Long-term effects of the 1923 mass refugee inflow on social cohesion in Greece

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Motivation

- Mass displacement of people is abound throughout history:
  - Jews, ethnic Germans, Hindus and Muslims in the 20th century
- More recently, great number of DP due to civil wars and ethno-religious conflicts (Sudanese, Syrians, Rohingyans).
- The literature has generally focused the short-term costs that mass population inflow may cause for the receiving communities.
- Less is known about the long-term effects

What are the consequences of mass refugee inflow on the social cohesion of receiving communities in the long-run?
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Background

- After the Greco-Turkish war of 1919–1922, 1.2 million Greek Orthodox were forcibly resettled from Turkey to Greece, increasing the host population by more than 20 percent within a few months.

- Greece in the 1920s: poor agrarian country with low state capacity

- First intervention of the League of Nations to provide immediate relief and implement an ambitious resettlement program

- The refugees had a cultural profile similar to the native population (language and religion).

- Despite this, newcomers were often met with hostility by the locals (prejudice, conflict over farmland, political opposition)

Has the initial hostility cemented into persistent inter-group inequalities and oppositional identities? Or, to the contrary, have the LN resettlement efforts fostered refugees’ integration?
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This paper

Combining historical and modern population censuses, I examine:

- Integration outcomes of first and second generation refugees
- Benchmark: recent Albanian immigrants
- Effect of hosting refugees on social cohesion at the community level 80 years later
- The role of resettlement policy
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Refugees’ integration:

In the 2000s, relative to natives, second generation refugees display:

- Similar levels of trust in others and in institutions
- Similar voting patterns in national elections
- Stronger egalitarian values
- Higher political and civic engagement

Source: Author’s elaboration on the European Social Survey (ESS).
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Table: Greek refugees and Albanian immigrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greek refugees</th>
<th>Albanians</th>
<th>Difference btw. refugees and Albanians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)-(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever feel discriminated against</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td>0.473***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek as language most often spoken at home</td>
<td>0.992</td>
<td>0.541</td>
<td>-0.451***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political activity (petition, boycott, demonstration...)</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>-0.062**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in civic organisation</td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows average attitudes and behaviors of Albanian immigrants and second-generation refugees. In the fourth column, the table reports regression estimates of the refugee-native gap after controlling for age and gender dummies. Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Author’s elaboration on the European Social Survey (ESS).
Notes. The sample consists of 293 refugee women (born in 1908-1922, i.e., 0-15 years old in 1923) who report to be married with a currently co-residing husband. The sample consists of 452 Albanian immigrant women who arrived in Greece at an age younger than 15 and who report to be married with a currently co-residing husband. Source: Author’s elaboration on the 2001 Greek census.
Figure: Distribution of refugees in 1928 at the community level
At the community level, places with higher share of refugees in 1928:

- Display greater participation in voluntary associations (sport clubs) 80 years later
- No evidence of increased political fragmentation
- No evidence of increased crime
The role of policy

The integration policy of the LN and of the Greek state likely contributed to refugees’ successful integration. It combined:

1. Providing productive assets (farmland, livestock) that made refugees self-reliant
2. Building new houses and new schools, key factor for refugee children’s education
3. Granting the citizenship for political inclusion
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The role of school supply

Figure: Literacy of refugee and native men in 1928, by birth cohort.
The role of school supply

Figure: Refugee-native literacy gap in 1928 (for males)
Conclusion

- Clemens et al. (2018): “immigration is not inherently good or bad; its effects depend on the context and the policy choices that shape it.”

- The Greek historical experiment seems to validate this claim, as only the LN timely resettlement efforts could have turned a potential refugee crisis into a “blessing in disguise” (Pentzopoulos, 1962).

- Limitation: easier to design and implement integration policies when refugees are culturally similar to natives (see Albanian immigrants today in Greece)
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