IMMIGRANTS, RACISM AND THE NEW XENOPHOBIA OF GREECE'S IMMIGRATION POLICY

by Martin Baldwin-Edwards
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1 History of migration trends
A long-run history of migration and Greece since independence (1832) can be characterized as predominantly one of emigration – of Greeks for economic reasons, and of ethnic and other minorities for political reasons. The first important immigration inflows were during and after the disastrous Greco-Turkish war of 1919-1922 and its final resolution with the Treaty of Lausanne. This resulted in the “Exchange of Populations” with Turkey and the displacement of over 2 million persons – Christians to Greece and Muslims to Turkey. The reception of the destitute Christian refugees in Greece was hostile, with decades of exclusion and second class status (Baldwin-Edwards & Apostolatou 2008: 8). This popular response to mass inflows has been posited as structurally important, leading to similar reactions to the more recent immigrations of ethnic Greeks in the 1980s and Albanians in the 1990s (Baldwin-Edwards & Apostolatou 2008: 15). This observation is in line with Joaquin Arango’s hypothesis of a “generation effect” whereby the socio-economic and historical context of initial immigration experiences shapes the dominant social orientations towards subsequent immigration (Arango 2012: 50).

After the traumas of both World War II and then the Greek Civil war, despite the largest US investment in the world from the Marshall Plan and military aid (Mazower 2001: 119) the Greek economy was very weak, even with massive capital inflows. This led to extraordinary levels of emigration – initially to the USA and after 1960 to northern Europe, primarily Germany (Vermeulen 2008). By the late 1980s, Greece had acquired a small immigrant population – a complex mix of legal, semi-legal and illegal migrants – from various countries including those in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. By 1990, it was of the order of 2-3 per cent of total population (Baldwin-Edwards & Apostolatou 2009: 235) – reflecting the country’s increasing political and economic stability in the region. The Greek political reaction to irregular border crossings by Albanians en masse in December 1990 was highly negative, and reinforced by near-hysterical reports in the mass media which constructed a stereotype of the ‘dangerous Albanian’ (Baldwin-Edwards 2004a). Thus, a new immigration law was rapidly drafted to replace the previous one of 1929; its primary rationale was the allegation of criminality and the need to protect Greece from aliens. The new law made no practical provision for legal immigration, but implemented several new mechanisms of expulsion and deportation as well as implementing major parts of the Schengen Agreement (Baldwin-Edwards & Apostolatou 2009: 235). Immediately, the Greek police mounted regular operations known as skoupa (broom) to round up undocumented immigrants and expel them, generally to Albania. In 1992, 277,000 Albanians were summarily expelled without legal process, and 221,000 in 1993. From 1992 to 1995, 250-282,000 immigrants (predominantly Albanians) were expelled annually, although there were multiple expulsions of the same individuals. Small numbers of other nationalities were also expelled – primarily Iraqis, Romanians and Pakistanis (Baldwin-Edwards & Fakiolas 1998: Table 7). Despite these repressive measures, the stock of unregistered immigrants in Greece (primarily Albanians) began to climb rapidly, and by 1995 had reached an estimated 600,000 of which fewer than 100,000 had legal residence (Baldwin-Edwards 2004b: Figure 1).
By 1997 Greece had acquired an estimated immigrant stock of some 700,000, of which only 60,000 were with legal status. There was considerable political pressure on the government to regularize immigrants – since the mass deportations of 200,000 a year had failed to prevent rising numbers (Baldwin-Edwards & Fakiolas 1998). In 1997 Greece started a two-stage regularization programme, which yielded the first hard information about irregular immigrants in Greece. Out of a total of 371,641 applicants, 241,561 (65%) were Albanians, 25,168 Bulgarians and 16,954 Romanians. The total number of persons covered (including family members) by the White Card awards was 462,067 with an estimated 150,000 who did not apply (Baldwin-Edwards 2009: 44). Regularization programmes were held subsequently in 2001 (with a new immigration law), 2005 and 2007. Immigrants started to acquire a more secure presence in Greece. By 2006 the second generation of immigrants had reached an estimated total of 220,000 with Albanians at around 110,000 – representing 30% of Albanian residence permits (Baldwin-Edwards 2008: 38).

Since 2008, the near-collapse of the Greek economy has altered the character of migration flows and of the immigrant population. A large number of Albanians residing in Greece have returned to Albania since 2007; Greek statistics are incapable of revealing the extent of this, but reports from Albania suggest a figure of 180,000 returns by 2012 (Kathimerini, 15 Jan. 2013). Moreover, the Schengen visa-free regime for Albanians that was introduced in December 2010 has facilitated circular migration, and reduced the imperative to remain in Greece in order to retain the right to work. However, legal entry is for tourism purposes only and any employment is unlawful; nevertheless, this has become a popular strategy for single male migrants (Gemi 2013: 23-24).

2 Characteristics of the immigrant population

There are still no reliable statistics on the legal population of Greece, since different policies have no co-ordination and no proper communication with the ELSTAT (the Statistical Service). However, it is possible to consolidate the known data and provide a crude estimate; quite why this is not done by the Greek state or OECD-SOPEMI is a matter for conjecture.

2.1 Census data

The 2011 Census, despite returning only preliminary data, is an inclusive dataset and gives some indication of the various immigrant group sizes, regardless of their different legal statuses. The 2001 Census had returned a total population of 10.96 million, of which 762,000 (about 7%) were without Greek citizenship – but this figure included EU nationals. The largest single nationality group was then, and remains, Albanians at some 56% of the immigrant population. The 2011 Census recorded a slightly smaller total population at 10.82 million, of which 911,929 (about 8.4%) were without Greek citizenship. 1 However, a more useful statistic is the non-EEA population, which numbered 712,828 persons at 6.6% of total population. Between these two census dates, the total immigrant population is rather similar in both qualitative and quantitative terms; the major difference is a tripling of the Pakistani community size, although still at only 34,000. Figure 1, below, shows the distribution of residents without Greek citizenship (including EEA nationals).

1 This includes all foreign nationals, stateless persons and persons of unknown citizenship.
Figure 1
Major nationalities normally resident in Greece, 2011 Census

Source: ELSTAT press release
2.2 Residence permits for Third Country Nationals (Ministry of the Interior)
The majority of TCNs with legal residence are recorded as residence permit holders, in accordance with the 2005 immigration law as amended (see below). These are published by Eurostat, data valid for 31 December of each year. Table 1 shows summary data. The peak number of permits occurs in 2009, and they decline significantly in 2012 – the last available year for data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>522,752</td>
<td>565,595</td>
<td>524,215</td>
<td>549,604</td>
<td>485,319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat database

Looking at reasons for permit awards (Table 2), roughly half are for family reasons. Remunerated activities have declined to less than half the 2008 level – reflecting the economic crisis. No permits are recorded for refugee or protection status (this is actually incorrect). The category “other reasons” is stated elsewhere (Triandafyllidou 2013: 18) as including permits of long-term duration, according to Greek definitions. The official Eurostat data for long-term permits (both EU type and national) are given below in Table 3. They amount to a mere 0.2% of all permits, compared with 55% in Italy and 76% in Spain, in 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>214,496</td>
<td>250,952</td>
<td>237,341</td>
<td>258,971</td>
<td>230,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6,102</td>
<td>5,847</td>
<td>6,422</td>
<td>7,210</td>
<td>7,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remunerated activities</td>
<td>255,729</td>
<td>244,627</td>
<td>187,545</td>
<td>189,734</td>
<td>110,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee status</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary protection</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>46,425</td>
<td>64,169</td>
<td>92,907</td>
<td>93,689</td>
<td>136,795</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat database

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU permit</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National permit</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>134</strong></td>
<td><strong>317</strong></td>
<td><strong>618</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,039</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat database

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The data provided to Eurostat are not consistent with those given out by the Ministry of the Interior. The discrepancies are significant and with different signs; they may merely reflect the fact that the Ministry validity dates tend to be 1 December, as opposed to 31 December. However, it may also be that the Eurostat data are more closely regulated and therefore more reliable.
The extent of long-term residence permits has become a matter of great importance in recent years, since the guarantee of security of residence removes the linkage between employment and lawful stay by non-citizens in a country. The very low rate (0.2%) in Greece is allegedly ameliorated by the existence of national “indefinite term” and ten-year permits. These are cited unofficially as numbering 107,080 in 2012 (Triandafyllidou 2013: 18); they do not appear to give the degree of security (i.e. automatic renewal) required by EU definitions, and are therefore excluded from Eurostat data.

Table 4, below, gives the principal nationalities of holders of valid permits in 2012, by gender. Albanians remain the most important nationality; Bulgarians and Romanians are no longer required to have permits, as EU nationals; and the remaining countries are more or less the same as in 2001. There are differences with the 2011 Census data, primarily concerning larger numbers in the Census for Albanians, Georgians and Pakistanis. In the first two cases, this may be linked with Greek ethnicity as well as irregular stay; in the case of Pakistanis, it is related to irregular stay and participation in the poorly-functioning asylum system.

The distribution of gender shows women as just under 50% of the total. Islamic nationalities are predominantly male; Slavic ones predominantly female. This pattern has existed since the first comprehensive data were recorded in the 1997 regularisation.3

Table 4
Valid residence permits in 2012, principal nationalities, total and female

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M+F</th>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>334,030</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>144,931</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>18,477</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>15,300</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>15,532</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>10,842</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>13,793</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>13,001</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>10,870</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>11,996</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>3,140</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>11,265</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2,911</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>10,031</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>7,414</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>9,180</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>6,800</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>6,213</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2,211</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>41,801</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>22,220</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>485,319</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>227,926</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own calculations from Eurostat database

2.3 Refugees and asylum-seekers

Older data for these are not available from the relevant ministry but are partially communicated to Eurostat. UNHCR gives a figure of 2,100 recognised refugees at end 2012, and 50,126 asylum-seekers as of mid-2013. Eurostat gives a figure of 48,000 outstanding applications as of March 2014. The Greek ministry claims as of May 2013 that the backlog had been reduced to 35,164 cases and that it would be entirely cleared by mid-2014 (CEU 2013). Since June 2013, Greece has operated two asylum systems in parallel: the former police system for applications lodged prior to 7 June 2013,

3 See Baldwin-Edwards (2009) for detailed data.
and a new Asylum Service for subsequent applications (EDAL 2013). The new system provides online data, showing that from 7 June to 31 December 2013, 4,816 applications for asylum were lodged. The main nationalities were Afghan (17%), Pakistani (13%), Albanian (9%) and Georgian (7%). In this period, 2,635 cases were closed, with 229 being granted Convention status and 92 subsidiary protection. The first instance recognition rates are 100% for Somali, 99% for Syrians, 90% for Sudanese; at the other end of the scale, they are 0% for both Albanian and Georgian applicants. Data for the first 4 months of 2014 show a similar proportion of nationalities, and total 3,286. The recognition rate for Syrians is 100%, along with high rates (76%) for Eritreans and Ethiopians. 2,492 cases were closed in this period.

2.4 Ethnic Greeks (homogeneis) of foreign citizenship
There are two broad categories of ethnic Greeks of foreign citizenship. The first concerns Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet republics: these have mostly acquired Greek citizenship. The second category is that of Albanian Greeks, from Northern Epirus. Until 2010, they were denied the possibility of naturalization as Greek citizens, and provided by the police with Special Identity Cards for Homogeneis. These numbered around 200,000 in 2004. Access to Greek citizenship (along with “purging” the cards of doubtful claimants and non-residents) resulted in a decline in the number of cards to 6,509 by December 2011 (Triandafyllidou 2013: 9). Neither category of ethnic Greeks has ever appeared in the residence permit database of the Interior Ministry, or in any other statistical data.

2.5 Irregular immigrants
There is no reliable method of estimating the extent of irregular migrant stocks with the near-collapse of the Greek economy and its massive impact on the employment of both Greeks and immigrants. Building on earlier research conducted before the onset of economic crisis, Maroukis (2012) updates the methodology to estimate 391,500 irregular immigrants in Greece in 2011. Compared with the 2011 Census data of 713,000 third country nationals, this would seem to imply an irregularity rate of over 50%. In contrast, the irregularity rates of Italy and Spain were declining over the last decade, reaching lows of 7% and 8% by 2012 (Baldwin-Edwards & Zampagni 2014; Baldwin-Edwards 2014).

Police data on detection of irregular immigrants remain poor and misleading, despite over a decade of criticism by experts. They fail to distinguish between recent illegal entrants and residents with former legal status; they fail to give gender; they fail to identify minors, in particular unaccompanied minors; and they fail to identify family migrations. The police data for 2013 show 43,000 detections over the year, of which 16,250 are not near border areas (mostly in Athens and Thessaloniki) and may concern longer-term residents. The primary nationalities are given as Albanian (15,400), Syrian (8,500), Afghan (6,400), Pakistan (4,000), Bangladesh (1,500), Somalia (1,000) and Eritrea (700). It can be observed that half of these nationalities are likely to have good claims for humanitarian protection, and should not be categorized as illegal immigrants.

4&lang=&lang=EN
5 The CLANDESTINO project on irregular migration
In the first four months of 2014, 13,300 irregular migrants were detected, of which 4,700 were not near a border. The predominant nationalities were Syrian (4,200), Albanian (4,100), Afghan (1,300) and Pakistan (1,000).

Examining data on effected returns, as provided to Eurostat, Table 5 shows the dominance of Albanian irregular presence, until 2011 when Albania was granted short-term visa-free travel to Schengen. Subsequently, returns to Pakistan became the leading figure, in 2012. The data in this table include all forms of removal from the territory: in the case of Greece, this means summary expulsions (primarily to Albania), forced returns by readmission treaties, “voluntary” returns and Assisted Voluntary returns. (See below, for details on policy.) Data for 2012 show assisted voluntary returns at 6,324, voluntary returns at 10,531 and forced returns at 11,586 (EMN 2013: Table7). It is unclear how these data relate to those in Table 5.

Table 5
Third country nationals returned following an order to leave, principal nationalities, 2008-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>5,135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>66,160</td>
<td>60,040</td>
<td>48,175</td>
<td>5,200</td>
<td>5,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>1,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>1,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>68,565</strong></td>
<td><strong>62,850</strong></td>
<td><strong>51,785</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,585</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,650</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat

3 Regulatory framework

3.1 Immigration framework legislation


The current immigration law conforms to the usual requirements of Schengen and the EU in requiring pre-approved visas for entry, other than for citizens of countries on the Schengen white list. Within the last two years, this has been extended to include most Balkan countries (including Albania) which is a major change for the management of Greece’s borders.
Currently, the immigration rules appear to grant 32 categories of residence permits, to be issued by Regions and with an initial validity of one year, renewable for two years until eligibility for an EU long term permit after 5 years or an indefinite duration permit after 10 years (now replaced by a 10-year permit). The 2005 provisions for acquisition of the EU long term permit were the most restrictive in the EU, requiring applicants to participate in state-run courses on Greek language and culture, with very few places available on such courses. Law 4018/2011 offers an alternative of a written test to prove an applicant’s ability in the Greek language, history and culture. The indefinite duration permit, requiring 10 years of legal residence, has allegedly been easier to acquire, but reliable data do not seem to be available. Nor are there reliable data on the 10-year permits introduced by 2008 amendment. Another category of permit, known as permanent resident, is awarded to family members of EU nationals. Data on awards of this are also unclear.

A one-month permit, renewable, for victims of trafficking exists. No data are available on their issuance.

Until 2011, the renewal of permits normally required 200 days of social insurance per year. This was reduced to 120 days, for certain categories (EMN 2013). An additional burden are the high costs of applications: these are set at 150 euros per year of validity (e.g. 450 euros for a 3-year permit) and for indefinite term and EU long-term permits, the fee is 900 euros. Non-renewal of a residence permit results in being given 6 months to leave Greece, or otherwise be classed as an illegal immigrant.

3.2 Asylum law
Greece’s previous asylum system, run by the police and with little accountability of any sort, was generally viewed as highly mismanaged, resulting in the lowest recognition rates in the EU, a massive backlog of cases (50,000 in mid-2013), and directly facilitated and encouraged irregular immigration through its lax procedures and unenforceable decisions. In particular, the process of applying for asylum was highly restricted (limited to 20 persons per week in one Athens police station) yet gave substantial rights to the holders of 6-month “pink cards” – including the right to remain, to employment, acquisition of a tax code (required for bank accounts and rental contracts), inter alia (UNHCR 2012). Other points of application for asylum were the Asylum Division of the Aliens Directorate in Thessaloniki, the Security Departments at national airports, and Security Departments belong to the 53 Police Directorates across Greece. This former asylum system continues for applications made prior to 7 June 2013.

Law 3907/2011 created an Asylum Service, a First Reception Service and an Appeals Board. It became operational with Presidential Decree 113/2013 and all applications are examined by the new Asylum Service. Under the new rules, two statuses can be granted for international protection: refugee status or subsidiary protection (EDAL 2013). A former status – humanitarian protection – was abolished by PD 113/2013 but is continued for rejected asylum applications lodged prior to 7 June 2013. Under the new rules, rejected asylum-seekers who may satisfy the conditions for

6 See www.minocp.gov.gr
humanitarian protection will have their cases referred to the Interior Ministry for consideration of that status within the framework of Law 3386/2005.

3.3 Detention camps and policy on detention of asylum-seekers and irregular migrants
One of the distinctive features of the new Greek policy on asylum and irregular migration is the extensive use of detention of both asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. On 26 March 2012 the Greek minister for the police announced a comprehensive plan for 30 regional centres for detaining migrants, each with a capacity of 1,000. The centres are to be developed from renovating unused military camps, and to be funded by EU programmes. By June 2013, Greece had informed the EU that it had the following centres:

First Reception Service
A First Reception Centre in Fylakio, Evros; operating since March 2013, two additional centres under construction in Lesvos island and Attika with capacities of 200 and 120 places. In addition, Greece states that it has two “mobile units” (not yet operational) and screening centres in Chios and Samos Islands.

Reception of Asylum Seekers, vulnerable groups and unaccompanied minors
Two centres in Athens “available”, and operational by October 2013
Two centres planned for Attika and Serres (northern Greece)

Pre-removal centres
Five are operational in Amygdaleza, Corinth, Paranesti, Xanthi and Komotini with total capacity of 5,000. There are four additional centres at Lesvos island, western Macedonia, Ritsona and Karoti-Evros planned to be operational by end 2014, with 10,000 places. Some old centres are being closed down, owing to poor conditions; Venna, Elliniko, Aspropyrgos and Tychero are already closed.

The Greek press and NGO observers make no distinction between these theoretically different types of centre, since it seems that migrants of all types are housed there. For example, the pre-removal centres seem to house asylum applicants. There are currently six “closed hospitality centres”: Amygdaleza, Komotini, Xanthi, Paranesti (Drama), Filakio (Orestiada) and Corinth. The official population figures are given for April 2013, as totalling 7,000.

In October 2012, the legislation was altered with Presidential Decree 116/2012 in order to increase the maximum detention period of asylum-seekers to 18 months. This was equated to the period allowed for detention under the EU Returns Directive, regulating conditions of removal of irregular migrants. However, PD 116/2012 does not provide automatic judicial review for asylum-seekers, which is actually required for those detained for the purpose of removal (EDAL 2013).

In April 2014, despite harsh condemnation of the health conditions of detained asylum-seekers and migrants – including unaccompanied minors (MSF 2014a) – the Greek police decided to detain migrants indefinitely (MSF 2014b). This policy was immediately put into operation in two centres in northern Greece – in Drama and Evros. The detained migrants were threatened with indefinite detention unless they consented to “voluntary” return or co-operated in their own forced return (MSF 2014b).
3.4 Policy on removal of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers

Since August 2012, the Greek government has engaged in mass arrests of immigrants based on ethnic profiling – specifically, skin colour – and detained immigrants en masse for identity checks. Between 4 August 2012 and June 2013, the police stopped and detained just under 124,000 people on the streets of Athens; a mere 6,910 (less than 6%) were subsequently found to be residing unlawfully in Greece (HRW 2014). Despite the racist and provocative message given out by this policy, along with its meagre result in terms of detection rate, the minister responsible pronounced the operation (named Xenios Zeus) a great success. The operation was denounced by Human Rights Watch in a detailed report, showing abusive practices by the police, systematic racial profiling, and extensive waste of police time. HRW also notes the positive view held by the police, citing improved public opinion as the main result (HRW 2013: 15). This policy can thus be placed clearly within the political context of rising racism, xenophobia and racial violence in Greece and a government trying to attract the burgeoning racist vote, in competition with the neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn.

Greek policy on returns is far from transparent, and different accounts are given on different occasions and audiences. The Greek state informed the Council of Ministers in a communication of June 2013 (CEU 2013) that there are two return programmes. One is that of non-voluntary deportations, which they put at 6,000 persons to be deported by the Attika Aliens Division. The other is a voluntary return programme organized by the IOM, totalling up to 8,500 persons and to be completed by end June 2013. (See the available statistical data on returns, above in Table 5.)

In June, the Public Order Minister announced another agreement with the IOM for returns, financed by the EU Return Fund and the Greek state and budgeted at 13 million euros (To Vima, 16 June 2014). The IOM website does not identify funding or specific activities, but merely notes that it is engaged in the following programmes:
- Voluntary Return of Third Country Nationals and Reception into Their Countries of Origin
- Assisted Voluntary Returns (Greece) funded by EEA Grants
- Assisted Voluntary Returns from Greece funded by the UK Border Agency

The IOM programmes have come under intense critical fire for allegedly using psychological and physical violence in order to force migrants to sign the documents for “voluntary” return. Specifically, KEERFA (an NGO organizing against racism) has documented cases involving police beatings, including severe injuries such as loss of sight. Most of these cases involve Athens airport and include allegations (with photographic evidence) of electrical torture, beatings and sexual humiliation. These reports were published by the mainstream newspaper To Vima as well as being documented online. Such harassment of undocumented migrants is now supplemented by the prospect of indefinite detention unless the migrants accept “voluntary” return.

Triandafyllidou (2013: 14) notes the difficulty of returning migrants to Asian and African countries. The effective expulsion rate for Albanians in 2009 was 70%, while that for Asian countries averaged 2.74% and for African countries 1.62%. With the exception of returns to Pakistan (which are now regulated by a readmission agreement), this would imply that Asians and Africans are the most vulnerable groups in Greece for forcible “voluntary” returns.
4 Racism, racial violence and xenophobia

After the mass immigration of the 1990s, racism and racial violence had already emerged by the early 2000s as a small but serious problem. It was small in terms of the number of incidents; it was serious, owing to the complete lack of interest by state authorities and politicians in recording incidents, protecting immigrants and minorities, and prosecuting those who engaged in hate speech. One NGO that persistently dragged such issues into the courts – challenging various governments to uphold the law and deal with discrimination, racism and racial violence – was actually despised and vilified by political parties and state authorities. Although several far right political parties, including Golden Dawn, existed at the time, the only party that attracted attention was LAOS – a xenophobic party, but very different from the neo-Nazi party that has recently replaced it in popular support.

With the onset of the economic crisis, xenophobia and racial violence escalated substantially. Official indifference continued, with no formal recording of incidents and no interest from the police or public prosecutor’s office in dealing with extreme violence and racial hatred. In fact, in late 2010 the police introduced a 100 euro fee for non-Greek victims of assaults to register a complaint. Even those who paid the fee to file a complaint typically found that no progress was made. In October 2011, the Human Rights Commission and UNHCR arranged for a network of NGOs to record incidents of violence against migrants. Over the period October-December 2011, the network reported 63 incidents, of which 42 involved physical injury. The legal status of the victims was undocumented in 27 cases, and registered asylum-seeker in 23 cases; 25 of the victims were Afghan, and 21 were sub-Saharan Africans (HRW 2012: 43). Incidents of violence, many involving activists of Golden Dawn, continued to escalate; they were particularly prevalent in run-down areas with high immigrant concentration and few Greeks (usually elderly, left over from a previous era when the area was affluent). Vigilante groups were formed, with overt anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant objectives, and thought to involve many Golden Dawn activists. In central Athens, the most notorious spot was around, and in, the square of Aghios Panteleimonas. The nationalities most affected by the violence were Afghans and Somalis. On the outskirts of Athens, in Aspropyrgos, Pakistanis became the victims of extreme violence.

The network’s report for 2012 reported 154 incidents over 2012, mostly physical violence carried out by organized groups – many linked to Golden Dawn. The report also mentions the beating to death of an Egyptian worker who asked for his wages to be paid. This incident is comparable with the shooting and wounding of 29 Bangladeshi migrant workers at a strawberry farm in Manolada, Peloponnesus. In this case, the state acted promptly (possibly owing to the international furore that emerged), charging the three farm supervisors with attempted murder, grievous bodily harm, human trafficking and illegal possession and use of firearms. The public prosecutor also took the unusual step of granting the immigrant workers the status of trafficking victims, to prevent their deportation as illegal migrants (MNS May 2013:22).

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7 Greek Helsinki Monitor
8 By early January 2013, after pressure from the EU, the Greek authorities had established a 24-hour police “hotline” for immigrants to call in order to report racist attacks. Since the service requires immigrants to present evidence of their identity, it exposes them to arrest and deportation if their papers are not in order. The take-up of the service was very poor, for that and other reasons (MNS March 2013: 21).
9 The Racist Violence Recording Network.
The behaviour of the political establishment has generally been no better than that of the thugs on the streets. Ministers from the so-called socialist party, Pasok, pushed through legislation in April 2011 that permitted police detention of immigrants and asylum-seekers for compulsory health checks. On the basis of nationality (actually, skin colour), appearance of poor health, or occupation as a sex worker, the police rounded up people en masse as representing a danger to public health. The previous month, the same minister (Chrysochoidis) had blamed increases in petty crime on “illegal immigrants”, since Greeks have the “lowest rates of criminality in Europe”. By the time of the 2012 elections, the current prime minister (Samaras) was campaigning for election not merely on economic policy, but also with a promise to reclaim Greek cities from immigrants:

*Greece today has become a centre for illegal immigrants. We must take back our cities, where the illegal trade in drugs, prostitution and counterfeit goods is booming. There are many diseases and I am not only speaking about Athens but elsewhere too.*

Subsequently, his political party started toying with the idea of a possible future coalition government with Golden Dawn: the extreme right xenophobia of the neo-Nazi party apparently was not seen as incompatible with the conservative party. More recent events, specifically the murder of a Greek popular singer by the neo-Nazis, along with pressure from northern Europe, has obliged Samaras to crack down on Golden Dawn – arresting most of its leaders on various charges including criminal conspiracy to murder. However, Golden Dawn has not declined in popular appeal, and this seems to be pushing the government politicians into a competition with Golden Dawn for xenophobic statements, promotion of racial hatred, abuse of migrants’ rights and a general political atmosphere of racial intolerance and xenophobia. Immigrants are presented as a primary cause of Greece’s economic ills. In particular, the emphasis is laid on “illegal immigrants” regardless of many whose actual status is refugee or bona fide asylum-seeker, or the loss of legal status through unemployment and being unable to renew a residence permit.

A final point should be made about the numerical claims being made by Golden Dawn and other extremists, and even by IOM and some Greek academics. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that the total number of immigrants in Greece is as high as its peak, around 2008. Indeed, a realistic estimate would be 700-900,000 in total. Of these, several hundred thousand are (for various reasons) without legal status. It has been claimed by Golden Dawn that Greece has between two and three million immigrants; the IOM has even suggested that there are one million illegal immigrants. This discourse of highly exaggerated numbers is an important aspect of striking fear into the hearts of Greek voters, and is both derived from and reproduces the prevailing climate of racism and xenophobia in Greece.

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10 Translated quotation taken from HRW (2012: 35), itself taken from *Athens News* 19 April 2012. The newspaper has closed and its archives are no longer online.
REFERENCES


