidential system instead which was founded under a new constitution in 1975 (BBC 1974). This system and the transition to democracy continue to shape Greek politics even today, especially as they pertain to its economic and social failures.

In 2015, before Greece was expecting its third bailout, Greece elected Alexis Tsipras and his radical-left wing party, Syriza, "into power on the promise that he would end the austerity measures Greece had been forced to accept in exchange for European funding, as well as tackle the corruption. Tsipras also pledged to modernize Greece." Unfortunately, he and his finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, failed on every single one of those accounts and blamed the EU instead of accounting for their failures. This led to widespread Greek distrust of the EU. (Dempsy 2015).

In July of 2019, twenty parties ran in Greece's elections, during which Greece elected "the first government in which a single party won [a] parliamentary majority since the economic crisis began in 2010." Greece's center-right New Democracy Party won this election by an impressive 39.8 percent of the vote, 10 percent more than its results in the 2015 election, and gained 158 out of 300 seats in parliament, which was 50 more than its 2015 number (Buchholz and Richter 2019). Syriza lost the election because of its past failures, especially pertaining to the economy, but managed to maintain 31.53 percent of votes (Mylonas 2019) and gained 86 seats in parliament (Buchholz and Richter 2019). As such, Syriza's actions during its time in power resulted in greater distrust in the left's ability to manage the economy and take care of the Greek people—leading to New Democracy's inevitable win. Of the twenty groups that ran in this election, "only six of them got more than 3 percent of the vote, which is the threshold required to place a member in parliament" (Mylonas 2019). These six were the Communist Party of Greece, Yanis Varoufakis' MeRA25, Syriza, Movement for Change, New Democracy, and Greek Solution (see figure 4). The most notable change from the 2015 election is the disappearance of Golden Dawn, Greece's extreme right-wing, populist, neo-Nazi, violent, and ultra-nationalist party, from the Greek Parliament. This party, which is more radical than Spain's Vox, consistently held more than 6 percent of the vote between 2012 and 2015, with its support faltering to below 5 percent in early 2019 (Halikiopoulou 2020). While this is an excellent sign that Greece's politics are shifting from

a highly radical nature to a center-right scope, parties like Greek Solution are still very present in Greek politics. Moreover, while New Democracy and its ally Movement for Change’s response to the refugee and migrant crisis vows not to imitate Golden Dawn or Greek Solution’s intended responses, they have undone many of the policies that their radical-left predecessors had instated and sparked more anti-migrant sentiments and actions throughout Greece (Stamouli 2019).

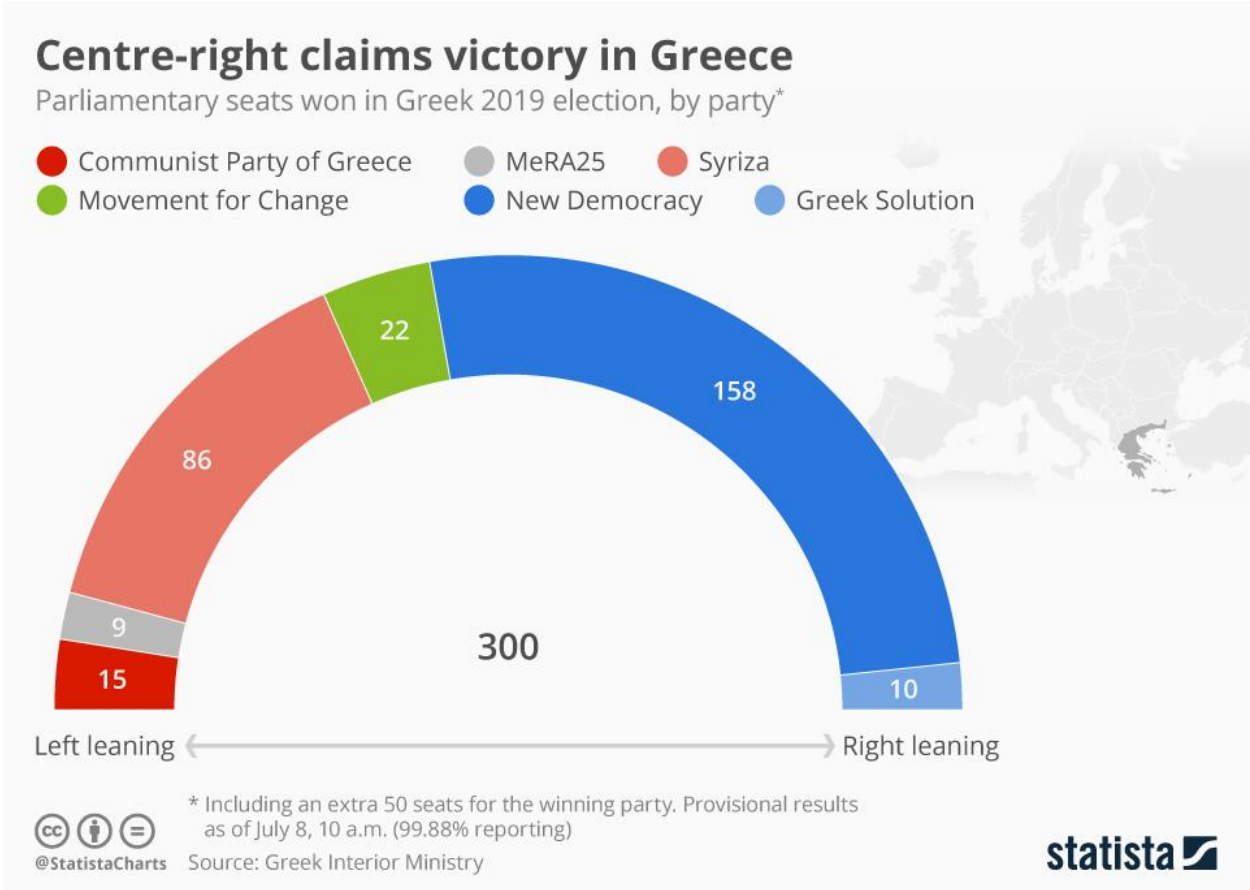


Figure 4:Parliamentary seats won in Greek 2019 election, by party. Statista 2019

METHODS

Research Design and Methods

To answer my research question, I relied on 94 different sources to engage in case studies of each state as this is a desk-based study. The case studies of each country are based on the critical reflection and reconciliation of official statements and documents released by the governments of each respective country, news updates from sources throughout the surrounding region, and statements released by NGOs and IGOs specifically responsible for the care of these groups. These include but are not limited to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Amnesty International, Refugees International, and Human Rights Watch, as they are the main organizations tracking the migrant and refugee crisis preceding and during the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted a comparative analysis for each country's pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19 strategy for dealing with migrants and refugees after compiling the information from the documents. After completing those analyses and comparisons, I made a larger comparative analysis between the countries, discussing similarities and differences, as well as the pitfalls and successes of each country. Overall, this methodology allowed me to draw factual conclusions about this dire and extraordinarily complex situation in a way that accounts for the causes and effects of the pandemic, the economic crises within each country, and the refugee and migrant crisis taking place simultaneously.

First, I rely on 13 scholarly articles written by academics, medical experts, and other professionals who have studied pandemics, refugees, and migration on both a global and European scale. The purpose behind this is to gain a wider perspective about Spain and Greece's responses in comparison to the larger European and global responses before and after COVID-19. Following the use of these articles, I rely on 35 articles and 1 video from local and international publications, 4 government documents, as well as 13 articles from IGOs, such as the UN and the EU. Moreover, I utilize 28 articles from NGOs, non-profit organizations, and think tanks that work directly with migrant and refugee rights including Amnesty International. These documents provide the basis for the data analysis section of this thesis as they are written by journalists, activists, and nonprofit workers who are dedicated to the maintenance of migrant and refugees' human rights.

By citing many sources by medical experts, human rights activists, and government officials to get the full scope of the multifaceted and quite complex situation at hand, I will be able to uncover the many layers that shape the conjunction between the migrant and refugee crisis and European pandemic responses. As someone fluent in Arabic, Spanish, and English, I have read sources in these three languages to gain global perspectives on this complex issue. This in turn allowed me to draw factual conclusions about the nuanced factors that contribute to the processing and treatment of refugees and migrants in detention centers—race, gender, sexual orientation, language, etc. By reading several sources from professionals in different fields, I did not limit the scope of my research to encompass only specific views of this situation. Instead, I drew conclusions about this complex question by addressing as many of the contributing factors as I

could, without laying arbitrary blame on either the states or the refugees and migrants. I considered the medical aspects and recommendations as they stand and compared them to the actions of the governments regarding refugees and migrants. I also studied the accounts of human rights activists who were on the ground helping the migrants and refugees during this crisis to understand more of the complications and often unseen truths of the situation. Additionally, I factored in the official statements and documents released by the governments of each respective country about the topic to gain a comprehensive understanding of how they claim to have dealt with this crisis within a crisis.

By comparatively analyzing how COVID-19 has affected the treatment of refugees and migrants in both Spain and Greece, this project will grow the state of knowledge that currently exists on this unprecedented global pandemic. Instead of focusing only on vulnerable communities that are citizens or permanent residents of these countries and considering only the effects this pandemic has on the populations of those within peaceful countries, this project would push beyond the imagined borders of state and consider those human beings that are the most vulnerable of all—migrants and refugees—during this time of uncertainty and obscurity.

Limitations

The main limitations of this research design are relying on secondary sources, as well as the inability to conduct interviews and field visits. More limitations of this research design could be false accounts, and improper or biased records especially those from government sources and medical professionals. At times, the migrants and refugees may fear for their safety or feel as though they should not give the journalists and professionals direct or honest answers to the questions they ask. This will inevitably result in skewed data and semi-truthful conclusions due to the false responses or accounts. In addition to this, I am currently unable to interview migrants and refugees as I cannot be on the ground in either country for several reasons including a lack of clearance and the ongoing pandemic. As such, I must use the written sources to discern my conclusion. Meaning I must frame my questions and results in an unbiased and transparent way to avoid any confusion, offense, or miscommunication about the actions of any state. In terms of the improper or biased records, I have compared as many relevant and credible sources as possible to discern the truth, or the closest I can get to the truth so that my conclusions are as valid as possible.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Spain's Pre-COVID Strategy

In the global context of the refugee and migrant crisis, some states are more susceptible to receiving higher numbers of these groups. Countries, like Spain, which border the Mediterranean Sea and have several open entry points are more vulnerable to receiving a higher number of refugees and illegal migrants. Spain's population of roughly 47 million has faced dramatic changes in the past few years. In 2018, Spain received 57,250 migrants through the Mediterranean alone, which is more than half of the 113,145 who made the journey through this channel (Barba 2019). The migrant population—which consists of all migrants and non-Spanish born individuals living in Spain—forms nearly 14% of the Spanish population, and the average age has decreased from Spain's previously older demographic (EU 2020). The country is a multi-ethnic state and has divides within those who are considered ethnically Spanish. Andalusia, the southern region of Spain, still houses the majority of Spain's Muslim and Jewish histories and is closest to the Mediterranean which makes it the main entry point for most migrants coming from the sea. Spaniards have generally been the most tolerant of refugees and migrants in general within the entire continent of Europe. Yet, preceding COVID, there had been a recent increase in internment and detention centers in Spain where predominantly African and Latin American migrants had been held in borderline inhumane conditions, left without legal counsel, and then eventually deported back to terrible conditions in their home countries (Belaza and Álvarez 2017). These have increased because of the influx of migrants coming to Spain as well as a need to control the anti-migrant sentiments that are rising in the country because of its economic and political climate.

There are two main detention structures within Spain. First are the Centers for the Internment of Foreigners (Spanish acronym CIE), “are public establishments of a non-penitentiary nature” (ACCEM 2019) which intern migrants and asylum-seekers who are pending deportation, for up to 60 days. If the migrants or asylum-seekers have not been deported within that period they must be released and cannot be detained again in the future (Moreno 2020). The CIE has seven internment centers throughout Spain in Algeciras, Madrid, Valencia, Murcia, Barcelona, Las Palmas, and Tenerife (Global Detention Project 2020). According to Article 62-bis of the Aliens Act, “Admission to [,] and stay in these facilities shall be solely for preventive and precautionary purposes, safeguarding the rights and freedoms recognized in the legal system, with no limitations

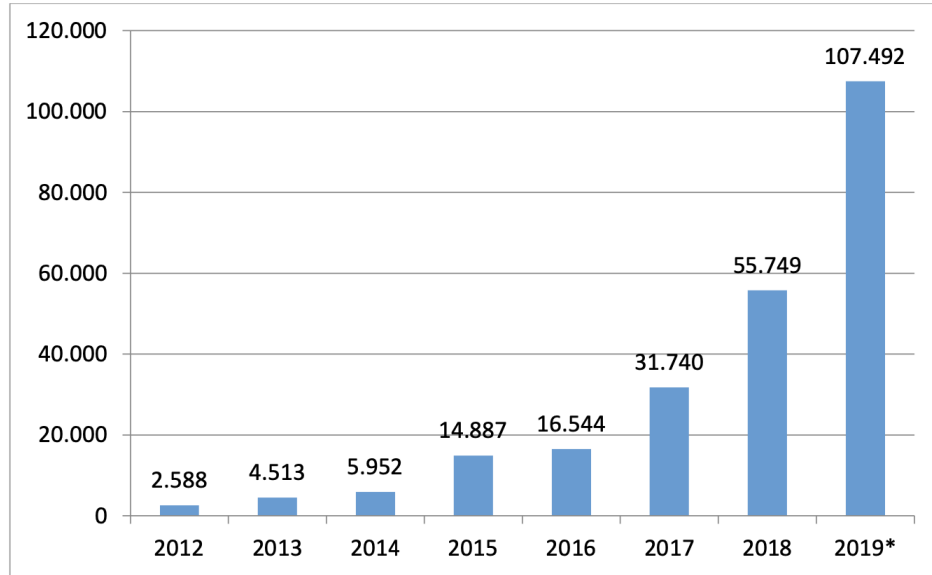
other than those applying to their freedom of movement, in accordance with the content and purpose of the judicial detention order of admission.” As such, the CIE are meant to be temporary holding centers in which migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees have a right to “be informed and to have access to a lawyer, to an interpreter, to appropriate medical and health support as well as access to NGOs working with migrants. They also have the right to have their life, physical integrity and health respected, and to have their dignity and privacy preserved” according to this same article of the Aliens Act (ACCEM 2019). Unfortunately, the reality of the CIEs before COVID was the exact opposite of the descriptions given in the previously mentioned Aliens Act.

The second main detention structure are the Centers for the Temporary Stay of Foreigners, (Spanish acronym CETI), which are “ad hoc” facilities designed to be “places of first reception providing basic services to migrants and asylum seekers who have entered Spanish territory illegally,” and are pending entry into mainland Spain. There are two main CETI facilities in the Spanish enclaves in Morocco called Ceuta and Melilla where people spend between two months and a year. The CETI facilities are semi-open centers, with access restrictions at night, which migrants and asylum-seekers are free to leave at any time. These facilities aim to ease the flow of migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees entering mainland Spain at one time (Global Detention Project 2020). There are also two other temporary reception structures called Centers for the Temporary Reception of Foreigners (Spanish acronym CATE), and Emergency Reception and Referral Centers (CAED), which were created as a result of the 2018 surge in the numbers of migrants and refugees entering Spain (Jesuit Refugee Service 2019)—these two structures lack legal definition and regulation by the Spanish government (ACCEM 2019). Much like the CIEs, the CETI facilities are not as helpful as they may seem.

In Spain, before the COVID-19 pandemic, many migrants and refugees came from MENA and sub-Saharan Africa in search of a better life than the one they had in their homelands (see figures 5 & 6). The migrants from Guinea, Morocco, Algeria, Gambia, Ivory Coast, and Cameroon formed roughly 74% of all migrants while Africans, in general, formed 89.9% of all migrants in Spain (Clemente 2017). By my calculations, that means that around 15.9% of migrants were from Sub-Saharan Africa, but these Sub-Saharan Africans made up 48% of internees in the CIEs. Many of these migrants were detained for not having proper documentation and were placed in terrible conditions where there are seven to eight people in a holding cell meant for one or two people, they were not given enough clothing in the wintertime, and healthcare was scarce—it was available

during the day, but interned migrants were left to fend for themselves and go to emergency rooms during after-hours, where their care was not guaranteed (Belaza and Álvarez 2017). The CIEs detained about 58% of migrants for being undocumented and mixed them with migrants who had committed a crime. It is not clear whether this group of migrants had documentation or not.

[Applications for international protection in Spain, 2012-2019](#)



**Provisional figures at 30 November 2019*

Figure 5: Spain And the Global Compact On Refugees: A Contribution To The First Global Refugee Forum 2019.

[Figure 4. Asylum seekers in Spain, 2012-2018](#)

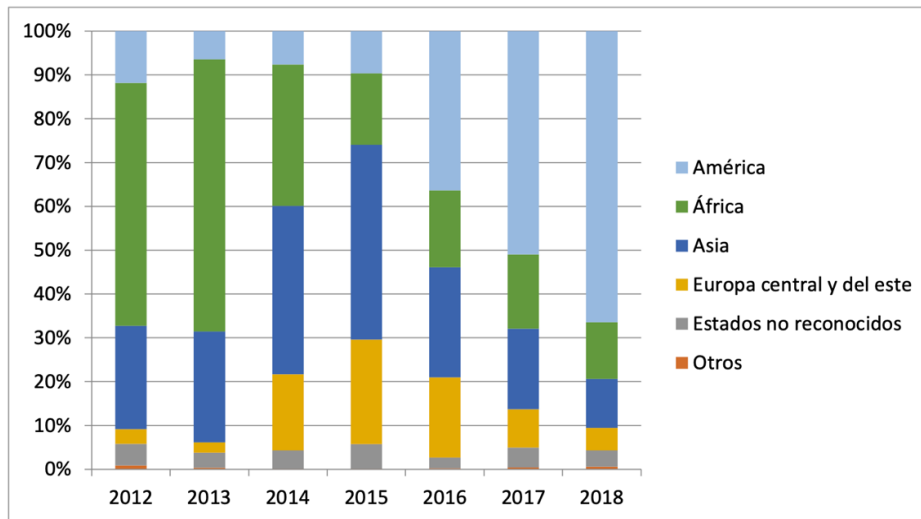


Figure 6: Spain And the Global Compact On Refugees: A Contribution To The First Global Refugee Forum 2019. Light Blue: Latin America, Green: Africa, Navy Blue: Asia, Yellow: Central and Eastern Europe, Gray: Unknown States, Orange: Others

Conditions in the CIEs are so terrible that tensions result in riots between the interned people as well. Incarcerated migrants live in conditions that bear many similarities to prison. There are metal doors, cold spaces, cell-shaped rooms, bedrooms with bunk beds, toilets, and some shelves. The cells were created to intern a maximum of one or two people, but they were used to hold six to eight people. There is medical service from eight in the morning to ten at night, but in emergency situations, inmates must request to be transferred to a hospital, which is no easy feat (ACCEM 2019). A video recorded by a man who was interned at the CIE facility in Valencia revealed that the conditions inside these facilities are indeed remarkably similar to those of prisons with horrible food, one bottle of water per person per day, toilets with no doors on them, no medical aid, and rooms with bunk beds that hold 6-8 people and have a small window with bars on it (Marco 2019). Furthermore, the CIE workers only speak Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, English, and French, meaning that many of the interned people cannot always speak to or understand the workers (Belaza and Álvarez 2017). This allows the CIE workers to take further advantage of the interned people because they know they cannot fight for their rights if they do not know them. Migrants who do not speak one of the five aforementioned languages do not have concrete ideas of their rights and cannot fight for them. Instead of having freedoms, these migrants live in a world of silence and ignorance until their case reveals whether the state is going to expel them or not, which usually takes up to 18 months (Keeley 2020). This increases the number of opportunities afforded to CIE workers to infringe on the rights of inmates and take away their human dignity, thereby violating Article 62-bis of the Alien Act.

People who are incarcerated in detention centers usually spend all this time for nothing because seven out of ten people were eventually released (Belaza and Álvarez 2017). That means that they are interned and then can live in Spain without facing problems. Approximately a third of the migrants that the CIEs have detained are not forcibly repatriated. In 2009, the number of internees was 26,032 while in 2016 it was 7,597. Those expelled are much less during both years with 18,308 in 2009 and 2,205 in 2016 (Clemente 2017). This means that 29% of the internees were expelled in 2016. In the years before 2016, the expulsion rate was higher than in 2016. 54% were expelled under a court decision, 36% due to the impossibility of documents, 7.5% for having finished their time in the detention centers, and 0.24% for having escaped (Burgos and Carbajosa 2017). But, in

2019 Spain had plans to expel 9,000 migrants because it relaxed its regulations on irregular immigration between 2009 and 2016 and is now receiving around 30,000 asylum and protection applications for shelter (Ansa 2019).

Most of the internees are men who make up 93.4% while women make up 6.6%. (Clemente 2017). Women who are interned are often sex slaves or victims of human trafficking who have risked their lives to flee these unspeakable situations. In several cases, these women go unnoticed by the CIEs and nobody notices that they have been raped and have faced worse situations. The CIEs expelled 23% of these women from Spain in 2016, which placed them in the grave and imminent danger of being trafficked again (Gálvez and Lejarcegi 2017).

Spain's COVID-19 Strategy

Despite Spain's exhaustive efforts to quickly try to contain the spread of COVID-19 following the first case in January, the country rapidly became the global "hotspot...the most affected country," by the pandemic in March of 2020 (Panayotatos 2020b). Unfortunately, this meant that Spain was forced to close its external borders on March 22, 2020, to all people who were not "residents of Spain, residents in Spain, cross-border workers, those that document causes of force majeure or situation of need, [and] foreign personnel accredited as members of diplomatic missions, consular offices and international organizations located in Spain are exempt from these restrictions, as long as they are related to the performance of official functions" (Ministerio Del Interior 2020). However, the definitions of "force majeure" and "situation of need" are not defined by the Spanish government. Additionally, the government has explicitly stated that "it is not possible to apply for international protection in Spain as a result of the global health emergency" (ACCEM 2020).

At the beginning of 2020, directly preceding the pandemic, Spain was receiving 3,500 asylum applications per week, mostly from Venezuelans and Colombians, which was 20 percent lower than the number they were receiving in 2019 during the same period (Panayotatos 2020b). In direct association with the pandemic, the number of refugees and migrants from Latin America and North Africa has decreased drastically. Latin American migration especially has plummeted to "almost negligible" numbers (Ortizda, 2020). However, "of the 7,828 refugees and migrants who arrived in Spain as of June 14, 2020, more than 80 percent went by sea," meaning that most were coming from North Africa (Panayotatos 2020b) as most Latin American migrants and refugees come to Spain by air.

The drastic drop in asylum applications is an interesting issue as well. Spain has suspended many asylum procedures during its lockdowns and has made it quite difficult to apply for international protection within its borders (ACCEM, 2020). During the week of March 9, Spain received 3,865 asylum applications, but after closing its external borders because of the pandemic, Spain received 25 applications for asylum during the week of March 16, resulting in a 99.4 percent decrease in the number of applications in a matter of days (Martín, 2020). By October, the number of migrant arrivals to Mainland Spain had decreased drastically from 2019, but the number of migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands was nearly three times higher than it was last year—growing from 2,698 to 9,199 just this year. The conditions on the Canary Islands have been described by “a representative of the Spanish Commission to Help Refugees [as], ‘an open-air prison’,” especially because Spanish authorities and border patrol have effectively, quarantined migrants on the island without allowing them to leave (Anon, 2020).

Moreover, Spain has effectively postponed all asylum processing procedures indefinitely. This means that asylum applications that had been filed and which had been awaiting an interview are also suspended indefinitely and must be rescheduled once operations resume. Furthermore, Spanish border authorities have a legal right under Spanish law to return people to their countries if they do not have proper documentation (Ministerio Del Interior 2020). Unfortunately, this goes directly against Spain’s commitment to non-refoulement laws, as individuals are currently being deported without being able to go through the process of applying for asylum and without any care for their human rights.

Those who have not been deported include those who were in CIE and CETI facilities. Following public outcry from human rights organizations and NGOs, and a public campaign for the closure of the CIE facilities (Campaña CIESNO 2020), Spain decided to empty its CIE facilities because of its inability to deport the migrants and refugees to their countries of origin due to COVID and because they wanted to avoid risking high infection rates in these facilities (Sánchez 2020). This effectively resulted in Spain closing its CIE facilities temporarily (Roman 2020). Those released without a home to return to were promptly placed under a humanitarian program where they were given access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and other basic services because of a deal struck between the Ministry of the Interior, NGOs, and other social groups (Sánchez 2020). Only 34 detainees remained in all the CIE facilities by April 5, 2020, and by May 6, Spain announced that all the facilities were emptied (Martín 2020). The same could not be said for the

CETI facilities in Ceuta and Melilla. In Melilla, people held in CETIs were reportedly facing overcrowding, a lack of protective measures, and very little information from Spanish authorities (Barakat 2020). Amnesty International Spain revealed that the Melilla facility, which was created to host 580 migrants and refugees was confining 1,753 people as of April 2, 2020. Additionally, Spanish authorities were not taking any extra precautions to safeguard the migrant and refugee populations in these facilities (Amnistía Internacional España 2020) and have been heavily criticized by several groups including Amnesty International and the Spanish Ombudsman.

Spain Comparison and Analysis

In Spain, there has been an interesting change of policy because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The starkest and most notable difference is the number of migrants and refugees seeking Spain's safety and protection. The aforementioned 99.4 percent drop in the number of asylum applications during the first week of Spain's implementation of its lockdown procedures has continued as the pandemic has gone on (Martín 2020). Unfortunately, the combination of Spain's strict border policies (Ministerio del Interior 2020) and the inability of most refugees and migrants to apply for asylum due to Spain's increasingly arduous process (ACCEM 2020), has resulted in an even larger crisis within a crisis.

The conditions in Spain's detention and internment centers before the pandemic infringed upon countless human rights and had become the focus of many political groups as well as human rights organizations in Spain and around the world (ACCEM 2020). The interned and detained migrants and refugees were simply seeking a better life than the ones they had in their home countries. Some have escaped heinous conditions only to be interned and then returned into those very same conditions (Belaza and Álvarez 2017; Clemente 2017). The migrants and refugees have positive rights to security, life, food, and shelter as human beings—that is of course in addition to the other international protections afforded to refugees which Spain must observe under international and regional law (UNHCR 2015). Very few of these are provided by the internment and detention facilities in Spain. Instead, the interned and detained people are living in conditions that make it nearly impossible for them to be secure (ACCEM 2019) as riots take place and healthcare is insufficient (Marco 2020).

Spain's generosity in accepting a large number of migrants and refugees over the past decade has been outshined by its heinous actions toward them. In the pre-COVID era, food and shelter were provided to migrants and refugees with many conditions and limitations. The facilities that

were meant to house them had turned into prison-like structures as per the accounts of NGOs and the video taken in the Valencia CIE facility (Marco 2020). Spain's economic and political problems have formed its response not only to refugees and migrants in the pre-COVID era but during the time of the pandemic as well since the Spanish people feel as though their country no longer cares about their needs (Femmine and Alameda 2017). The current situation is arguably worse, as these migrants and refugees who are already among the most vulnerable populations in the world, are now facing this global pandemic in addition to the other, often life-threatening, circumstances that encouraged them to leave or flee their countries. Moreover, they are unable to apply for asylum in Spain, a place they may have spent years trying to reach and face a great chance of being repatriated immediately if they lack proper documentation (Ministerio del Interior 2020).

Spain's decision to close the CIE facilities was well-founded but came from a self-serving place as they realized they no longer had any legal basis to keep migrants and refugees interned in these facilities (Roman 2020). However, they have failed in the CETI facilities where thousands remain vulnerable to the issues that result from being in an overcrowded facility, in addition to facing increased susceptibility to the pandemic (Barakat 2020). Thus, COVID-19 has caused Spain to temporarily close its CIE facilities, implement stricter border and asylum-policies, violate international and regional law by repatriating individuals, and neglect the needs of those in CETI facilities—which is worse than its pre-COVID response.

Greece's Pre-COVID Strategy

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Greece consistently made international headlines for its overcrowded refugee and migrant camps, its human rights violations, and its rising anti-migrant sentiments. Its population of 10,724,599 has seen some of the highest numbers of incoming migrants and refugees in all of Europe. Between 2014 and 2019, most refugees and migrants to Greece came from Afghanistan and Syria according to the UNHCR. In 2015 alone, Greece received 856,723 migrants by sea, that number dropped by roughly 650,000 in 2016, and by 2019 it was 56,726. Simultaneously, the number of refugees and migrants entering Greece has increased by roughly 10,000 from 4,907 in 2015, to 14,887 in 2019 (United Nations, 2020). In 2017, there were an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 unauthorized migrants and refugees living in Greece, which made up 11% of its population (Pew Research Center 2020). This percentage proved to cause some problems within the state. In a set of surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, they found

that 82% of Greeks wanted less or no additional migrants to move to their country (Connor and Krogstad 2020), 74% of Greeks believed that migrants were a burden on the country that take jobs and drain its social benefits (Gonzalez-Barrera and Connor 2020), and 92% claimed that they disapproved of the way that the EU handled the migrant and refugee crisis (Connor 2020). These reactions stem from Greece's economic and political history which has largely contributed to its public anti-migrant sentiment both in the pre-COVID era and during COVID.

Greece has one main detention and reception structure for migrants and refugees, named Reception and Identification Centers (RICs). These RICs are present on five islands off the Greek-Turkish coast in the form of refugee and migrant camps; these islands are, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos (Human Rights Watch 2020). There are 30 camps total which were created in 2015 and 2016 as a temporary response and holding centers for the influx of migrants that were entering the Greek mainland (Greek Council for Refugees 2020). However, Greece has not “implemented some kind of written standards for reception conditions” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020a). It only has article 55(1) IPA⁴ which states “that material reception conditions must provide asylum seekers with an adequate standard of living that guarantees their subsistence and promotes their physical and mental health, based on the respect of human dignity.” As such, there are no mechanisms or guidelines in place for the “monitoring and oversight of the level of the reception conditions” nor is there a way to complain against these conditions as well (Greek Council for Refugees 2020).

There are two main Greek refugee and migrant camps (RICs), Moria and Vathy, which are notorious for having especially horrendous conditions. Moria which is located on the island of Lesbos, was initially created to house 3,100 refugees and migrants—as of February of 2020, it housed over 20,000 refugees and migrants, almost seven times the amount it was built to house. There lie a plethora of problems within the camp, especially since 40% of the inhabitants are children. As a result of the overcrowding and the size of the camp, there is a lack of clean water, a fear of using the restrooms at night (especially for women and children), and many health problems. Furthermore, there is often violence (usually in the forms of riots, sexual violence, and

⁴ The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) is how the EU supports reforms in the ‘enlargement countries’ with financial and technical help. The IPA funds build up the capacities of the countries throughout the accession process, resulting in progressive, positive developments in the region. (European Commission 2020)

assaults), a lack of rights and freedoms (Greek Council for Refugees 2020), and a lack of knowledge about the limited rights that do exist as the languages spoken by the refugees and migrants are not always spoken by the volunteers and government employees (Chapman 2020). A report in 2018 revealed that many of the children between the ages of 6 and 18 have either tried to commit suicide, thought about it, or have injured themselves which is a direct result of the aforementioned conditions (Hennicke 2018). Unfortunately, the conditions at Vathy are not much better and are shaped by the EU-Turkey deal created in 2016.

In 2016, the EU and Turkey came to an agreement that Turkey would prevent asylum-seekers from leaving its territory⁵ for EU countries, specifically Greece. This agreement more specifically outlined that asylum-seekers, especially Syrians, who had arrived on the Greek Aegean Islands from Turkey would be returned to Turkey. The EU has given Turkey billions of dollars for partaking in this deal (Amnesty International 2020), which was a direct result of the fact that Europe had received 1.3 million asylum applications in 2015 alone (“Record 1.3 Million Sought Asylum in Europe in 2015” 2016). Moreover, Greece received more than 800,000 migrants and refugees, half of whom were Syrian (BBC 2015), traveling directly from Turkey both by land and by sea because both countries share a border (see figure 7). For the past four years, Turkey has been carefully ensuring that these refugees and asylum-seekers have not left its borders, resulting in its retention of more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees to date (UNHCR 2020). Understanding this deal is crucial to understanding the conditions at Vathy and Greece’s larger response to the refugee and migrant crisis because the deal had affected Greece’s processing policies directly before the pandemic.

⁵ Turkey is not an EU member state.

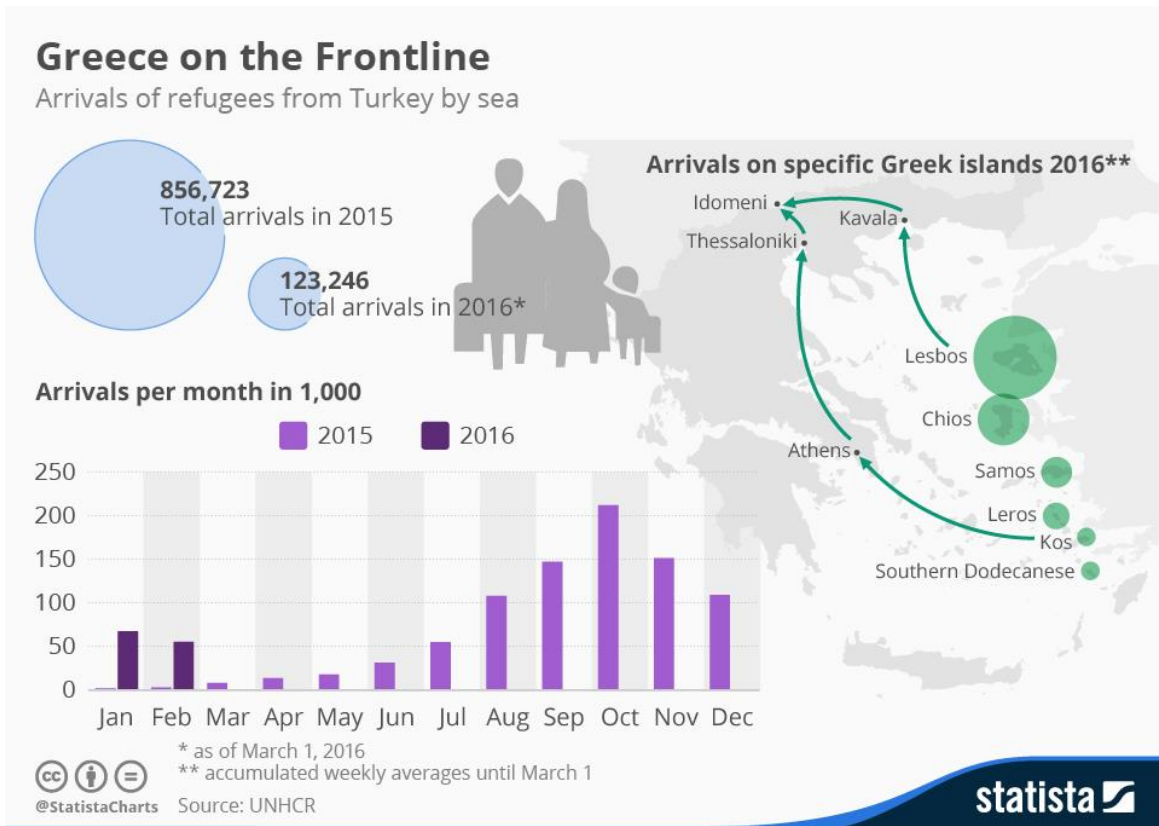


Figure 7: Arrivals of refugees from Turkey by sea. Loesche and Richter 2016.

The conditions at Vathy, which is located on the island of Samos, are equally as deplorable as those in Moria and are quite questionable. Vathy has gained a reputation that no one can leave the camp unless they are sick or pregnant. This is a direct result of an EU deal with Turkey in 2016, in which the EU agreed that Turkey would take on any migrants headed to Greece. The EU-Turkey deal effectively trapped many of migrants and refugees in Greece’s squalid camps leaving them to scramble to try and find evidence of chronic illness within themselves or any family member, or signs of pregnancy so that they may be granted permission to leave the camp. Vathy was built to host 700 migrants and refugees, instead, it hosts roughly 3,000 migrants and refugees in terrible conditions that are quite similar to Moria’s. Vathy also struggles with a severe lack of running water, filthy toilets—that most refugees have avoided using—and a lack of resources for the refugees and migrants including winter clothes and places to sleep (Christides and Stéfátou 2017). Unfortunately, these were not the only detriments of this EU deal. This issue resulted in Greece’s decision to close its borders and implement harsher asylum policies in the last few months of 2019 and the first few preceding the pandemic.

As of February 27, 2020, Turkey announced that it would no longer uphold the terms of the deal it had struck with the EU and would not stop refugees and migrants from entering Europe. As such, refugees have been fleeing from Turkey's inhumane conditions only to be met by "heavily armed Greek border guards, tear gas, rubber bullets, and razor wire." Furthermore, Greece's "security forces have been firing tear gas and repelling dinghies trying to reach Greece's shores" (Amnesty International 2020). They generally repel dinghies by meeting them in the Mediterranean with coast guard ships and firing rubber bullets at or near the dinghies, as well as by using large batons to forcibly turn the dinghies around. The refugees and migrants are also often met by large crowds of the residents of the island, in this case, Lesbos, who yell at them to "go away" or "go back"—unfortunately, a handful of these confrontations turn violent with the Greek citizens assaulting refugees, migrants (Daragahi 2020), NGO workers, and journalists (Tidman 2020). These actions have only worsened because of the pandemic.

Greece's COVID-19 Strategy

Greece experienced its first case of COVID-19 on February 26, 2020 and initiated a system of contact tracing which led to all exposed subjects being tested and isolated. In early March, the country quickly closed schools, universities, and public spaces periodically until March 23rd when a "nation-wide restriction of movement [was] enforced, whereby citizens [could] leave their house only for specific reasons and with a special permit" (National Public Health Organization, 2020). These policies allowed Greece to control the virus quickly and effectively within the first month of the pandemic. Moreover, it meant that there were "no cases of COVID-19 among the tens of thousands of refugees and migrants living in Reception and Identification Centers (RIC) on the Aegean Islands" during the first month of the pandemic (Panayotatos, 2020a). However, the Greek government quickly decided to seal the RICs' borders and effectively trapped 30,000 migrants and refugees within the confines of the terrible camps on all the Aegean Islands, even though Greece had already passed its first wave of COVID-19. The trapped migrants and refugees, 55 percent of whom are women and children, are trapped in conditions where they do not have access to necessities, regular access to healthcare, or access to basic services. This has led to a direct increase in mental health issues for children and adults alike since they are not able to go walk or swim in the sea or leave the confines of the overcrowded camp (Medecins San Frontieres 2020). Moreover, following the globally accepted precautions of social distancing and frequent hand washing to

prevent the virus from spreading are impossible in this context since the facilities are overcrowded and undersupplied (Medecins San Frontieres 2020).

Since Greece's strategy had already been tainted by the effects of its strife with Turkey, over the issue of migration, its COVID-19 measures were no surprise. As a result of Greece's infringement upon the rights of migrants and refugees, and the 35 cases that surfaced in camp Moria, the camp burnt down in March leaving thousands homeless. While it is not clear how the fires started, some migrants have claimed that far-right Greek groups were responsible, while the Greek minister of migration has claimed that "incidents in Moria began with the asylum seekers because of the quarantine imposed." The EU and other organizations offered help to Greece following this incident as well (BBC 2020).

Another result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the breakdown of the EU-Turkey deal was Greece making its asylum and border policies stricter. Most asylum-seekers and migrants who come in hoping to attain refugee status are interviewed as part of the asylum procedure and are asked to speak about the trauma they have faced at home before they are ready to which has caused the number of successful applications to drop significantly from the pre-COVID era. This is a result of the fact that a lack of trauma gives Greece legal grounds under its regional laws to repatriate migrants and asylum-seekers who do not meet its conditions for asylum (Kafkoutsou 2020). Greece had already been actively repatriating migrants and refugees since August of 2020 by offering them economic incentives (Al Jazeera 2020; Kafkoutsou 2020)—a violation of international and regional law. The Greeks also resorted to picking up asylum-seekers and migrants who had documentation and were going through the asylum process and dropping them off at the Turkish border. If the asylum-seekers and migrants did not comply and leave, then the Greek authorities would beat them until they did (Souli 2020).

Moreover, as a result of Turkey's faltering on the EU deal and opening its borders, Greece continued its policy of using force and violence, which it had started before the pandemic to keep migrants and refugees away from its islands (Kafkoutsou 2020). They did this with the intention that it would discourage more migrants and refugees from coming in. This use of violent means worked as Greece hoped it would, but also resulted in increased skepticism of Greece's policies by NGOs and other organizations (Daragahi 2020). It did not meet skepticism from the EU and instead, Greece was deemed the "shield of Europe" by the EU (Rankin 2020) and was met with plans to reallocate children and other migrants and refugees from Greece, which was an initiative

that had been attempted unsuccessfully before (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020b).

Greece Comparison and Analysis

Greece's situation is exceptionally complicated and tainted by many varied factors including its political climate, public anti-migrant sentiments, its economy, and its relations with its neighbor, Turkey. Greece's pre-COVID policies were shaped by its left-wing government (Dempsy 2015) which was reportedly more lenient toward migrants and refugees than its current center-right government (Stamouli 2019). Unfortunately, due to the aforementioned stressors, Greece's pre-COVID policies centered around a disregard for migrant and refugees' rights and needs. Although the opening of RICs in 2015 and 2016 was warranted given the exorbitant number of migrants and refugees (Greek Council for Refugees 2020), their use in recent years and especially now at the time of the pandemic has led to gross violations of basic human rights (Chapman 2020).

Greece's use of violence toward the refugees and migrants both before and after COVID was mostly a result of its desire to deter more migrants from coming in after the EU-Turkey deal broke down (Kafkoutso 2020). However, this is not a proportional response to the fact that migrants and refugees are simply seeking safety and security (Amnesty International 2017). Although this crisis has existed for over a decade, migrants and refugees continue to bear the consequences of the EU's inability to create a coordinated plan to address their arrivals (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020a).

Overall, Greece's policies have largely remained the same. They continue to keep migrants and refugees in RICs indefinitely (Medecins San Frontieres 2020) while neglecting to provide them with regular healthcare, access to basic services, and conditions sufficient for the prevention of COVID-19 (Medecins San Frontieres 2020; Chapman 2020). Moreover, the migrants and refugees' human rights continue to be infringed upon both in the camps (Panayotatos 2020a; Medecins San Frontieres 2020; Chapman 2020), and at Greece's borders—both on land through forced removal (Souli 2020) and at sea (Daragahi 2020). COVID-19's implications on Greece's migrant and refugee processing policies are very minor since Greece had already begun to implement the worst of its policies in the few months preceding the pandemic—the only major effect the pandemic had on Greece's policies was Greece's further harshening of its asylum procedures.

Spain and Greece Comparison and Analysis

To compare and analyze the similarities and differences in the approaches between the two countries is no easy feat as considerations must be made for not only the needs and precautions the states must take for the sake of their citizens and residents but also the needs of the refugees and migrants as well. Moreover, there are nuanced considerations of their distinct economic, social, and political contexts that must be factored in as well.

In the pre-COVID era, both Spain (Barba 2019) and Greece (United Nations 2020) found themselves to be the hotspots for entry from the Mediterranean Sea. They both received an exorbitantly high number of refugees and migrants between 2014 and 2019, because of the wars, genocide, natural disasters, and other dire situations (Amnesty International 2020) facing MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin American countries (Clemente 2017). While most of the demographics of the migrants and refugees are the same, as a result of both states' proximity to the MENA region via the Mediterranean Sea, the distinct groups of migrants and refugees entering Greece come from Turkey and Asia (Loesche and Richter 2016) while Spain's distinct groups come from Latin America ("Spain And the Global Compact On Refugees: A Contribution To The First Global Refugee Forum" 2019). As such, while both share some common groups, their demographic breakdown is quite distinct, meaning they must cater to the needs of different populations, languages, religions, and cultures.

In the pre-COVID era, the most common traits between the two countries, beyond their shared numbers, were their violations of refugees and migrants' human rights. In Spain, the CIEs provided almost uninhabitable internment centers that were characterized by violence, overcrowding, and a lack of respect for basic human dignity (Belaza and Álvarez 2017; ACCEM 2019; Marco 2019). The Greek camps followed rather the same description with a lack of healthcare and a lack of basic services (Greek Council for Refugees 2020), to a worse degree when one considers the fact that they are outdoors and offer no structural protections to the migrants and refugees (Chapman 2020). Much like Spain's CIE centers which faced internal violence (Belaza and Álvarez 2017), Greece's RICs are also faced with extreme violence both by the migrants and refugees themselves (Greek Council for Refugees 2020) and by the residents of the islands on which the camps stand (Daragahi 2020).

Both states' policies toward the migrants and refugees are subject to the provisions set out by the EU and the UN since both states are members of the EU and had agreed to all the UN

conventions on refugee and migrant treatment (UNHCR 2015). In this regard, Spain has been more faithful than Greece as it has explicitly listed the conditions and requirements about the processing and treatment of migrants and refugees within its constitution (ACCEM 2019), while Greece has not (Greek Council for Refugees 2020). While it is true that neither state fully abided by the regulations set out by the EU, UN, or by their distinct regional laws, Spain has done a better job of following these than Spain has especially with its reception facilities. Although the CIE and CETI facilities needed to change, they supplied a roof on top of the migrants' and refugees' heads, as opposed to Greece's open-air camps where the only roof is a tent if there is a vacant one (Chapman 2020). However, both Spain and Greece have plenty of work to do before their facilities stop facing scrutiny.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Spain became one of the first hotspots for the disease (Panayotatos 2020b) while Greece maintained one of the lowest infection rates in all of Europe (Panayotatos 2020a). During this time, Spain chose to release all migrants and refugees from its CIE facilities and close them temporarily (Roman 2020) for two reasons, to avoid infection rates skyrocketing, and because they no longer had any legal justification or ability to deport those within their facilities (Sánchez 2020). Greece, on the other hand, chose to confine all migrants and refugees within their camps even after it had passed its first wave of COVID with no cases in any of the camps (Medecins San Frontieres 2020). Additionally, where Spain supplied humanitarian aid to newly released CIE internees who did not have a home to go back to (Martín 2020), Greece continued to fail its migrant and refugee populations by leaving them in hazardous conditions with no way to complain (Greek Council for Refugees 2020), no way to gain basic medical assistance, and no protection mechanisms against the virus (Medecins San Frontieres 2020). Although Spain's policies in the CETI facilities are lackluster and are partially reminiscent of Greece's response in its RICs since those detained in CETI facilities do not have any protective measures either and face overcrowding (Barakat 2020), Spain's policies in the CIE facilities outshine Greece's policies entirely.

Although, Spain has a left-leaning government (Jones 2019) and Greece has a center-right government (Buchholz and Richter 2019), their migrant and refugee processing policies have been affected in similar ways. Their shared identity as Southern European states that have been disproportionately affected by the migrant and refugee crisis and the fact that both states' economies have suffered terribly over the past 15 years (Femmine and Alameda 2017; Council on

Foreign Relations 2018) has shaped their responses to this crisis within a crisis. However, none of this compensates for the fact that both countries have increased the brutality of their measures both on land and in the Mediterranean Sea. Although Greece had begun this process a few months before the pandemic, both Spain and Greece have resorted to implementing harsher asylum policies (ACCEM 2020; Kafkoutou 2020), using more violence at their borders (Cockcroft and Proxax 2017; Amnesty International 2020; Daragahi 2020), and both neglecting to account for the basic human rights of the populations that are now under their care (Barakat 2020; Chapman 2020). This in turn has caused the two most vulnerable populations to be even more vulnerable to human rights violations and more susceptible to COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the intersection of politics, economics, and public discourse, to understand the implications of COVID-19 on Greece and Spain's migrant and refugee processing policies and finds that both states' policies have been negatively altered by COVID-19. The implications of COVID-19 on Spain's migrant and refugee processing policies were the implementation of harsher asylum policies, the temporary emptying of the CIE facilities, the continued neglect of those in CETI facilities, and the implementation of harsher border protection policies. The implications of COVID-19 on Greece's migrant and refugee processing policies were the increased brutality of border protection methods, the implementation of repatriation or removal policies, and the restriction of movement of vulnerable groups in squalid conditions. In both cases, the states placed their needs above the needs of the migrant and refugee populations that sought safety within their borders. Hence, the implications of COVID-19 were greater on Spain's migrant and refugee processing policies than on Greece's since Greece had already begun implementing harsher policies before the pandemic due to the fallout of the EU-Turkey deal.

Although this project had its limitations, namely my inability to conduct interviews, and the fact that the pandemic has not yet concluded, this work has provided a considerable degree of insight into the problems faced by migrants and refugees in Greece and Spain during the first nine months of the pandemic. Yet, there remains a great deal of research that must take place on migrants' and refugees' rights during global pandemics, namely, their rights in other states or regions of the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the future, Greece, Spain, and the rest of Europe's migrant and refugee processing policies should continue to be examined, critiqued, and re-evaluated both in normal and pandemic contexts. For now, it is my aim that this work provides

insights into the multitudinous human rights violations faced by migrants and refugees, and into the structures that inevitably led to these violations, so that we can collectively avoid another crisis within a crisis in the future.

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