

Migration in Greece at a glance

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SUMMARY

Greece's immigrant population, including aliens and co-ethnic returnees such as Pontic Greeks and ethnic Greek Albanians, reaches just over one million people. This represents about 9% of the total resident population, a strikingly high percentage for a country that until only twenty years ago was a migration sender rather than host.

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Immigration policy in Greece was quick to develop in terms of putting into practice stricter border controls and other enforcement measures. However, there has been a significant time lag in designing and implementing a more comprehensive policy framework that includes the regularisation of undocumented aliens, and that aims toward the integration of this population across all sectors and areas of the host country.

Approximately three quarters of the immigrant population currently has legal status (work and stay permits). It is interesting to note that most immigrants have entered Greece illegally and have survived in the country 'without papers' for (frequently consecutive) periods ranging from a few months to several years. The prolonged undocumented status of many migrants, and the policy vacuum that lasted for over a decade has not facilitated active civic participation on the part of immigrants in Greek public life. Recently adopted immigration legislation has been criticised for continuing to ignore the majority of the country's illegal migrant population and effectively hinders approximately 70% of immigrants from obtaining residence permits.

With regard to the media, overall, it has been inclined to privilege the perpetuation of negative prejudices and only recently have there been initiatives or measures targeting xenophobic attitudes and perceptions of Greeks towards foreigners. There are more and more efforts, largely supported by initiatives from the EU, aiming to promote tolerance, cultural pluralism and to bring forward the positive aspects of migration.

Migrants have contributed to the Greek economy's boost over the past decade. A sensitive tension that needs to be addressed is between a rather hostile public opinion towards immigration with the need for an inflow of new citizens to counterbalance Greece's aging population, and consequently the future viability of the country's social security system.

Immigrant activism in mainstream associations like trade unions or political parties is barely existent. The main reasons for the lack of civic activism include the insecure legal status of many immigrant workers, their mistrust towards the Greek state (which has been very ambivalent in the implementation of regularisation and other immigrant policies), their lack of time and resources to devote to activities other than paid work.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Until recently, Greece was a migration sender rather than host country.

A brief historical overview of immigration trends into Greece since the 20th century, is limited mainly to inflows from the Balkans due to the Balkan wars, and to refugees from Asia Minor (approximately 1,4 million in the 1920s and again around 350,000 in the 1950s from Istanbul) and from Egypt. These refugees were principally of Greek origin; they were integrated into the host society very quickly, basically for foreign policy reasons, and their impact on Greek economy and commerce was positive. Nevertheless, the economic underdevelopment of the country did not encourage immigration into Greece. On the contrary, Greeks emigrated in significant numbers mainly to northern Europe (Germany, Belgium), the USA and Australia. Emigration, however, came nearly to a halt in the mid to late 1970s after the tightening up of migration regimes in northern Europe.

After the geopolitical changes of 1989, the country was quickly converted into a host of mainly undocumented immigrants from eastern and central Europe, the former Soviet Union, as well as from the Third World. The dramatic and sudden increase of immigrant influx was an unexpected phenomenon for both the government and the population. The new situation has been characterised by administrative and political confusion with regard to migration policy, and an over-representation of irregular/illegal immigrants working in conditions of informality across the Greek economy. An increase in xenophobic behaviour and racism has been registered from the mid-1990s.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN GREEK IMMIGRATION POLICY

It is commonly stressed that Greece, traditionally an immigrant-exporting country, has increasingly confirmed its status as a destination country. In particular, major population inflows towards Greece during the last twenty years have included:

- co-ethnic returnees, notably the Pontic Greeks, arriving from the former Soviet Republics (Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia and Armenia);
- immigrants of Greek descent, notably ethnic Greek Albanian citizens (Vorioepiotes);
- immigrants from non EU countries (other than the categories mentioned previously);
- and, a smaller number of returning Greek migrants from northern Europe, the US, Canada and Australia.

At the eve of the 1990s Greece lacked a legislative frame for the control and management of immigration. The first law that tackled the influx of foreigners into the country was *law 1975 of 1991* with the eloquent title '*Entry, exit, sojourn, employment, removal of aliens, procedure for the recognition of refugees and other measures*'. The aim was mainly to curb migration, to facilitate removals of undocumented migrants apprehended near the borders and, if possible, to remove illegal aliens sojourning in Greece. The law made nearly impracticable the entry and stay of economic migrants, seeking for jobs.

In the years that followed, hundreds of thousands immigrants came to Greece without documents, or permits. They crossed the northern mountainous borders between Albania or Bulgaria and Greece on foot at night, or landed with small dinghies on the Greek islands of the Aegean or Crete (usually with the 'help' of human smuggling networks). Some arrived at Greek airports with tourist visas which they overstayed and others crossed the northern Greek borders by bus, pretending that they were travelling for leisure. It became increasingly evident that immigrants were here to stay and that the new phenomenon could not only be managed through stricter border control and massive removal operations.

The *presidential decrees 358/1997* and *359/1997* inaugurated the first immigrant regularisation programme, which took place in spring 1998. In total, 371,641 immigrants applied for the white card (limited duration permit) which was the first step in applying for the temporary stay permit or green card (of 1, 2 or 5 year duration). Only 212,860 undocumented foreigners managed to submit an application for a green card. The main reason for this was that while this first regularisation programme was ambitious in its conception and rather open in its conditions, it met with insurmountable organisational and practical difficulties. For one, the state services responsible for managing the programme were hardly prepared to receive and process the hundreds of thousands of applications. In addition, proof of legal employment for a minimum number of days was an important prerequisite; the reluctance of many employers to pay social insurance contributions made it very difficult for many applicants to meet this requirement. As a result, a significant number of applications were unsuccessful in passing to the second but necessary phase of the green card application phase and despite the repeated extensions of the deadlines, presumably fell back into undocumented status.

Nonetheless, this programme lay the first foundations in Greece for an institutional framework able to deal with immigration. In addition, the data collected through the regularisation procedure offered some first insights to the socio-economic and demographic features of the immigrant population.

According to data collected by the Employment Institute (OAED), 44.3% of all foreigners who applied for the regularisation of their working and residence status between the months of January to May 1998 was concentrated in the wider metropolitan area of Athens. Of these applicants, 52.7% were Albanians, 6.1% Pakistanis, 4.8% Bulgarians, while 4.5% were Romanians and another 4.5% were Poles. In addition, there were more female applicants among the following population groups: Bulgarian, Polish, Ukrainian and Filipino.

In 2001, and before the first regularisation programme had come to a close, the government issued a new law (*law 2910/2001*) entitled '*Entry and sojourn of foreigners in the Greek territory. Naturalisation and other measures*'. This law had a twofold aim. First, it included a second regularisation programme that aimed at attracting all the applicants who had not been able to benefit from the 1998 'amnesty' as well as the thousands of new immigrants who had, in the meantime, arrived in Greece. Second, the new law created the necessary policy framework to deal with immigration in the medium to long term. Thus, it

provided not only for issues relating to border control but also for channels of legal entry to Greece for employment, family reunion, return to their country of origin (for ethnic Greeks abroad), and also studies or asylum seeking. It also laid down the conditions for naturalisation of aliens residing in the country.

Another 370,000 immigrants applied to acquire legal status within the framework of the new programme. Even though the implementation phase had been more carefully planned, organisational issues arose quickly. In the Athens metropolitan area in particular, the four special immigration offices set up by the regional government to receive and process the applications were unable to deal with the huge workload they were faced with. Following repeated recommendations on behalf of trade unions, NGOs, and the Greek Ombudsman the law was revised and the relevant deadlines extended. Nonetheless, resources were still insufficient as work and stay permits continued to be issued for one year periods only. Hence, by the time one immigrant was done with the issuing of her/his papers, s/he had to start all over again to renew it. In addition to the cumbersome nature of the procedure, the costs (in money but also in time spent queuing) associated with this renewal process incurred by the migrants constituted a further hindrance. Only in January 2004 (Act 3202/2003) did the government decide to issue permits of a two-year duration, thereby facilitating the task of both the administration and the immigrant applicants.

In 2001, the government issued a three-year programme: *the Action Plan for the Social Integration of Immigrants (for the period 2002-2005)*. This Plan includes measures for their inclusion in the labour market, their access to health services and overall a series of measures promoting cultural dialogue and combating xenophobia and racism within Greek society. Unfortunately, many of the provisions of this programme remain on paper. In effect, during this period most budgetary efforts were geared on completing the preparations for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and the political spheres were concentrating on the national elections of 7 March 2004 and intra-party politics. Now, in view of the disconcerting prospects of the post-Olympic Games economy that are expected, the integration of the immigrant population may be attributed the attention and priority it deserves on the government agenda.

In August 2005, the Greek Parliament adopted a new immigration bill on '*Entry, stay and integration of third country nationals in Greece*' that will be effective as of 1st January 2006. The objective of this new legislation is to rationalise the co-ordination of Greece's immigration policy, simplify procedures and cut red-tape. The core innovative features include unifying residence and work permits into one document, clarifying family re-unification conditions, addressing the status of victims of human trafficking and strengthening regional migration commissions. However, this bill has been criticised for continuing to ignore the majority of the country's illegal migrant population and effectively hinders approximately 70% of these immigrants from obtaining residence permits. The Greek Minister of Interior has reacted to these criticisms by noting that the necessary changes will be made if gaps or problems surface during the law's implementation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN GREECE

At the 1991 census, there were 10,260,000 residents in Greece of whom 167,000 were foreigners. Following the most recent census of March 2001, there are 10,964,020 inhabitants in Greece, 797,091 of which are foreigners. The 2001 census gives the most complete picture of the immigrant population in Greece as it has attempted to cover both legal and undocumented aliens. In effect, according to the OECD Report on International Migration Trends, the foreign population – including illegal immigrants -- in Greece is estimated between 7.5% and 9.5% of the total population.

| Population – official data | 1991 | 2001 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Total population of Greece | 10,260,000 | 10,964,020 |
| Of which foreigners | 167,000 | 797,091 |
| In % | 2 | 7 |
| Source: National Statistics Service of Greece | | |

Among these foreigners there are only 47,000 citizens from the EU 15 member states (i.e. before the fifth EU enlargement that was concluded on 1 May 2004). Comparing the data of the two censuses it becomes obvious that the demographic growth of Greece in the last decade is almost entirely due to the arrival of non-EU workers and their families.

With regard to the 762,000 immigrants for whom we have detailed demographic data, the percentage of men is slightly higher than that of women (54.5% and 45.5% respectively). Most immigrant men and women declare employment as being their main reason for coming to Greece (54% in total). The second most important reason for settling in the country is family reunion (about 100,000 people in total, i.e. 13%), while approximately 50,000 persons have identified return to their country of origin as the third most important reason for migration to Greece. The census included another category (apart from work, family, return, studies and seeking asylum), which was ticked by 164,180 individuals (roughly equally divided between men and women). In spite of the large number of people registering under this category (over 20% of all foreigners), there is no available information as to what these 'other reasons' may consist of.

The largest group of immigrants are from the Balkan countries. More than half of all foreigners registered in the census and for whom we have detailed demographic data, are *Albanian* citizens (i.e., 438,000 or 57%). The majority of these (240,000, i.e. 54%) stated they came to Greece to find employment, while 70,000 (15%) came for family reunion, and about 10,000 (or 2.3%) as co-ethnic returnees. About one third of Albanians work in the construction sector and another 20% in agriculture.

The second largest national group (with a very large difference from the first though) are *Bulgarian* citizens with 35,000 individuals registered at the census, and two

thirds (more than 27,000) have identified work as the principle reason for their immigration to Greece. Roughly one third of Bulgarians work in agriculture and another third in private care and house cleaning services.

Alongside the non EU citizens, we should consider in substance even if not in form, the co-ethnic returnees from the former Soviet Republics, generally referred to as *Pontic Greeks* who arrived in Greece in the late 1980s and early 1990s as economic migrants. According to the special census administered by the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad (GSGA) in the year 2000, 152,204 Pontic Greeks had settled in the country. More than half of them (about 80,000) came from Georgia, 31,000 came from Kazakhstan, 23,000 from Russia, and about 9,000 from Armenia.

It is unclear how many ethnic *Greek Albanians (Vorioepiotes)* (not included in the GSGA data) had already been naturalised and hence appeared as Greek citizens in the 2001 census. It is estimated that about 100,000 Albanian citizens who live in Greece have been issued with the Special Identity Card for ethnic Greeks from Albania.

Furthermore, nearly one-half of the migrants have secondary education (including technical-skill schools) while approximately a one-tenth have higher education. A qualitative analysis of the educational levels of the various nationalities shows that, in comparative terms, Albanians have the lowest level of education and former Soviet citizens the highest. In terms of higher education, females have the largest share of the total, while males appear to predominate in all other educational categories (Kasimis & Kassimi 2004).

In sum, we estimate at just over one million the total number of immigrants (including co-ethnics) living in Greece. This amounts to about 9% of the total population. Of those, according to our estimates, about 850,000 have legal stay and work status. The total number of undocumented aliens has thus fallen to nearly 200,000 from the half a million estimates of the mid-1990s. Among the legal immigrants, a large majority regularised their status through the two 'amnesty' programmes mentioned above while a smaller number either came legally or took advantage of the special provisions for co-ethnics.

In addition, it is interesting to consider certain characteristics of this workforce, based on data collected during the first regularisation wave in 1998 in the Athens metropolitan area (Marvakis et al 2001):

- 49.1% of the immigrant population is between 21 and 30 years old;
- 73.6% of the immigrant population is male;
- 46.4% is married;
- the religious denominations of this population can be grouped as follows: 29.5% Muslim, 22.4% Christian Orthodox, 13.2% Christian Catholic, 27.7% Christian (other) and 1.8% are declared as atheist;
- while 54.1% of this population expressed the desire to reunite with their families in Greece.

Furthermore, approximately 75% of the immigrant workforce in Athens is characterised by low-skilled, temporary and irregular/precarious employment regardless of their educational / professional background in their country of origin (Chtouris and Psimmenos 1998). Many are employed on a day-to-day basis, and frequently by different employers, usually in manual labour; they can therefore be easily replaced by other day-to-day workers. Their marginalisation in the workforce contributes to their social marginalisation and, due to the temporary character of their employment, and frequently their irregular status, does not facilitate in creating networks with their co-workers. To a degree, their status is interdependent with the general characteristics of the Greek economy and labour market. The economy is characterised by the preponderance of family-owned, small and medium sized enterprises. Such a structure is intricately connected with practices of informality (for instance by not reporting all employees on the payroll, or under-reporting wages, etc) that has been estimated to reach 35-40% of Greece's GDP. These are the basic 'demand' factors for cheap, flexible labour and consequently influence the working conditions particularly of the immigrant labour force.

| Breakdown of foreign and foreign-born population in Greece by main nationality group, 2001 | |
|--|---------|
| Total number of foreigners | 797,091 |
| <i>of which approximately:</i> | |
| Albanians | 438,000 |
| Pontic Greeks | 152,204 |
| Nationals from EU15 | 47,000 |
| Bulgarians | 35,000 |
| Georgians | 20,000 |
| Romanians | 20,000 |
| Russians | 17,500 |
| Cypriots | 17,000 |
| Poles | 13,000 |
| Pakistanis | 10,000 |
| Ukrainians | 10,000 |
| Indians | 10,000 |
| Undocumented immigrants | 200,000 |
| sources: National Statistics Service of Greece; General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad, and estimates based on research | |

NATURALISATION

A special comment about naturalisation in Greece is in order here. Law 2130/1993 states that immigrants who wish to become Greek citizens have to be residents in Greece for more than ten years in the last twelve (previously the requirement was for eight years in the last twelve). This is one of the longest residence requirements for naturalisation – together with Swiss legislation – in Europe. Law 2910/2001 (articles 58-64) made the conditions and procedure even more cumbersome: a high fee is to be paid by the applicant (over 1,300 Euro) and the decision is discretionary. Furthermore, authorities are not required to reply within a specified period of time and need not justify a negative decision to the applicant. If an applicant is rejected, s/he may apply again after one year.

These articles (58-64) have been subject to criticism by NGOs, the liberal press and international organisations (ECRI 2004) for being discriminatory and unfair. ECRI in particular has raised concerns regarding the preferential path to citizenship available to individuals of Greek origin, noting that there are subjective elements in the assessment of such origin, making the applicants liable to discrimination. Also, ECRI (2004, paragraph 64) notes that such distinctions between presumed co-ethnics and others create uncertainty among the latter and false expectations among the former with regard to the kind of rights and/or treatment that they are entitled to.

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

In Greece, immigrant participation in public life, has been hampered by the longstanding undocumented or insecure status of most immigrants. Moreover, the flawed organisation of both regularisation programmes made immigrants particularly suspicious about the intents of such programmes, and paradoxically encouraged them to remain in the shadow of Greek society and economy. Besides, most immigrants were too busy making ends meet and not being caught by the police to find the time (and energy) to organise in associations.

Taking into account that foreigners – including those of Greek ethnic origin – constitute about 9% of the total Greek population and over 11% of the Greek labour force, their record of civic activism is truly limited. It is fair to say that the institutional and legal framework of migration in Greece has up to now provided them with very limited opportunities to participate in public life.

Section II of the Greek Constitution (2001), referring to Individual and Social Rights, sets out 18 sets of rights applicable to all individuals living in Greece. Of these, there are eight articles in which the exercise of a right is reserved to Greek citizens only. Thus, immigrants who are legal residents do not have the right to rally (article 11) nor to enter into associations (article 12). Moreover, law 2910/2001 and Circular 32089/10641/26.5.1993 of the Ministry of the Interior, discriminate against immigrants with regard to the processing of and response to naturalization applications. Such provisions do not impede civic participation as such but generally create a climate of

mistrust between the state and the immigrant aspiring to become a national and to be fully integrated into the host society. Furthermore, law 2910/2001 states that immigrants are required to report any change of address, job or employer to the authorities, though restrictions to mobility within Greek territory do not apply.

Perhaps the most important issue that is particular to the Greek case is the fact that the Greek state has distinguished between immigrants of Greek ethnic origin and others (Triandafyllidou 1996; Triandafyllidou & Veikou 2002). The former have been granted special status. Co-ethnics from the former Soviet Republics were treated as returnees and a preferential path to naturalisation was made available to them, and though ethnic Greek Albanian citizens were discouraged from naturalising, they were issued special identity cards. These cards carried with them eligibility for specific welfare benefits, even if their holders were not granted Greek citizenship. This policy of preferential treatment has raised numerous legal problems and created unease among the population (ECRI 2004). Overall, this distinction may have encouraged the civic participation and integration of Pontic Greeks and Vorioipiotes while discouraging the more active inclusion of 'other' immigrants.

With regard to formal participation in the country's political life, voting and standing for elections at the national level is still restricted to Greek citizens only. EU citizens residing in Greece can participate in European elections and in local elections though until the previous elections in 2002, participation has been at rather low levels. Immigrant naturalisation and full political participation overall remains a sensitive issue. There are no special consulting or other bodies at the state or local level encouraging immigrant participation even without the right to vote. Given that non-Greeks do not have political rights it follows that they cannot become official party members. The exception is with regard to Cypriots that are able to be party members. In the context of our research, this raised the question of the extent to which immigrants can exercise their right to association in the political sphere. Interviews that we conducted with representatives of the main political parties, however, shed some light on the informal inclusion of immigrants in the political sphere. In recent years there has been a number of parliamentarians that include immigrants in their team, and some political parties refer to immigrants that are informally closely associated with the party or that participate (generally as observers) in party conventions as 'friends of the party.' This informal network and affiliation facilitates a flow of information between the immigrant communities and the political elites.

Although to some extent, many aspects of the picture painted here are rather bleak, there are a handful of positive highlights regarding immigrant integration. During the last years, Greek NGOs and state organisations have participated more actively in European Social Fund and European Commission programmes combating discrimination and exclusion. They have thus contributed to public awareness campaigns in favour of immigrant inclusion in Greek society, although such campaigns are far from gaining prime time visibility of the kind that perceived immigrant criminality has been receiving for several years now.

Intellectuals, NGOs and particularly the Greek Ombudsman have been increasingly active in promoting and protecting immigrants' human and more general socio-political rights. Trade unions have tried, to a certain extent, to encourage immigrant workers' membership. Trade unions of specific professions, e.g. the builders' union, have formally been pro-immigrant as a means to secure their native members' rights and to avoid illegitimate competition from immigrants accepting work for lower pay and without welfare benefits. However, on the whole, trade unions have not been at the forefront of pro-immigrant civic or political activism.

There are also a few examples of naturalised immigrants (generally having obtained Greek nationality through marriage) that have become increasingly civically and politically active – particularly as regards their participation in political parties. Though these remain exceptions.

In parallel, there are growing trends of increased sensitivity towards minority and immigrant problems, of increasing acceptance of diversity within Greece, and a tendency to give voice to minorities themselves as well as to NGOs active in the field. These trends mainly characterise the moderate and progressive segment of the press and TV channels. Critical accounts of the poor social and economic conditions of specific minorities (mainly Roma and Muslim Turks) and immigrant labourers (Albanians in particular) are given, and related state policy is criticised. Nonetheless, minority or immigrant rights are never on the media agenda as collective political rights. The coverage concerns mainly the improvement of their living or working conditions, their access to education or work, but not their politicisation as non-Greek cultural or ethnic groups that comprise a part of Greece.

It is interesting to note that over the last couple of years, popular television programmes, serials and reality shows have been including immigrants in their casting. More importantly though, small television stations such as *Kanali 10* provide news updates in Russian and Albanian and certain radio stations in the Attica prefecture cater to the immigrant communities (such as national broadcasting ERA, or Radio 98.4, etc).

The modest positive change in the media coverage of minority and immigration issues may be related to cultural initiatives undertaken by known artists and media people promoting understanding and receptiveness towards diversity. In addition, there has been a mobilisation of NGO activists and a small number of intellectuals to whom the more moderate newspapers occasionally give access. Last, but not least, the more balanced accounts of immigration issues in particular are related to the positive role that immigrants are perceived to be playing in the national economy. This includes, taking care of the elderly or of younger children, or catering to labour shortages in low status and low paying jobs in agriculture and the service sectors; overall, this has made the Greek people and media more open to them.

To sum up, it appears that immigrant participation in public life is indeed very limited while ethnic associations are few and relatively small. The overall limited participation of immigrants in public life, however, has to be seen also against the

background of a rather weak native civil society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Greek society finds itself significantly transformed and still undergoing a transition period. It is now fully integrated in the European Union, and while it may still have a significant informal economy, which is difficult to curb, it is a member of the Euro-zone. The country is facing the economic and cultural tensions of globalisation and EU enlargement, and at the same time has become host to nearly a million immigrants in less than a decade. The national education system has undergone important changes but still strives to find a new orientation towards multiculturalism alongside more effective and efficient learning in secondary and higher education. Moreover, during the last decade, steps have been taken for a more open policy towards the country historical minorities - in particular towards the Muslim minority of western Thrace, which remains the largest one. Also Greek authorities and citizens have made some hesitant steps towards immigrant incorporation in Greek society – e.g. the inclusion of immigrant families in state housing for the first time in October 2004. The native population is rapidly ageing, thereby causing preoccupation among other things, for the state welfare system. The relatively high unemployment rate is paradoxically coupled with severe labour shortages in some sectors. Migration policies are necessarily being considered against this background.

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