

Greece and the refugee crisis: challenges and opportunities

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A Greek or a European crisis?

- Economic crisis
- Migration crisis
- Representation/institutional crisis
- Identity crisis
- European integration or European dissolution?

The scope and the trends in refugee and migration flows

Migration in Greece has been formed by three distinct waves:

- During the **1990s**, the bulk of migrants came from the **Balkans, Central-Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union** after the collapse of communist regimes.
- During **the last decade**, and particularly since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, Greece has become a transit and destination country for migrants and asylum seekers mainly from **Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East**.
- In **2015-2016**, the refugee flows, **mainly from Syria**, but also from Iraq and Afghanistan, triggered the most significant wave of migration towards Greece, which was seen as a focal transit point to Western Europe (including migrants from Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia).

TCNs in Greece

According to the 2011 national census data:

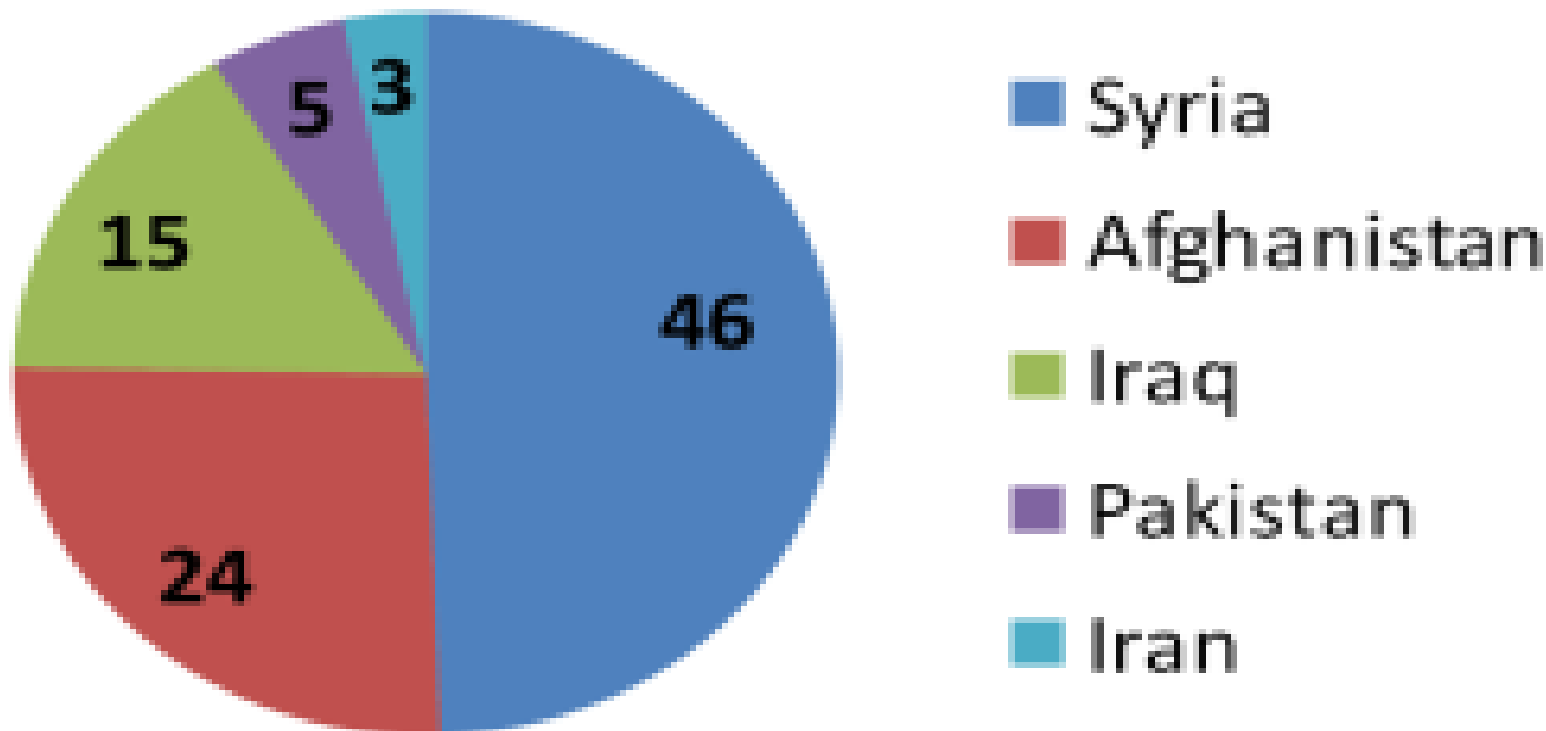
- 713.000 third country nationals and 199.000 EU citizens (non-Greek) living in Greece accounting respectively for 6.5% and 1.8% of the total resident population.
- Albanians: 480.000
- Bulgarians: 75.000
- Romanians: 46.000
- Pakistanis: 34.000
- Georgians: 27.000
- Ukrainians: 17.000
- Poles: 14.000

- * Undocumented migration?

Refugee flows in 2015-2016

- 1.200.000 arrivals on Greek islands
- 7.000 arrivals via land borders
- 50.000 rescues in the sea
- 765 arrests of traffickers
- 62.681 people are temporarily residing in Greece, on the islands and the mainland

Nationality of incoming persons



Applications for asylum status

- 13.197 asylum applications in 2015
- 36.750 asylum applications from 1.1.2016 until 31.10.2016
- Total (as per 31.08.2017): 115.558

Challenges and structural difficulties

- The ongoing – seventh consecutive year – economic crisis in Greece has had a significant impact.
- According to 2016 OECD data since 2009, material conditions for people in Greece have declined significantly:
- Average household net adjusted disposable income per capita **decreased by 31.6% and average earnings dropped by 15.6%** in 2013.
- In Greece, labour market insecurity is among the highest of the OECD. The long-term unemployment rate stands at 19.5%, after having increased by **15.6 percentage points between 2009 and 2014, and is today the highest in the OECD.**

Challenges and structural difficulties

- The significant increase of poverty and destitute people stretches the capacities of the welfare services. The number of people at risk of exclusion increased due to unemployment and the dramatic decline of salaries, pensions and family incomes. As a result, the number of beneficiaries of social services and benefits of social protection grew whilst resources were reduced.

According to a survey conducted by DIANEOSIS:

- the percentage of relative poverty in Greece was 21.9% in 2011, 23.2% in 2012, 23.6% in 2013, 22.1% in 2014 and 23.2 in 2015
- the percentage of extreme poverty for the same period was 8.9% in 2011, 14.3% in 2012, 17.1 in 2013, 15.7% in 2014 and 15% in 2015

Challenges and structural difficulties

- The poor state of the market and the extremely high levels of unemployment (currently 23% for the general population, 44.2% for young people under 25 years old) along with continuous austerity programs are putting pressure on systems already under strain and make refugees appearing as competing for scarce jobs and resources with existing vulnerable groups.

Challenges and structural difficulties

- The rise of far-right are not conducive to integration but rather represent a rejection of multiculturalism. The Golden Dawn - a fringe neo-Nazi active since the 1980s - party rejection of multiculturalism. The Golden Dawn - a fringe neo-Nazi active since the 1980s - party rose to prominence in 2012 in the midst of the economic crisis, **when the party got 7% of the popular vote in national elections (in comparison to 0.9% in 2009).**
- As far as national public opinion is concerned, according to the survey conducted by Dianeosis on wide array of public attitudes in Greece published in 2017, the public seemed to hold **rather negative views** on a range of integration indicators:
- **88.3%** of respondents think that the number of migrants in the country is excessively high; **64.4%** think that the presence of migrants in the country increases criminality, while **58%** think that the presence of migrants in the country increases unemployment.

Challenges and structural difficulties

- However, according to the Athens Observatory for Refugees and Migrants survey of public attitudes of the Municipality of Athens on refugees, also published in 2017, a slightly different picture emerges.
- Responses were **more positive on a number of indicators**:
- **72%** of respondents think that the refugees' children must have access to national education (must attend school), **44%** think that the refugees constitute a threat for the Greek society, whereas **41%** think that they do not.

Challenges and structural difficulties

- Reluctance of refugees to integrate: according the anecdotal evidence from those working closely with refugees and asylum seekers – national and municipal agencies, NGOs and international NGOs – the vast majority does not desire to stay in Greece.
- The 2017 census of the refugee population conducted the Athens Observatory for Refugees and Migrants, only 8% of the heads of family interviewed intend to stay in Greece, whereas 34% aim to return to the country of origin.
- Of the rest, 61% desire to go to Germany, 6% to Sweden, 4% to Switzerland, 4% to the Netherlands, 3% to the UK and 3% to France. This significant reluctance impedes both short-term as well as long-term integration: few are willing to learn the Greek language whilst many do not see the point of their children attending school.

Levels of dependence

- According to SOLIDARITY NOW data, refugees in Greece appear to have an **increased level of dependency** which, for the time being, impedes their integration into Greek society. Indicatively:
 - **73.68%** of asylum seekers and refugees report that they depend on NGOs assistance to pay rent for their families.
 - **72.19%** report that their primary source of income derives from assistance by NGOs and international organisations.
 - **32%** of those stating that they have found employment work in the shadow labour market.

Levels of dependence

- However, some positive signs have started to appear as far as **pre-integration** is concerned. Indicatively:
- **28.49%** report that they have documentation proving educational achievements that could facilitate their access to the labour market
- **52%** of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection have a tax registration number and a Social Security Number.

Gaps in training needs

Greek language

- Language classes take place sporadically and often not beyond the basic/survival level. The lack of centrally coordinated and overviewed language skills courses undermines short as well as long-term opportunities of integration, whether in the area of education and vocational training or the area of employment as well as interaction with the host community.
- This was not only underlined by our professional and refugee interviewees, but it is also highlighted in the special edition of refugee voices on integration produced by 'In the Loop' where the language of the host country came up first as a key enabler to do all the other things necessary to start a life.

Gaps in training needs

- Cultural orientation

Cultural orientation emerged as an important need from our interviews with professional and refugee women alike.

Knowledge about the country's profile – from habits and rules of sociability to national celebrations and food, as well as knowledge about the cultural landscape of a large city (especially for those who come from a non-urban background) emerged as **necessary steps in understanding the new context and in becoming confident in developing initial bonds with the host community.**

Gaps in training needs

Civic and legal education

- Legal education with regards to human, social and political rights is important as refugees often come from countries with different political and cultural traditions. In this context, what is of particular significance is education about the rights of women.
- In the context of sexual and gender-based violence that many refugee women faced in their journey to Europe and within their current accommodation as explained above, and in the context that a number of women has recourse to survival sex, it is of paramount importance to offer not only support but structured training with regards to the legal tools and available options in Greece to protect themselves from violence.

Gaps in training needs

Vocational training

- Vocational training following consultation with the relevant authorities as far as the labour market needs in Greece is concerned is also necessary for future integration. Given the state of the economy and the high rates of unemployment in Greece, any planning for vocational training must be carefully designed so as to give realistic possibilities of future employment.
- The provision of IT skills is also of outmost importance, given the centrality of the internet in contemporary forms of job-seeking.

Gaps in training needs

Violent radicalization awareness

- Given the rise of violent radicalization in Europe and the increased vulnerability of insufficiently integrated or marginalized individuals to radicalization that may lead to violence, training on radicalization awareness (recognizing the indicators of the radicalization process) and knowledge of how to act upon such eventuality could help the families, the community and the host society to prevent violent acts and the ensuing polarization which may lead to phenomena of prejudice and bigotry against the refugee, migrant of Muslim community.

In conclusion

- Long term strategy for refugees' integration
- Developing integration skill-set
- Settling and desire to stay
- European synergies
- Fight against racism, hate speech, intolerance, Islamophobia
- Fight against Islamist violent extremism
- Economic development and the job market