



#### Actors Interviewed:

- Civil society: NGOs, trade unions, migrants' organizations: 10
- Media: 5
- Governmental representatives: 6

## 1. DESCRIPTION OF WORK AND TARGET GROUP

#### Policy Brief:

*"In Greece, regarding age, the majority of irregular migrants belong to the younger age groups. Women are under-represented among the irregular migrant population. The gender composition however may vary in relation to specific ethnic groups: men are over-represented among Asians; Eastern European migration is mainly composed of women".*  
(p. 2)

According to interviewees, undocumented migrants in Athens are mostly men. A journalist pointed out that many children live marginalized and are invisible. Two representatives from public authorities said that gender composition may vary in relation to specific ethnic groups. A representative of an NGO affirmed that the majority of irregular migrants are not only men and women but also children and elderly. A significant percentage is also represented by people who have been trafficked. Another respondent added that men come mostly from Asia and the Middle East whereas Eastern European migration is mainly composed of women. An interviewee underlined that the number of people who have been trafficked is considerable yet hidden.

\***Terminology.** Majority used "irregular" or "undocumented". Two interviewees employed the term "illegal". It seems that there is no substantial difference amongst these three words.

## 2. ESTIMATES, DATA, ASSESSMENT OF SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF THE IRREGULAR MIGRANTS' POPULATION

### Policy Brief:

#### *“Main Pathways into and out of Irregular Status*

- *The main pathway for irregular migrants in Greece is to enter the country legally, with a temporary visa for tourism, and then overstay their visa and work in the informal labour market*
- *Another pathway into irregular status in Greece regards legal migrants that fail to renew their stay in permits because they cannot prove they are employed as they work in the shadow economy. Indeed, informal work arrangements prevail in the niches of the Greek economy where migrants are employed notably, the construction industry, tourism, agriculture and the domestic work sector*
- *Irregular entry constitutes the pathway into irregular status that gets most media attention in Greece despite the lower numbers that it involves (...)*
- *Another pathway for irregular migrants to provisionally 'legalize' their stay in Greece is to apply for asylum (...). In practice most rejected asylum seekers stay in the country as irregular migrants”. (p. 3)*

### Pathways into Irregularity

The majority of the interviewees felt that irregular entry is the most common pathway into irregularity; six considered visa overstay as another pathway; the denial of refugee status was perceived at the same time as an important pathway by seven respondents. Moreover, three respondents mentioned that migrants turn out to be undocumented because they are people who have been trafficked while one respondent remarked that often migrants become undocumented because they are dependents of a regular migrant who lost their visa due to family breakdown and/or another similar reason. Falling back into irregularity represented an additional category for two interviewees.

The above suggests that pathways into irregularity have more to do with limited access to legal status due to unlawful entry and impossibility to regularise.

### Flows of Undocumented Migrants coming to Greece

Eleven interviewees felt that the total yearly number of irregular migrants is increasing; four maintained that it is decreasing and two people regarded it as steady. Some respondents, who perceived it as decreasing, found that this is also turning into steady due to the economic crisis.

More specifically, according to a journalist the number of migrants coming from Asia and Africa is increasing whereas it is decreasing from the Eastern European countries. It remains steady when looking at the Balkan countries. A local authority official underlined that the amount of regular migrants who are falling back into irregularity is growing faster. According to the same source, the combination of informal economy and the global financial crisis is already affecting migrants' employment prospects. As time goes by, the number of migrants being unable to secure the required number of social security stamps (demonstrating a minimum amount of days of legal work per one or two years) for the renewal of their stay permits is rising. This is what the daily interaction with migrants (and their cases) reveals over the last year.

Another concern for potential falling back into irregularity pose the permit-issue requirements for the second generation of migrants who are not born in Greece and have not attended fully and/or successfully the Greek educational system. In particular, according to the discussion of the Greek CLANDESTINO country expert with the above official, the requirement of a yearly income of 8,500 Euros for the first three years of their adulthood regulating the access to the 5-year long-term residence permit is at odds with the reality of (full- and part-time) youth unemployment and underemployment in Greece.

### **Numbers of Undocumented Migrants Receiving Assistance from Organizations**

It is very difficult to provide exact figures regarding the number of undocumented migrants receiving assistance by the organisations interviewed.

Based on the percentage of irregular migrants receiving services from an NGO, its representative pointed out that generally speaking the number of undocumented migrants is decreasing due to the economic crisis. Approximately 30% of the people receiving assistance from another NGO are undocumented migrants. Another respondent said that figures vary in relation to ethnic groups, stressing that Greece is a transit country for many migrants.

According to an authority official, approximately 1,000 general complaints concerning undocumented migrants are filed and processed every year. Another governmental representative said that it is not possible to provide any records. A respondent stressed that his organization does not keep any data on the number of irregular migrants, as they are not interested in knowing their legal status. One other NGO does not have figures either; however, it is possible to count approximately 350 undocumented migrants out of the 700 people who require help from this NGO every month.

1,000 is instead the number of irregular migrants receiving support by an association interviewed. Moreover, 20% of all migrants visiting the office of a trade union and to which this union provides assistance are undocumented.

#### **Policy Brief:**

*"We have estimated that there were 280,000 irregular migrants present in the Greek territory at the end of 2007". (p.2)*

Greek Clandestino research team estimates that 280,000 undocumented migrants were present in Greece in 2007. This is a substantial decrease from the estimates in the 1990s pointing up to 700,000 irregular migrants.



### **Estimates of Undocumented Migrants in a Given Geographical Area**

On the whole, estimating the total population of undocumented migrants in the working region of the interviewees is impossible.

- However, according to an authority, 250,000 could be the lowest guesstimate; estimates usually rely on police apprehensions which never include all the irregular migrants in the country.

- Another respondent estimated that there are approximately 400,000 irregular migrants in a population of 1,000,000 migrants living in Greece.
- On the contrary, another interviewee said that there are 1,200,000 migrants who live irregularly in Greece. According to him, 500 people represent the total population of undocumented migrants in the area of his NGO's work.
- An NGO representative stressed that the available statistics do not include the real total population of undocumented migrants.

### **Assessment Regarding Estimates and Views on their Reliability**

Most of the interviewees believed that reliable data constitute a useful tool for their field of work either at the grassroots or on the political level. Many issues would be triggered through trustworthy figures. They could be a crucial contribution towards planning policies for migrants and creating an effective administrative machinery regarding migration, due to lack of political decisions over the matter. Statistics could launch and create a dialogue between stakeholders and politicians as well as inform civil society, in a framework of comparing and supporting arguments towards concrete goals. Petitions to legalize irregular migrants could be set but there will also be a risk of deportations.

In fact, according to some NGOs, trade unions and journalists, reliable data are more useful for NGOs and associations than political authorities and the government. From their point of view, governmental representatives have no interest in numbers or statistics since no official policies on both regular and irregular migration have been implemented so far. If on the one hand, making proposals, intervening in the public arena and promoting the issue of legalizing irregular migrants could be raised by public figures, on the other hand, estimates could be exploited by the government. For this reason, interviewees felt that relying on data released by politicians might be dangerous or even inappropriate. Civil society believes that governmental representatives are fully aware of figures regarding migration but simply do not react in order to avoid responsibilities. "No policies at the political level means legitimising deportation and exploitation", an NGO representative said. Data sources would therefore help NGOs, trade unions and associations design projects, conceive petitions, support arguments as well as inform and enhance dialogue amongst different stakeholders.

One interviewee affirmed that the government has already clear estimates which it does not want to make public. Another stressed that there is no sense for his authority to collect data from another political source, since they already provide their own statistics. Two NGOs stated that numbers are not important as only migrants have to be taken into consideration. A respondent pointed out that data collection is a useful tool but not critical enough for her work as attorney at law. An interviewee underlined that the Greek government has no interest in figures whereas a governmental representative believed that reliable data are important from the viewpoint of policy makers but not as far as her field of work is concerned.

### 3. DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Greek Clandestino research team states that, at the moment, efforts to slow down irregular immigration to Greece are concentrated around the intensification of border/coastline controls so as to intercept migrants that are attempting to enter clandestinely. Such policies however, do not consider the fact that many unauthorized migrants probably enter Greece legally, usually by means of a (temporary) tourist visa, and then stay in the country after the visa expired, thereby becoming irregular immigrants.

In reality, restrictive regulations aiming to deter immigration do not manage to reduce the determination of numerous migrants from developing countries to attempt to enter 'fortress Europe' at any cost. When there are no 'legal' possibilities to gain access to a country, migrants go through (often dangerous) alternative routes to sneak in clandestinely.

#### **State Policy Responses and their Implementation on the Ground: Examples of State Beneficial Policies Employed.**

Most interviewees amongst NGOs and the media stated that there are no state policies implemented on the ground which support undocumented migrants. They claim that irregular migrants are not even considered by both politicians and society. At the same time, the majority amongst the respondents were very concerned about the current situation in Greece regarding immigration.

A significant number of respondents (NGOs and the media) from non state actors agreed in saying that repression and expulsion are the only policies implemented so far; in fact, no strategic plan is provided by the government. According to an interviewee, the government is reluctant to accept irregular migration. Preventive border controls and detention centres are the main tools managing irregular migration. However, irregular migrants remain an important workforce supply upon which the Greek economy (especially the informal economy) relies, namely: the construction sector, tourism, agriculture and the domestic services industry. However, the majority said that free education to children is the only beneficial state policy as undocumented children are entitled to go to school, be registered and attend classes regardless of the legality of the status of their parents.

Moreover, some interviewees amongst the NGOs considered that the rise in conservative policies from the European Union has not only worsened the humanitarian situation for undocumented migrants but also made the governmental responses towards irregular migration more restrictive. There was in fact consensus in criticising the government.

Amongst the respondents, some are convinced that Greece should take a position regarding irregular migration and not keep on avoiding the topic. A respondent stressed that there is no management of migration or system of mutual benefit and insisted that a rights based approach would be a crucial tool towards



managing migration in Greece. For another, immigrants, both regular and irregular, have to be treated and considered as Greek workers.

According to a journalist, there is no government policy for dealing with asylum seekers.

A governmental representative wondered how irregular migrants could be legalized if they come "illegally". He pointed out that we cannot always resort to regularizations and give in to pressures (he mentioned that he's been constantly asked by NGOs and individuals when is the next regularization program foreseen for). According to him, regularisation is an extraordinary measure and the EU allows only for partial and small scale regularizations. He even asked the interviewers' opinion on the matter. He agreed that one of the main problems with irregularity is that the current system that is supposed to facilitate and manage the legal entry of the foreign worker (metaklisi) is not efficient. However, the opposite view is held by two other governmental representatives who believe that the process of metaklisi does function as it stands. When told that other government officials disagree on that, they argued that metaklisi does work for rural parts of Greece involving mostly seasonal work in agriculture.

According to a respondent, irregular migrants have no other choice but to come. According to the majority of the interviewees, NGOs, trade unions, journalists and a political body representative, restrictions on entry, stay and work of migrants do not really affect migrants' determination to come, the host economy's 'determination' to use their labour and the international migration industry (smuggling networks etc) to bring them to their destination country. They all agreed on saying that the current policies implemented are neither effective nor beneficial.

**\*\* Recommended Action:**

**Policy Brief:**

***"Combating and Preventing Irregular Migration Flows (...)***

- *The Readmission Agreement with Turkey should be re-negotiated in exchange of development assistance with a view to making it work*
- *Diplomatic efforts should increase with a view to signing readmission and cooperation agreements with not only Turkey but also other major source and transit countries in Asia and Africa*
- *Legal channels for labour migration should be made functional. There is a pressing need to cut red tape, simplify and shorten procedures to invite foreign workers (...)*

***Addressing Irregular Migration and Informal Work (...)***

- *Confront informal economy: a) through increased controls of the labour market sectors where informal economic arrangements are common (constructions sector, agriculture, tourist industry, other services), and mainly b) through an increase of formal jobs in Greek economy". (p. 4)*

Recommendations from the CLANDESTINO policy brief authors (Thanos Maroukis, Anna Triandafyllidou) on the basis of research and the field visits in Greece and discussion with state and non state actors:

- Overhaul the procedure for inviting a foreign worker: exclude some employment sectors from market tests. Create one stop shops for employers to process their applications. Create employment offices in

consular offices in cooperation with international organisations with wide experience in the field (like IOM).

- Simplify the processing of stay permit renewal – give longer period permits: double the duration: from 1 year to 2 years, from 2 years to 4 years, from 4 years (which would mean 1+2+4=7 years of legal stay, give indefinite stay permits.
- Automatic naturalisation for children born in Greece or who have completed 9 years of education in the country. Possibility to refuse it until age 21.
- Staff and train labour inspection offices to inspect sectors like construction, agriculture, tourism, catering – special attention should be paid to subcontractors.
- Create asylum seeking offices on the Aegean islands and along the Greek Turkish border at Evros river – hire legal experts and interpreters for the languages of the main countries of origin (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Iran for instance).
- Support migrant organisations and other NGOs so that they can provide (a) studies on migration realities on the ground and alert the ministries for imminent crises, make migrant organisations partners in policy making, (b) support services to particularly vulnerable groups such as asylum seeking families, minors, irregular migrants who are without shelter and without a job. Even if they are undocumented, having them homeless, jobless, with no hope is not humane and is disrupting social cohesion.
- Create appropriate institutions for organised and continuous dialogue between different stakeholders involved in migration and asylum. In particular support inter-ethnic and inter-faith dialogue with a view to making people more aware of the realities of Greek society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.