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**Greece: How a State in Crisis  
Manages its Migration Crisis?**

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**Center for Migrations  
and Citizenship**

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## Immigration and Crisis in Greece

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Throughout the last two years Greece has been experiencing the most acute economic crisis in the post-Second World War period. While Greece appeared not to have been hit particularly hard by the global economic recession that started in 2008, the effects of the recession and the acute internal crisis of public finances became visible in late 2009. The Greek crisis today is related more to structural problems of the Greek economy (low productivity, low competitiveness), the segmentation of the Greek labor market, and a public debt that has skyrocketed during the last years, than to the global economic recession. However, a negative economic environment in Europe and the world obviously does not help resolve the Greek crisis and reverse the downward trend of Greek growth rates registered in the last two years.

The drastic austerity measures adopted by the Greek government since spring 2010, which have already passed three consecutive phases, were to a large extent imposed on Greece by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, with a view to correcting its budget deficits and making the economy more competitive. They have included horizontal cuts in the salaries of public employees (which have now reached 30%), increases in both direct and indirect taxes (including one-off emergency taxes imposed in October and November 2011), and significant cuts in public expenses including, for instance, the abolition of certain semipublic bodies and agencies and the reduction of certain types of welfare allowances. In parallel the government has introduced important changes in the national welfare and pension system, increasing the age of retirement and abolishing a large number of exceptions to the general regime, including those aimed at mothers with children who previously could retire much earlier. Structural changes such as the liberalization of all the closed professions (transport, lawyers, chemists, butchers, notaries, auditors) and of the energy market, or the simplification of business permits and business rules have not taken place yet, largely because of the fierce opposition by relevant trade unions. By contrast, labor market rules have been liberalized both in the public and in the private sector (some of the latest measures being the abolition of collective sectoral agreements and the reduction of lowest salary level).

The crisis and the measures taken to reduce the public debt and reorganize the state finances have had both a material and a psychological effect on the Greek market. Consumption has

decreased dramatically, hitting the retail and overall trade sectors hard, as well as leisure services such as catering. Tourism, in contrast, has been doing fairly well (largely because of the repercussions of the Arab spring on the tourism sector in North Africa), with a 20 per cent rise in tourist arrivals and overall turnover in the summer of 2011 compared with the summer of 2010. The fall in consumption is due both to the lower average income of households and to the psychological effect of the crisis: any investment, purchase of durable goods, or other expenditure that is not strictly necessary is postponed until the future, when the economic situation of the country has stabilized. The banking sector has also been suffering a period of crisis, not least because it holds a relatively large number of 'toxic' Greek state bonds. Thus banks have become extremely careful in lending to customers for fear that they will not be repaid. Indeed the latest measures agreed between the Greek government and the Eurozone partners on 26 October 2011 include specific measures for the recapitalization of Greek (and foreign) banks because of the losses they will suffer after the so-called 'haircut' of Greek state bonds.

The crisis has led to an increase in unemployment rates. Greece registered an 18.2 per cent average unemployment rate in July 2010, up 6 points from 12.2 per cent in August 2010. The youth unemployment rate in August 2011 (for people under 25 years of age) was 43.5 per cent (the second highest in the EU, after Spain). Unemployment among people between 25 and 34 years old was also higher than average at 24.9 per cent. Women suffered more from unemployment (22.3 per cent) than men (15.5 per cent). By now, the crisis has hit all sectors of the economy, but those sectors that were already suffering from the recession of 2008-2009, such as construction, were those that typically employed large numbers of migrants. The estate market is in crisis and constructors are not developing new housing projects. At the same time, public works have been stopped or reduced in size, while some have been postponed for the future.

Since Greece has not so far developed a credible policy for managing legal migration inflows, most immigrants arrive in the country undocumented, find employment in the informal labor market, and are later regularized through an amnesty program. To this day, the only category of migrant workers that arrive in Greece legally is the seasonal agricultural worker. And even in this case these permits are sometimes abused as workers are employed in other regions and in other sectors (see Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

The impact of the crisis on migrant workers is multifaceted and largely intertwined with the systemic features of migration in Greece. The legal stay status of migrants and their families in Greece is particularly precarious as for the first ten years of their stay they continuously have to prove that they are employed and have been insured (every one or two years, upon renewing their stay permit). This is a condition that is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfill because the jobs available in sectors such as construction, transport, catering, or

tourism are, more often than previously, without a proper contract, highly unstable, and without welfare payments. This, of course, risks becoming a vicious circle because if a migrant cannot renew her/his stay permit, he/she risks falling back into illegality and being unable to find a job with a proper contract.

A recent study (Maroukis and Gemi, 2012) and media reports<sup>1</sup> suggest that some Albanian men are returning to Albania in search of better employment prospects or in an effort to let the financial storm pass and return when job prospects are better. In some cases the rest of the family stays in Greece, with women employed in the informal care and cleaning sector, while in other cases the entire family returns to Albania while the husband/father periodically returns to Greece for temporary employment in agriculture, tourism, or construction.

Despite these bleak employment prospects, the Greek government has taken important steps to reorganize its irregular migration management and asylum system, and to foster migrant integration. It is interesting to examine how and why this has happened. This paper first presents a brief outline of the migrant population of Greece and then discusses recent policy developments. The paper argues that despite the acute economic crisis, Greece has taken important steps to favor migrant integration into Greek society, as well as to address the problem of irregular migration and the thorny issue of asylum seeking, which has exposed Greece to strong criticism in recent years. Thus the paper shows that an internal crisis may also paradoxically provide a good opportunity for improving the migration policy framework. As the Socialist party in power had the political will to act on this issue, and while attention was turned away from migration issues (and onto the economic crisis), important measures have been passed through by the Greek parliament. European influence was crucial in this respect, on one hand for the long term maturing of integration policies in Greece, and on the other hand for putting strong pressure on the country to reform its failing asylum system and improve its management of irregular migration.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reuters Press Agency*, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/06/01/us-albania-greece-migrants-idUSTRE6503WB20100601>>; and *Kathimerini* (2010, July 25), <[http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_ell\\_1\\_25/07/2010\\_409263](http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_ell_1_25/07/2010_409263)>.

# The Immigrant Population of Greece

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Greece has become a country of immigration during the last twenty years. The number of legal and irregular migrants living in the country has fluctuated between half a million in the mid-1990s and over one million during the last decade. The total immigrant population in Greece is approximately 1.25 million corresponding to 11 per cent of the total resident population. About 3.9 per cent of the total resident population or approximately half of the total non-ethnic Greek immigrant population is estimated to be undocumented. These are either people who have never had a stay permit or who had legal status but did not manage to renew their permits.

In estimating the total number of immigrants in Greece, we must take into consideration two groups of co-ethnics. The first group is Greek co-ethnics who are Albanian citizens (also known in Greece as *Voreioepirotas*). They hold Special Identity Cards as *Omogeneis* (co-ethnics) (EDTO) issued by the Greek police and have the same socio-economic rights as Greek citizens. EDTO holders are not included in the database of the Interior Ministry. The second group of co-ethnics are '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. They are officially considered as 'returnees' to the 'motherland' even though they or their ancestors have never lived within the boundaries of the modern Greek state. According to the special census administered by the General Secretariat for Repatriated Co-Ethnics in the year 2000, 155,319 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. While Pontic Greeks were naturalized upon arrival through a preferential channel (see Christopoulos, 2006), they may be considered as immigrants both in the technical sense (they moved to Greece during the 1980s and 1990s) and in the sociological sense (they face problems of exclusion from the labor market and of social and political marginalization).



**Table 1 Estimate of total immigrant stock in Greece, on December 2011**

	<b>Size of immigrant stock</b>	<b>% of total resident population</b>	<b>Source of data</b>
<b>Total immigrant stock</b>	447,658	3.96%	stay permits valid on 1 Dec. 2011, Ministry of Interior database
<b>Co-ethnics from Albania</b>	197,814	1.75%	Data from Ministry of Interior, for 31 Dec. 2009
<b>Co-ethnics from the Soviet Union</b>	154,000	1.36%	Secretariat of Greeks abroad, Special Census, 2000
<b>Irregular immigrants (estimate)</b>	440,000	3.89%	Maroukis, Triandafyllidou and Lyberaki, 2011
<b>Total immigrant and co-ethnics stock</b>	1,239,472	10.96%	
<b>Total without co-ethnics</b>	887,658	7.85%	
<b>Total population of Greece</b>	11,305,000	100%	Eurostat estimate for 2011, < <a href="http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-08062011-BP/EN/3-08062011-BP-EN.PDF">http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-08062011-BP/EN/3-08062011-BP-EN.PDF</a> >

Source: Author's own compilation through own interviews.

Regarding the irregular migrant population, the evolution of presumed inflows of irregular migrants (as registered through apprehensions at border areas) has taken a new turn in 2011 (see table 2). Apprehensions at the Greek-Albanian border have dramatically decreased by nearly 75 per cent; apprehensions at the Greek-Turkish sea border by more than 90 per cent; apprehensions at the island of Crete (southern corner of Greece opposite to Egypt) by 40 per cent; and apprehensions within the country by 50 per cent. At the same time, apprehensions at the Greek-Turkish land border appear to remain at levels similar to those of 2010.

**Table 2: Apprehensions of irregular migrants, per border, 2007-2011**

<b>Apprehensions</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011*</b>
<b>Greek Albanian border</b>	42,897	39,267	38,164	33,979	8,855
<b>Greek FYROM border</b>	2,887	3,459	2,355	1,589	714
<b>Greek Bulgarian border</b>	966	1,795	1,258	983	570
<b>Greek Turkish land border</b>	16,789	14,461	8,787	47,088	45,170
<b>Greek Turkish sea border</b>	16,781	30,149	27,685	6,204	625
<b>Crete</b>	2,245	2,961	2,859	2,444	1,445
<b>Rest of the country</b>	29,799	54,245	45,037	40,237	23,461
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>112,364</b>	<b>146,337</b>	<b>126,145</b>	<b>132,524</b>	<b>80,840</b>

Note: data refer to apprehensions, not to people. Hence the same person if apprehended twice counts twice.\* Data for 2011 refer to the first 10 months. Source: Greek police data, [www.astynomia.gr](http://www.astynomia.gr)

While migrants apprehended at the Greek-Albanian border are usually returned to Albania, thanks to the protocol of cooperation signed between Greece and Albania and the good cooperation of the two countries on this issue, people apprehended at the Greek-Turkish borders are seldom sent back to their countries of origin or to Turkey, since Turkey does not practically implement the Protocol. In the period 2002-2010, out of 5,039 requests made by Greek authorities concerning 78,711 cases, 9,320 cases were accepted by the Turkish authorities, but only 2,695 people were effectively readmitted in Turkey.

Regarding the main nationalities of apprehended irregular migrants, while Albanian citizens were by far the largest group of people apprehended for irregular entry or stay in the Greek territory throughout the years, an inversion of this trend is noted for the first time in 2011. The dramatic decrease of apprehensions of Albanian immigrants may be explained by three concomitant factors. First, the waiving, in December 2010, of the requirement for tourist visas for Albanian citizens visiting the Schengen area for less than three months has decreased the scope for apprehending Albanian migrants staying without appropriate status in Greece. In other words, the police would have to prove that the migrant has stayed in Greece for longer than three months and is not in possession of appropriate travel documents. Second, the current economic crisis has probably prompted many migrants who had already lost their legal status (or

who had never had a legal stay permit, because they had entered the country after 31 December 2004, date of the last massive regularization program) to go back to Albania rather than endure the stress of being undocumented with bleak job prospects (see also Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). Third, it is likely that fewer Albanian citizens seek work in Greece without the appropriate stay permits, again because of the economic crisis and especially the crisis in the construction sector.

The number of apprehensions generally indicates not only irregular migration or asylum seeking pressures at the Greek borders (or the presence of irregular migrants within the country) but also the enforcement efforts of the authorities. Greece has beefed up its border controls during the last five years. In the fall of 2007, the Greek border guard employed 200 new officers in the Aegean Sea. In addition, FRONTEX has been operating in Greece since 2006, albeit with increasing intensity in the last couple of years. The joint operation POSEIDON has now become the largest FRONTEX operation in the Mediterranean and includes the first ever deployment of FRONTEX's RABIT (Rapid Border Intervention Teams)<sup>2</sup>, Project Attica, which operates in the area of voluntary returns, and of six long term stationed focal points.

It can be assumed that most of the migrants that are apprehended at the Greek-Turkish border are released after a few days or weeks with an expulsion order at hand, asking them to leave the country within 30 days. Most migrants then go to Athens to find their co-ethnic networks or their smugglers' contacts, with a view either to finding a job and accommodation in Athens (this can include applying for asylum, especially for people coming from war-torn countries like Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, or Palestine) or with a view to leaving for Italy and then some other EU country (see also Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012).

## ***National composition of the immigrant population***

About 60 per cent of Greece's foreign population comes from Albania, while the second largest group is composed of Bulgarian citizens, although their percentage of the total migrant population is considerably smaller. Georgians and Romanians are the third and fourth largest communities. It is worth noting that it is likely that Bulgarians and Romanians are three or four times as many as they appear in the table below because they either do not know that they should register even if they are EU citizens or, due to mistrust towards Greek

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<sup>2</sup> 175 officers were sent to the Greek Turkish land border in late October and November 2010 and will stay there until March 2011.

authorities, they do not wish to register (see also Nikolova, 2010; Lazarescu, 2010).

**Table 3 National composition of the migration stock in 2010**

Country of Origin	Labour Force Survey 4th Tri. 2010		Third Country Nationals (TCN) Valid Permits December 2010	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>Albania</b>	485,004	59.87%	390,890	68.90%
<b>Bulgaria</b>	48,372	5.97%		
<b>Georgia</b>	32,755	4.04%	16,550	2.92%
<b>Romania</b>	33,347	4.12%		
<b>Pakistan</b>	21,211	2.62%	16,312	2.88%
<b>Russia</b>	14,067	1.74%	13,299	2.34%
<b>Ukraine</b>	12,246	1.51%	20,443	3.60%
<b>Bangladesh</b>	14,577	1.80%	5,719	1.01%
<b>Syria</b>	6,481	0.80%	7,378	1.30%
<b>Armenia</b>	6,721	0.83%	5,976	1.05%
<b>Cyprus</b>	9,933	1.23%		
<b>Poland</b>	10,166	1.25%		
<b>Egypt</b>	9,526	1.18%	13,735	2.42%
<b>Iraq</b>	6,657	0.82%	994	0.18%
<b>India</b>	7,964	0.98%	13,112	2.31%
<b>UK</b>	7,297	0.90%		
<b>Germany</b>	9,605	1.19%		
<b>Moldova</b>	5,429	0.67%	11,591	2.04%
<b>Netherlands</b>	3,227	0.40%		
<b>Philippines</b>	5,054	0.62%	9,389	1.65%
<b>OTHER</b>	60,414	7.46%	41,967	7.40%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>810,052</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>567,355</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources: Author's own compilation on the basis of data from the National Statistical Service of Greece, Labour Force Survey 4<sup>th</sup> trimester 2010, and Ministry of Interior, Valid Stay Permits on 31 December 2010.

# Immigrant Employment in the Greek Labor Market

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Greece's unemployment rate has fluctuated during the last decade. Starting from a relatively high rate in 2000 (of about 11 per cent) it went down to 8.3 per cent in 2007 but climbed to approximately 12 per cent in August 2010, while in August 2011 it reached an alarming 18.2 per cent, as a result of the acute economic crisis that the country is going through. There is, however, a marked imbalance in the unemployment rates of the two genders. The female rate of unemployment in the period 2005-2008 has been consistently higher than the unemployment rate of men by 7-9 percentage points. It was only in the period 2009-2010 that this difference was reduced to 5 per cent approximately. Still in August 2011, the male unemployment rate was 15.5 per cent while that of women was approximately 22 per cent (i.e. again female unemployment was 7 percentage points higher than male unemployment).

Unemployment rates for people under 24 years of age were consistently over 20 per cent in the period 2005-2010 and reached 43 per cent in August 2011, while the unemployment rate for the 25-34 age bracket was consistently above 10 per cent and reached a peak of approximately 25 per cent in August 2011. Furthermore, if we combine the gender and age data tables, we see that unemployment rates for young women skyrocket – the gap between male and female unemployment is valid in all age brackets.

Regarding the employment and unemployment rates of third country nationals, until last year (2010), Greece presented a typical southern European pattern: relatively high levels of unemployment (approximately 10 per cent) coexisted with large numbers of foreign workers. For instance, according to the LFS data for the last quarter of 2009 there were about 430,000 foreigners formally employed in Greece (while there were also more than 600,000 registered unemployed, both Greek and foreigner).

The pattern had a relatively simple explanation, rather common among southern European countries: the Greek labor market was characterized by high segmentation with special employment niches occupied by migrant workers. The native population's living standards had increased in recent decades and there was widespread participation in tertiary and higher education. Thus, young Greeks preferred to wait for employment which conformed to their

skills, while being financially supported by their families, rather than take up a low-prestige, low-skilled, and low-paying job.

However, the situation started changing in early 2009 and the change has become remarkable in 2011. Unemployment rates have gone up 50 per cent compared to 2010 for natives, but they have also climbed to dizzy heights for third country nationals. The table below shows that, as of the first trimester of 2009, the unemployment rate of third country nationals has been higher than the average unemployment rate (and hence also the unemployment rate of Greek and EU citizens). In the first trimester of 2010, the unemployment rate for third country nationals reached nearly 20 per cent while the average level for natives was approximately 16 per cent. During the same period the percentage of the economically active population among TCNs has slightly increased (from 71.5 per cent to 73.3 per cent) while that of Greeks has slightly declined (from 53.3 per cent to 52 per cent).

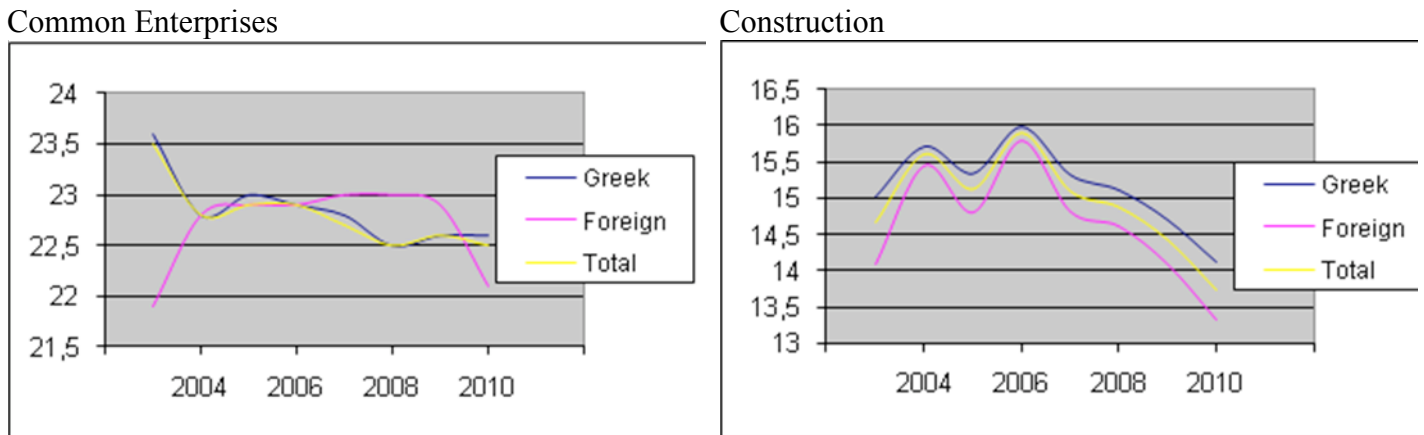
**Table 4 Unemployment rates, third country nationals, 2008-2011.**

	<b>Unemployment rate TCNs</b>	<b>Unemployment rate (general)</b>	<b>Economically active TCNs (%)</b>	<b>Economically active Greeks (%)</b>
<b>2008</b>	7.4%	8.3%	71.5%	53.3%
<b>2009</b>	10.7%	9.2%	72.1%	52.1%
<b>2010</b>	14.5%	11.4%	73.8%	52.4%
<b>2011</b>	19.8%	15.9%	73.3%	52.0%

Source: Author's own compilation, based on data from the Labour Force Survey, First trimester of each year, [www.statistics.gr](http://www.statistics.gr)

Data from the major national welfare fund insuring dependent employees (IKA, Social Insurance Institute) also show a decrease of working days per month for those employed which is more dramatic for foreign workers (see figure 1 below).

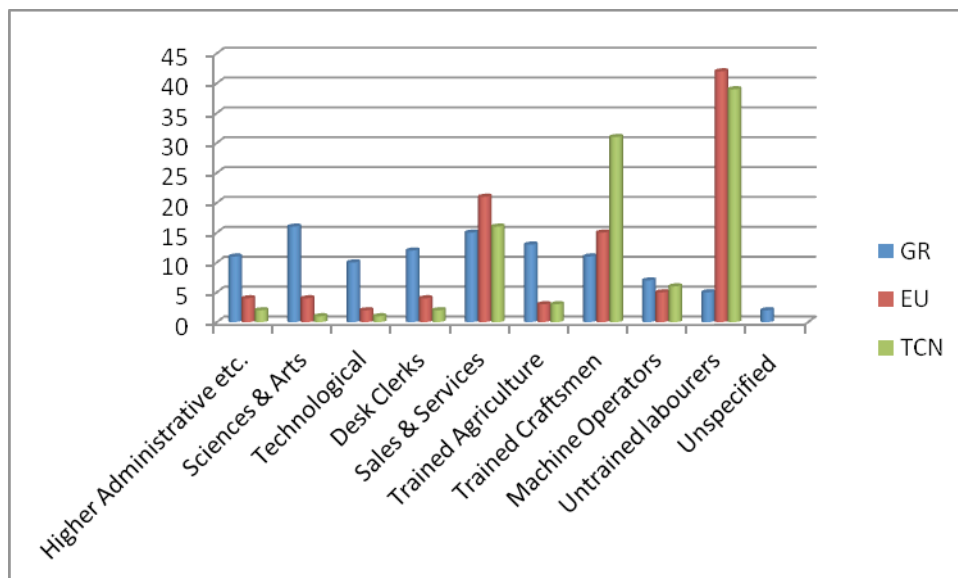
**Figure 1: Days of employment per month**



Source: Author's own compilation on the basis of data provided by the National Welfare Institute IKA, June 2003-2010, [www.ika.gr](http://www.ika.gr)

Recent data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS, 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester 2010) on immigrant insertion in the labor market show that nearly 40 per cent of foreign workers (both EU and TCNs) are employed as unskilled laborers, mainly in manual jobs, and another 30 per cent of the third country nationals and 15 per cent of the EU citizens are employed as skilled workers (craftsmen). An important part of the immigrant population, though, (16 per cent of TCNs and 21 per cent of EU citizens) is now employed in the service sector and as salespeople in shops or open air markets (see figure 2 below).

**Figure 2: Distribution of migrant workers per employment sector**



Source: Author's own compilation based on data from the National Statistical Service, Labour Force Survey, 3<sup>rd</sup> Trimester 2010, available at [www.statistics.gr](http://www.statistics.gr)

# Greek Migration Policy: Recent Developments

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Greek migration policies in the 1990s and 2000s have largely been characterized by a reactive approach to irregular migration and informal employment in the country's black market economy. The main legislative measures for normalizing the migration situation have been regularization programs (three such programs have been adopted in 1998, 2001, and 2005; a smaller informal amnesty program was introduced in 2007 for those who had had a stay permit but had lost it because they did not have sufficient welfare contributions proving 200 days of employment each year). Integration measures have been practically non-existent until 2010.

A detailed review of the development of Greek migration policy during the past 20 years goes beyond the scope of this paper and is carried out in sufficient detail elsewhere (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2010). What is, however, most interesting is that, during a time of acute economic crisis, Greece has introduced some of its most progressive and ambitious reforms with regards to migrant integration as well as the better management of irregular migration and asylum seeking. In the sections below we analyze the main salient points of these reforms.

## ***Reforming citizenship acquisition and extending local political rights to third country nationals***

Greek nationality has been based predominantly on the *jus sanguinis* principle and, until March 2010, the naturalization procedure was long, costly, and with a very uncertain outcome even for applicants who satisfied the requirements. In practice, naturalization was an option only for people of Greek ethnic origin from the former Soviet Republics. Other immigrants, including Albanian citizens of Greek ethnicity (the so called *Voreioipirotes*), could apply after ten years of legal residence distributed in the last 12 calendar years. Implementation was, however, particularly restrictive, and citizenship acquisitions were counted in two-digit numbers (see table 6 below).

In November 2006, a joint decision by the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs facilitated the naturalization procedure for ethnic



Greek Albanians, which waived the fee and the discretionary character of the naturalization judgment. That decision was passed largely without debates as it was congruous with the predominant conception of the Greek nation: Greeks are those of Greek descent, not those who live in Greece (if they are of non-Greek origins). During the period 2007-2009, approximately 45,000 people acquired Greek citizenship, the vast majority of whom were ethnic Greek Albanian citizens (see table 6 below).

**Table 6 Acquisition of Greek citizenship (1998-2011)**

1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	2011*
56	69	66	58	52	36	23	66	68	10,806	16,922	17,019	7,500	7,000

Source: Ministry of Interior, 2011. \* Data for 2010 and 2011 are provided by the Ministry of Interior, Secretariat General for Population and Social Cohesion, draft report on Migrant Social Integration for 2011. Data for 2011 refer only to the first 8 months of the year.

When the Socialist party came to power in October 2009, it quickly proceeded to change the citizenship law, in keeping with its electoral promises, to facilitate naturalization for non-Greek origin immigrants. Thus, in March 2010 the Greek Parliament voted in a new law (law n. 3838/2010) on citizenship and naturalization. The new law lowered the requirement for naturalization from 10 to 7 years of legal residence in Greece. Immigrants who wish to naturalize, however, must first obtain the long term EU migrant status for which they can apply after five years of legal stay. The requirements for naturalization have been lowered although they still include knowledge of the Greek language and culture. By contrast to the previous law, the authorities are required to reply to applicants within a certain timeframe, and to justify their decision.

The new law has made the long term EU resident status a stepping-stone to naturalization. It has also reduced the 'exorbitant' fee of €900 required as part of the long term EU resident status application, down to a more 'realistic' €600 fee. In addition, the integration test has been made easier as people no longer have to enroll in the state-sponsored courses which had very few places available, practically rendering the implementation of the long term resident status void. Applicants can now prove their knowledge of Greek by sitting a test (law 3789/2010). Nonetheless, Greece is criticized in the most recent Migrant Integration Policy Index evaluation (MIPEX 2010) for still requiring integration courses and tests for a migrant to become a long term EU resident.

Concerning the second generation of immigrants, the new law provides for children born in Greece of foreign parents to become Greek citizens through a simple declaration of their parents, provided that both parents have been living in Greece legally for at least five years. If one of the parents does not fulfill the requirement, the declaration can be made and the child may obtain the Greek citizenship as soon as the second parent satisfies the requirement.

Children who were born abroad of foreign parents but who have completed at least six years of schooling in Greece and live in Greece may also be naturalized with a simple declaration by their parents provided again that both parents have been living in Greece legally for at least five years. Citizenship acquisition of migrant children may also make their parents' lives easier: as parents of Greek citizens they are entitled to a five-year renewable permit, regardless of their employment situation, as this is in the best interest of the child who is a Greek citizen.

In addition to reforming the citizenship and naturalization rules, law 3838/2010 has introduced full local political rights for foreign residents who have lived legally in Greece for five years. However, immigrants who wish to register to vote must also satisfy one of the following conditions: be in possession of a long term EU resident status or a national stay permit of ten years or indefinite duration, be parents of a Greek citizen, married to a Greek or EU citizen, or hold a special identity card issued to ethnic Greeks from Albania.

While the extension of local voting rights to non-EU citizens has been greeted with great satisfaction by the center-left wing parties and by a large part of civil society organizations, its impact so far on migrant political participation has been rather small. The new law introducing these rights was passed in March 2010 and it prescribed that the election lists for the then upcoming local elections of November 2010 be open for registration until the end of August 2010. The aim was to give sufficient time to migrants and co-ethnic Greek Albanians to register to vote. But the number of registered have been rather small. The total number of immigrants who registered was 10,097, alongside 2,665 co-ethnics from Albania. Thus there was a total of 12,762 new voters for the November 2010 local election<sup>3</sup>. While it was important that more than 12,000 people were able to exercise their local political rights, it has to be noted that this number was a fraction of the more than 60,000 people that were expected to satisfy the requirement and, certainly, a number too low to shape electoral outcomes in the different municipalities where they voted.

In addition to the above measures, the Socialist government (in power since November 2009) introduced law 3852/3010 (the so-called Kallikratis law) which concerns the reorganization of local and regional governments. This law instructs the creation of Councils for Migrant Integration at the municipal level. These councils are composed of members of the municipal council and social stakeholders including migrants themselves. They have a consultative character advising the mayor about issues of concern to the local migrant population. The Athens municipality and other municipalities across

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<sup>3</sup> Data provided by the Secretariat for Population and Social Cohesion, on 15 November 2011 upon our request

the country have created these councils, but naturally it is too early to assess their role and impact on favoring migrant integration and civic participation.

Law 4018/2011 introduced a new system for the management of TCN stay permit issuing and renewals, creating one-stop-shops across the country which will replace the local (municipal) and regional centers operating until now. In the previous system, migrants had to submit their applications for issuing/renewing a stay permit at the municipal offices that received all the documentation and transferred it to the prefectural/regional offices that processed the applications and issued the permits. There was a lot of time lost and energy wasted in these transfers back and forth between municipalities and regional offices and many errors committed due to the fact that most of these services functioned with temporary contract workers. The new system introduced regional offices that are one-stop-shops (with a higher number of offices in Athens and Salonicca where a large part of the migrant population lives). This new system of management also intends a more efficient use of databases and e-sources with a view to searching for missing documents via the internet and avoiding that migrant applicants endure very large delays in the processing of their permit. These new one-stop-shop offices are expected to start working in 2012. They are believed to bring an important improvement in the management of stay permits.

Law 4018/2011 has also facilitated the acquisition of long term EU resident status as it provides for immigrants that can prove their knowledge of Greek language and history through a written test to skip the specific state-run course, as law 3386/2005 prescribed. This facilitation is important not only for the enhanced status of protection that the long term resident status entails but also because having long term EU resident status is a prerequisite for applying for naturalization under the provisions of the 3838/2010 law on citizenship.

There were fewer than 1,000 long term EU resident status holders in Greece in 2010 largely because of the stringent requirements concerning proof of knowledge of the Greek language prescribed by the law formerly in force. Migrants in Greece are issued stay permits of a maximum of two-years until the migrant completes a ten-year legal stay, after which s/he may apply for a ten-year or indefinite duration permit. At the end of 2010, there were 62,000 people holding ten-year or indefinite duration stay permits (see table 7 below).

Table 7 Long term permits, 2007-2010

Type of permit	2007	2008	2009	2010
10-year duration permits (on the basis of law N.3731/08, art. 9, par.1)	3	467	8,780	24,994
Indefinite duration permits (on the basis of law 3386/05, art. 91, par. 2)	353	33,332	36,715	36,813
Other indefinite duration permits	465	497	503	505
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>34,296</b>	<b>45,998</b>	<b>62,312</b>

These people form the main pool of future citizens, as regards first generation citizenship acquisition, and of future local election voters. Naturally the effect of migrant children acquiring Greek citizenship through the relevant provisions of the new law and their parents acquiring five-year stay permits as parents of Greek citizens is yet to be seen. We currently have neither data nor estimates on the number of children of foreign parents born in Greece or having completed six years in Greek schools.

### ***Policy developments regarding asylum and the management of irregular migration***

Greece is one of the main geographical points of entrance to the EU for irregular Asian and African migrants and asylum claimants traveling through Africa or Asia to Turkey and then crossing to Greece. FRONTEX estimates that in 2010 three quarters of all irregular migrants that cross borders illegally (i.e. not visa overstayers) entered the EU through Greece; it would be more accurate to say across the Greek-Turkish border. Indeed, asylum applications have increased over this period but are still comparatively few compared with the total number of irregular migrant apprehensions, let alone irregular migrants/asylum seekers arriving undetected (see table 8 below).

Table 8 Asylum applications in Greece, 2000-2009

Categories	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of asylum applications	3,083	5,499	5,664	8,178	4,469	9,050	12,267	25,113	19,884	24,822

Source: Author's own compilation on the basis of data from the Ministry for the Protection of the Citizen, [www.astynomia.gr](http://www.astynomia.gr)

Greece has until recently lacked the political will to implement an appropriate asylum system. Previous governments have not

invested the appropriate human and economic resources to this purpose. However, the country has also been subject to disproportionately high irregular migration pressures due to its geographical position as well as to Turkey's unwillingness to cooperate in taming these flows. Although, given the geographical position of the country, such pressures may not actually be avoided. What could be avoided, however, is that all asylum seekers arriving at the Greek-Turkish border must have their applications lodged and examined by Greek authorities.

In response to the above asylum crisis situation, the socialist government that came into power in November 2009 introduced Presidential Decree 114/2000 in an effort to process the backlog of asylum applications that had been formed during the last years and which exceeded 45,000 at the end of 2009. In addition, Law 3907/2011 passed by the Greek Parliament in January 2011 has two separate Agencies, the Asylum Agency and the Agency for First Reception. Thus, this new law introduces new standards concerning the first reception of irregular migrants, the distinction between irregular migrants and asylum seekers, the processing of asylum applications, the waiting period for the judgment of these applications, and, most importantly, takes the asylum committees out of the authority of the Greek police which had basically taken over the whole asylum system since 2008.

The new asylum agency is autonomous and refers directly to the Minister of Interior. It consists of a central office and several regional offices located at the main points of entry and exit of the country (e.g. near the Greek-Turkish land border, in Orestiada, but also at the port of Patras, and on several islands of the Aegean sea). At the same time, the new law creates First Reception Centers in selected places where there is a notable inflow of immigrants. These centers receive irregular migrants upon their arrival, inform them about their rights and obligations, and refer asylum seekers to the regional asylum office that may function within the local reception center. They also take care of vulnerable groups such as minors, women with young children, people who have health problems, and victims of trafficking. The regional asylum offices are responsible for receiving and processing the applications, conducting interviews, and issuing decisions at the first instance.

The new law still prescribes that irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Greece can be detained in the first reception centers, but such detention has to be appropriately justified. Detention has to be justified in relation to the need of establishing the identity of the irregular migrant/asylum seekers, and it is prescribed that asylum applicants will stay in the reception centers for as long as their application is being processed. The time necessary for processing the application is determined at fifteen days, with a possible extension of ten more days. In other words, it is expected that decisions on first instance asylum applications will be issued within 30 days. If during this period there is no decision issued, the asylum office will issue a

temporary asylum seeker permit and will send the asylum seeker to appropriate hostels, which are to be set up by the Ministry of Public Health.

Law 3907/2011 also implements two kinds of new permits for irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the effort to satisfy the letter and the spirit of the European Directive on common standards for returning illegally staying third country nationals. Thus, irregular migrants who have been issued an expulsion decision and who cannot be expelled for a number of reasons, e.g. their ill health or the non-cooperation of their country of origin, are issued a written statement that postpones their return. This written decision has a six-month validity and can be renewed (provided that the migrant cooperates with the relevant authorities and is at their disposal for actually executing the expulsion when this becomes possible) for as long as the expulsion cannot take place. During this period the stay of the irregular migrant in Greece is thus registered and legal and s/he may access the labor market. These postponements of expulsion decisions are not meant to 'reward' illegality but rather to acknowledge a difficult situation and allow for a dignified existence for people who are otherwise living with the constant fear of detection and arrest.

The same law also introduces a new type of permit for exceptional reasons that are given to irregular migrants who have been living in Greece for twelve years or more and in particular for ten years before their application for such a permit; people who have thus been living in the country for a long time and can prove that they have strong ties with the country, including, for instance, being a family member of a Greek citizen, speaking the Greek language, having attended Greek schools, or having been holders of a legal stay permit in the past.

Law 3907/2011 opens up the possibility of viable voluntary return for irregular migrants who have been caught illegally entering or residing in Greece. While the time period during which the irregular migrant can decide to return to her/his country voluntarily is normally between seven and 30 days, when the migrant declares their will and a decision of voluntary return is issued, the new law provides for the possible expansion of this period for up to one year, so as to make voluntary return feasible for the migrant. This expansion aims at taking into account the special personal circumstances of the illegally staying alien; for instance, the fact that her/his children may be studying at a Greek school or that s/he may have special ties with Greece because of her/his stay and work in the country so that return may require some time to be organized.

The design of the new law is certainly in line with European asylum law and practice and promises to significantly improve Greece's record in both asylum and irregular migration management. However, it remains to be seen how such an ambitious organizational and legal framework can be implemented under the current

conditions of austerity. One of the first implementation problems faced by the two Directors responsible for the organization of the first reception centers and asylum offices is the recruitment of qualified personnel. Under the current ban in the hiring of new staff in the public sector, the staff needs of the two new services have to be satisfied through the transfer of personnel from other offices of the wider public sector. This is particularly problematic as such personnel would not necessarily have the experience or training required for their new tasks. In addition, some of the staff needs will be subcontracted, and this includes security staff for the first reception centers (to private security companies) and the translation services. In short, the new system for dealing with irregular migration and asylum is ambitious and appropriate but its implementation and results are yet to be seen.



## Concluding Remarks

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The above policy developments mark a turning point in Greek migration policy, with regards both to the management of irregular migration and asylum applications, and to migrant integration, including naturalisation issues. The laws outlined above were long overdue as Greece has had a numerically large migrant population for at least 10 years now (about 700,000 non EU residents at the census of 2001, over 600,000 permit holders at the end of 2009 in addition to 200,000 ethnic Greeks from Albania holding special stay permits). However, while it may come as a surprise that Greece was so slow in developing a proper migration policy, it still comes as a bigger surprise that a government facing such a difficult economic and political conjuncture managed to maintain its electoral promises in the field of migration and to push through these important reforms.

With regards to the change in the citizenship law, it is my contention that these developments are rooted in some slow and soft changes in the political elites' views of migrant integration, which prepared the ground for this legislation. Indeed, debates and actions on these issues had taken place prior to this legislation. Internal developments took place within the Socialist Party between 2004 and 2009 (the period during which it was in the opposition), which signaled a clear pro-migrant integration policy of the party (Gropas and Triandafyllidou 2011). The Socialist Party created in 2005 three positions within its Central Party Committee, which were to be devolved exclusively to migrant party members. These migrant members of the Party Committee are not citizens and hence have no right to vote in Greece. However, they provide for a direct representation of migrant groups within the workings of the party and are carriers of dialogue and exchange in the party and other social and political forums. This initiative has been called 'Friends of the Party' and migrants have been invited by the Party Chairman, Mr. George Papandreou, to join its ranks.

The then governing party, New Democracy (Conservatives), had not taken any legislation initiative in favor of extending political rights to third country nationals, nor to ease the citizenship acquisition requirements. Nonetheless, 50 MPs from the Conservative Party (then in power) submitted a proposal to the Parliament to reform the Constitution (article 102, paragraph 2) so as to explicitly foresee that aliens who reside in the country could acquire local voting rights through a simple legislative reform. Such a proposal had then been



rejected as it was considered that article 102.2 of the Constitution, as reformed in 2001, already foresaw this possibility.

In the 2008 Socialist Party Convention, the PASOK party took a firm commitment to extend citizenship to the second generation of migrants, facilitate citizenship acquisition for the first generation and also introduce local voting rights for migrant residents when it would come to power (Gropas and Triandafyllidou 2011). Perhaps in response to the Socialist party's initiatives, the Conservative party then in power promised to extend the right to vote in the 2010 municipal elections to all immigrants who held the 'long-term residency' permit ([www.in.gr](http://www.in.gr), 20/10/2006, *Eleftherotypia*, 06/10/2008).

This pro-immigration shift in the Socialist party policies and practices can be attributed to the personal views of the party leader George Papandreou, as well as the related progressive views of academics and other prominent figures that he has recruited to the party electoral lists over the past four years. Only to name a few, these include: University professor Marilena Koppa, an expert on minority rights in the Balkans and currently an MEP for the Socialist party; University Professor Thaleia Dragona, in charge of the main education programme for the native Turkish Muslim minority of western Thrace, formerly an MP (2004-2007) and more recently State Secretary for Intercultural Education (2009-2010); MEP Kostas Mpotopoulos, Doctor in Law and former lawyer with a scholarly track record; MEP Stavros Lambrinidis (shortly Minister of Foreign Affairs in late 2011), a former lawyer in the US and a well-known public figure; professor Nikos Alivizatos, architect of the recent law on citizenship together with Andreas Takis, former University lecturer and former Deputy Ombudsman for Human Rights and current Secretary of State, in charge of the Secretariat for Population and Social Cohesion. It is thus clear that there has been a number of people, mainly originating from the academia, who held views in favor of immigrant integration and citizenship reform within the ranks of the Socialist Party.

Contrary to developments in migrant integration and naturalization policies, the reform of the asylum and irregular migration management policies was largely due to external influences and mounting pressures from the EU, and most specifically from the European Court of Human Rights on Greece to respect its international and European obligations in these areas.

As regards irregular migration management, the Greek state had to transpose the EU directive on common standards for returning illegally staying aliens and this was a clear obligation that needed to be respected. At the same time however the state had to respond to harsh criticisms concerning its failed asylum system. Greece had been under the spotlight because of its continuing inability to provide effective protection to asylum seekers arriving at its shores. Already on 31 January 2009, the European Commission had started infringement Proceedings with Greece because of its failure to implement the

Dublin II regulation, bringing the country in front of the European Court of Justice. The infringement concerned mainly the fact that Greece lacked legal guarantees for a substantial examination of the application of asylum claimants. Not only were asylum applicants routinely placed in detention and when released given no assistance for housing or subsistence, but also, and most importantly, their applications were routinely rejected without a proper examination or interview.

Several member states actually stopped implementing Dublin II and returning asylum seekers to Greece in the period 2008-2010: Finland stopped returning asylum seekers to Greece on 18 April 2008, shortly after Norway. In March 2008, a Swedish court stopped the extradition of an Iraqi asylum seeker to Greece but it was only in November 2010 that Sweden revoked the application of the Dublin regulation with regards Greece. The UK stopped returning asylum seekers to Greece in September 2010 while in late January 2011 Germany did the same. On 21 January 2011 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) found that Greece's broken asylum system and appalling detention conditions meant that Belgium's transfer of an Afghan asylum seeker to Greece in 2009 under the Dublin II Regulation had breached the prohibition on ill-treatment and denied him an effective remedy (for a fuller discussion see Triandafyllidou 2011)

All these developments had put strong pressure on the Greek government to reform its asylum system and introduce more effective measures to ensure that while irregular migrants arriving at its borders would be stopped, people in need of protection would receive such protection.

Thus, the Greek paradox of important policy advances in the wider migration policy field can best be explained by the combined influence of internal political developments and European influence and pressures. It remains surprising that such pressures and developments bore their fruit at a time of serious economic hardship and high popular discontent with the country's political elites.

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