



LivingTogether Programme

Migrant Cities Research:

ATHENS

NOVEMBER 2008

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Part 1. Introduction

City profile and migration patterns

Athens, one of the most diverse European metropolises, is a Mediterranean megacity, an urban complex of almost 4 million inhabitants and the capital city of a country with total of 11 million residents. The cycles of history have engraved the experiences of migration on the city's identity, which has been transformed and reshaped many times as a multi-ethnic and multicultural social space of dialogue and contrasts.

Most recently, at the turn of the 21st century, new migrations are leading to another transformation of the city and to the emergence of new networks and ways of belonging. Almost half of the people living in Greece live in the wider Athens area, a trend which has emerged and been shaped through consecutive waves of incoming, internal and outgoing migration. According to the most recent census (2001) almost half of these immigrants have followed the historical trend and settled in or near the capital.

To put the lie to the myth of Greece having only recently become a host country, we see that the history of migration in Greece has left its mark on the turbulent growth of metropolitan Athens.

As historical bibliography suggests, during the 19th and 20th centuries foreign workers constituted a considerable proportion of the Athens workforce. About ten per cent of the 1917 population were migrant workers,¹ and a multi-ethnic presence of Turks, French, Maltese, and Italian immigrant workers was reported during the 19th century.

The early and mid 20th century was marked, and its public space and social relations reconfigured, by the settlement of refugees (particularly from Asia Minor) and immigrants, and through internal rural migration and urbanism.

Migration into Athens in the late 20th century featured large numbers of immigrants from neighbouring countries, notably Albanians, who now constitute more than half the migrants living in the capital. Athens attracted more migrants than any other Greek city, and has by far the greatest

¹ As Zolotas (1926) indicates, as reported by Parsanoglou D. (forthcoming KEMO series publications – paper at the ten years KEMO conference, December 2006).

presence of immigrants (17 per cent)², giving life to a new and dynamic multicultural and multi-ethnic urban space. This recent transformation of Athens through migration has not, however, led to the formation of ghettos, although there are some forms of segregation and socio-economic inequalities on a small spatial scale. Immigrants often live in basements or abandoned and old apartments, regenerating the housing market. The central districts of Patisia, Kypseli and Pagkrati are identified by estate agents as 'preferred by immigrants', due to the old, and run-down apartments available.

The settlement and integration of immigrants in the Athens area is largely affected by the demand for labour. At the beginning of the century and prior to the 2004 Olympic Games there was an increased demand for construction workers, and for women to be employed in cleaning and domestic care in the Athens area. The demand for unskilled labourers was high in the years before the Olympics to work on the many new major public works.

According to the Athens Chamber of Commerce figures each ethnic group provides specialists and is strongly represented in specific types of business, and Albanians seem to be the most active in starting a business. Considering the small size of the Asian community, the highly disproportionate number of ethnic businesses run by Asians in Athens (i.e. Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Indians in the catering sector) indicates that they are 'the most entrepreneurial' (Triantadyllifou, 2008). Recent research also shows that about 50 per cent of the Chinese community are self-employed businessmen (Tonchev, 2007).

Urbanists observe significant differences in housing patterns among immigrants of different nationalities. For example, Albanian nationals, who constitute the largest proportion of the total immigrant population, appear to share residential space with Greeks. They speak Greek fluently, indeed their Balkan historical background is full of periods of assimilation since the formation of the expanding Greek national state. On the other hand, immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe and from less developed Asian and African countries tend to concentrate in smaller communities, especially in the historical centre and in the outer zone of peripheral Attica's sprawling urban areas, where unskilled foreign workers settle.

The high percentage of immigrants from its cultural and territorial neighbour, Albania, sets Athens apart in relation to other much more multi-ethnic European cities which have a more distinct and diverse migrant presence.

² According to MMO-UEHR IMEPO survey (2004), the greatest cluster of non-EU immigrant population is in the Municipality of Athens – some 132,000 immigrants, 17 per cent of local population.

While segregation and ghettos are not the rule, ethnic clusters of immigrant workers often live and work in penury with little recourse to civil rights.

Athens is gradually “turning inside out” as long as the suburbs become compact and the city expands to peri-urban areas. Also Athens is “turning outside-in”, as the centre draws in its zone the populations that were once considered “elsewhere”(Arapoglou, 2006)

Research conducted by the Athens Polytechnic suggests that immigrants, by renting or purchasing basement or lower floors in older buildings that would otherwise remain vacant, have contributed to a major boost of the run-down, inner city neighbourhoods of Athens and to the previously stagnating property market. It is not in neighbourhoods that segregation as such is evident, but in the specific floors of the apartments they rent or purchase. Ghettos in the sense of isolation and separation from nationals do not seem to exist in Athens. *‘This is what sets Athens apart from other European cities.’³*

Migration policy and regularisation

A contradiction in the ways immigrants have settled in the city, and are redefining its social spaces is to be found in the migration policy and legislation which in the last 15 years has defined the state’s answer to the new migration phenomenon.

The idea of migration as a ‘historical incident’ in Greece has met with intolerant and negative public attitudes, often reinforced by artificial ‘crime waves’ reported in the media, and by the lack of migration policy and regularisation programmes. Even after two major legalisation programmes (2001, 2005) and today it is estimated that half the immigrants are living in Greece illegally (roughly 600,000 out of 1.25 million). Although there is no specific research on different migration patterns in Athens, The most recent census shows that while 47.26 per cent of the immigrant population live in Athens, they hold only 37.36 per cent of the valid residence permits, revealing a pattern of irregularity and fragile social links. This is an important aspect in relation to the predominant migration pattern, which aspires to

³ Dina Vaiou, Fotini Tounta (2007), unpublished research conducted by the Athens Polytechnic University. Reported by: Kathy Tziliivakis, *Immigrants as urban saviours*, New research suggests that immigration is a key component of neighbourhood transformation and urban renewal in Athens, Article code: C13241A141, In: *Athens News* (29 June 2007). According to the researchers, immigrants have changed the face of Athens, introducing diversity and new businesses in previously abandoned neighbourhoods. The ethnic clusters mapped by the research are not considered ghettos because immigrants are not isolated from the mainstream city.

long-term settlement. In most cases immigrants choose to stay 'for life' in Greece.

To those living and working legally, one should add the numbers of those arrested for remaining illegally and deported or ordered to leave the country within 30 days. Studies suggest that the majority 'disappear' into the immigrant networks and informal labour market of Athens and Thessaloniki despite their deportation orders. (Triantadyllifou, 2008)

The number of applications during regularisation programmes shows the immigrants' desire to regularise their status in the country. In 2007 the Athens Labour Centre denounced the abuse of immigrants who had submitted applications at the local municipal offices without fulfilling the legal requirements. In return they received a receipt marked 'legal requirements not fulfilled'. In spite of the fact that these applications were rejected, immigrants were misled into submitting them and paying the non-refundable 150-euro fee. They were led to believe that such applications, even once rejected, may constitute proof of their present residence in the country, a legal basis for a future regularisation programme.

Integration policy and public attitudes

A major research project regarding a comparative study of the integration policies throughout the EU, MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index)⁴ showed Greece among the countries with the least favourable migrant integration policies in the EU. Greece ranks at the bottom of the table in citizenship, political participation, employment and family reunion policies.

The lack of migration policies mostly affects the so-called second generation of immigrants, who have no preferential access to citizenship – even if born in Greece – and therefore, once adults, suffer the same insecure status as their parents. This contradiction between migration legislation and policy and the ongoing integration processes within Greek society causes tension, anxiety, and uncertainty that is increasingly noticeable in the media discussion of this paradox – particularly in Athens's main national circulation newspapers.

4 www.integrationindex.eu. MIPEX is produced by a consortium of 25 organisations. Associate partners for Greece are the Hellenic League for Human Rights and the Greek Ombudsman. MIPEX is led by the British Council and Migration Policy Group (MPG). MIPEX produced a comparative analysis of 140 indicators of legislation and policy concerning the immigrants' integration in six areas: access to the labour market, long term residence, family reunion, nationality, political participation and anti-discrimination.

Media discourse on migration has changed over time, more or less reflecting the attitudes of the wider public and to some extent state policies in managing migration.

In the early 1990s when migration was considered an unwanted temporary condition, public attitudes were largely negative, xenophobic and discriminatory, apparently leading to exclusion. Immigrants were not even conceded the term 'migrant', which was reserved for Greek emigrants living abroad who had been positively assessed. The main terms used were 'non-nationals' (*'allogapoi'*), or 'clandestines' (*'lathrometanastes'*).

At the turn of the century, after the first regularisation programme, the successful development of the Greek economy and the Olympic Games, in which immigrants played a major positive role, attitudes and the public rhetoric shifted to a utilitarian acceptance of the 'economic migrants', who therefore became more visible and who are now recognised as making a positive contribution to Greek society.

However, negative or defensive views towards migration persist, as recent surveys indicate (Public Issue-IMEPO, 2008). More than half the population considers that migration is damaging Greece, mainly because it threatens to alter the ethnic identity of Greeks (48 per cent) and causes an increase in crime rates (71 per cent). Only 23 per cent of Greek nationals think that migration is beneficial. What is revealing however, are the positive attitudes towards migrants expressed by the younger generation (aged 18–34) and by people with higher education, in sharp contrast to the rest of the sample.

Today, after 18 years of intense migration experience - with a very high percentage in Athens, public discourse is highlighting the issue of those young immigrants either born in the country or who came to the country as minors. The dynamics developed on a social and political level are closely linked to a two-sided phenomenon of a 'de facto' migrant integration and a sense of belonging and participating in the city.

Racism, discrimination and integration

Racist incidents and violence against immigrants are increasing in numbers and in severity. In 2007 the Greek National Focal Point on Racism and Xenophobia reported a steep increase of attacks by far-right groups dressed in military clothes against the homes of – mainly Pakistani – immigrants in the area between Athens, Piraeus and Aegaleo, as well as an increase in police violence towards immigrants. The most notable event, shown by the media

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worldwide, was a mobile telephone video showing the abuse and humiliating treatment of two immigrants arrested by police officers at the Omonia police station in central Athens in summer 2006. During the same period, police officers repeatedly entered mosques unannounced during Ramadan prayer, walking in without a warrant and showing disrespect by not taking their shoes off, in order to carry out unsuccessful drug raids.⁵

Furthermore, while state-guided good practices are hard to find, one of the most positive and promising actions of multicultural education in Greece is being abolished through the removal of the headmaster concerned, following a controversial evaluation procedure. The 132nd elementary school in Athens is not officially characterised as 'intercultural' despite the fact that more than 70 per cent of the pupil population is migrant, and whose mother tongue is not Greek. For five years teachers of this school had been implementing voluntarily a wide multicultural educational programme,⁶ which brought remarkable results.⁷

On the other hand, some organisations, including self-organised groups of immigrants, as well as good intercultural dialogue and participation practices are blooming and multiplying in the Greek capital. The Greek Forum of Migrants, based in Athens, with the support of various Greek institutions and NGOs has legal statutory status and claims to represent immigrants in migration policies. Two second generation grass-roots movements ('Racism from the Cradle' and 'secondgeneration.gr') demand full participation and political rights.

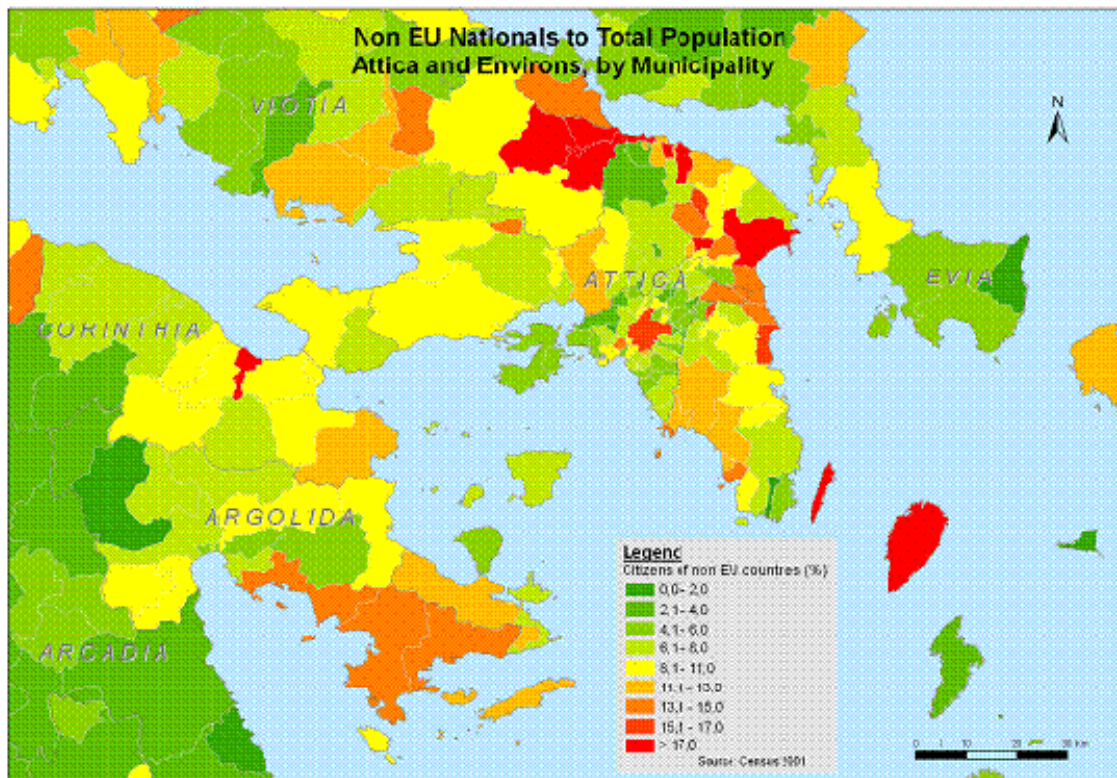
After almost two decades of living together in an Athens under the threat of segregation, immigrants and nationals are meeting and shaping a 'de facto' integration process.

The charts below are reproduced from external sources.

5 HLHR-KEMO press release on the rise of racist violence in Greece (15.10.2007), www.hlhr.gr/press/10-2007-RAC-Attacks%20HLHR-%CA%C5%CC%CF.pdf.

6 Among others, mother tongues (Albanian and Arabic) were taught to pupils and Greek was taught to parents, while notifications were made also in Albanian and English

7 T. Kostopoulos, D. Psaras, et. al., Η γλώσσα της επικοινωνίας, In: Eleftherotypia (23.06.2007) www.enet.gr/online/online_fpage_text/dt=23.06.2007,id=87720660,71449940,94234708



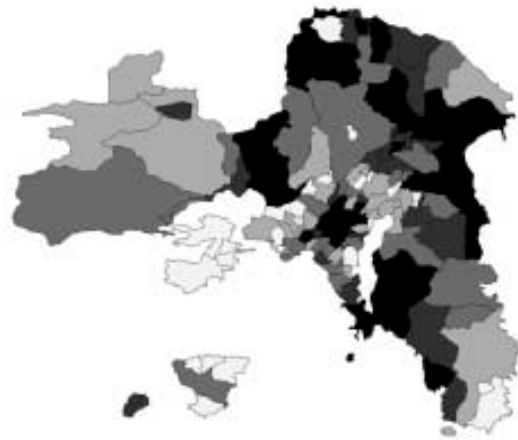
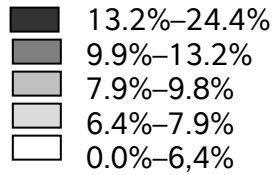
Reproduced with permission.

From: Mediterranean Migration Observatory UEHR, (2004), *A study conducted for IMEΠO [Migration Policy Institute], Greece by Statistical data on immigrants in Greece: An analytic study of available data and recommendations for conformity with European Union standards*, Panteion University.

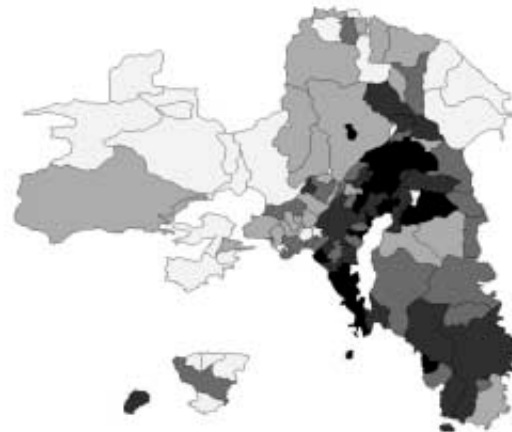
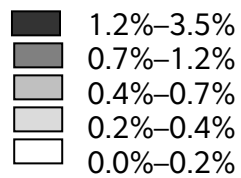
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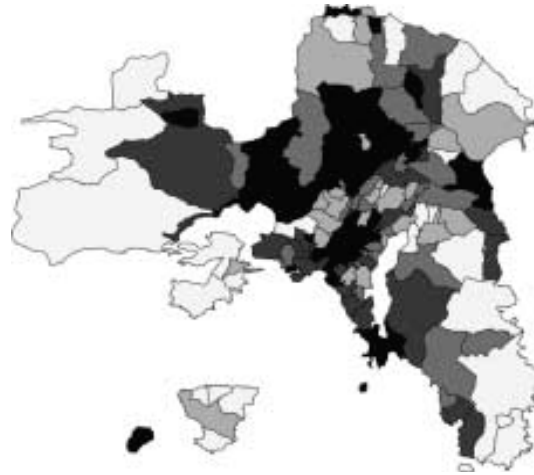
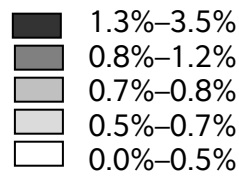
Percentage of foreign nationals in the total population



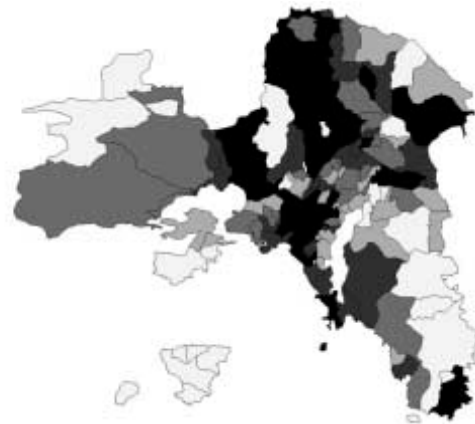
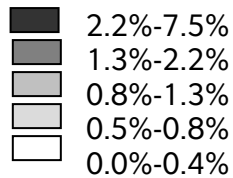
Percentage of nationals from developed countries in the total population



Percentage of nationals from Central and Eastern European countries in the total population



Percentage of nationals from less developed countries in the total population



From: Arapoglou V. (2006), *Immigration, segregation and urban development in Athens: the relevance of the debate for southern European metropolises*, in: *The Greek Review of Social Research*, special issue 121, Ca 2006, pp.11–38. *Reproduced with permission*

Part 2. Introducing ten migrants

1. Artemis



Name: Artemis

Sex: Female

Age: 52

Nationality: Albanian

Occupation: Literature teacher, migrant rights activist

Artemis grew up in Fieri, a place with ancient ruins and an all-pervading sense of history. When she saw the famous ancient monuments of Athens, she felt on familiar ground and she felt moved by them, especially as her family has Greek roots. *'Athens is a big city, a difficult city,'* she said to herself, *'but how do all those people get about? There must be a way and I must find it!'* Soon she learned how to move around the city, to discover it and to feel comfortable. Even today, when she is on a bus, she takes a map of Greece

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out of her bag and studies it. *'I take it out and I look at it and I want to learn as much as I can.'*

Artemis often recalls her life in Albania – Fieri, where she was raised and Tirana, where she lived most of her adulthood. She taught literature at school. One day she was leaving in a rush because her son, who was then very little, was ill. She had no telephone and was anxious. But she needed to get something to cheer him up, a little gift. Some bright, beautiful oranges caught her eye as she passed a grocery store. Quickly she picked three.

Those three oranges cost as much as my daily wage. So I put them down and I left, and then I said to myself, 'If something happens today, I will remember these oranges for the rest of my life'. So I went back and I got them.

She talks about the scarcity of goods, and her inability to make a decent living or to offer opportunities to her children. In 1992, not long after that incident, the family migrated to Greece.

For the first decade they lived in Salonica.

I liked it there. It was more romantic in a way, we raised our children near the beautiful sea it was like a dream.

But as the children were growing up, they decided to move to Athens. Artemis led the way, coming to Athens first in order to get a job and a home. Since then, they have lived in three different neighbourhoods.

Each new house is a new experience for a migrant, an experience of integration into the wider society.

She likes the little alleyways with benches that you find all over the city, where people sit for a bit in order to find shade or to rest. When she thinks about how she relates to the local community however, she believes that it is not yet feasible to make sustainable friendships. Necessity or loneliness may change things. Three years ago, they settled in a larger apartment in Gyzi, near other family members who also live in Greece.

It's good to live close by. We are there for each other.

Yet she has no other relations in the neighbourhood. As an activist for migrant rights, she spends most of her time at her office in the centre of Athens, where she is in constant touch with migrants of many nationalities

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who live in Athens. Once she wrote an article about her disappointment when, while strolling around the decorated central square, she heard recorded Christmas wishes in many languages, but not in Albanian. She regrets writing that, she now says, *'because I made a private feeling public, and made more people feel the bitterness.'* Some things, she believes, are better left unsaid. She herself chooses to see the glass as half-full, not half-empty. Despite the difficulties and the obstacles that she constantly has to confront, she has always had the support of her husband, a former university professor of literature and well-known activist, and he also helps in the process of integration. Her daughter has studied literature at university and has also graduated from drama school. Her son is preparing for his postgraduate studies in economics in the UK. Apart from her children's well-being, Artemis dreams of creating an umbrella organisation that will bring together all the migrant women's networks and associations.

Now, when she returns to Albania on visits, she feels more and more like a stranger.

They look at you in that way... As if you have betrayed them.

2. Ava



Name: Ava
Sex: Female
Age: 38
Nationality: Albanian
Occupation: Sociologist, PhD candidate

Ava came to Greece on her own in 1992, when she was 22. She had just graduated in music and education. Recently, she bought a house in the area where she first lived: Nikaia, the old refugee neighbourhood of Athens, which housed the Greeks of Asia Minor when they arrived after the political upheavals of 1922. She has lived and worked in various parts of the city, she has had two children, a marriage and a divorce, and she has received the professional recognition that comes from hard work. Soon she will be finishing her doctoral dissertation on migration.

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Although her office is in central Athens and she commutes daily by motorbike, she remembers very fondly the port of Piraeus, where she had her first job as a clerk in a shipping company.

I liked it very much. And the people were very good with me, wherever I went, you know, at the banks, everywhere. Perhaps because I was the first Albanian that they encountered, and I did all the office transactions, handling large sums of money, it made them curious and they expressed a lot of interest. I still like Piraeus. There is a beauty in the sea, I don't know, in the people. Perhaps it's the sense of neighbourhoods. I still go back there.

Yet, out of all the areas where she has stayed, she thinks that the one that increased her sense of belonging was Aghia Varvara, a district with a high concentration of Roma population. Maybe because of that, the local community was much more open to difference and oriented towards integration.

When you have a different social group living beside you, and you have learned to live with them, to coexist with difference, you deal with things in a different way. You see things as they are in their real dimension. You don't judge, nor do you keep a distance. So there was a peculiar situation, a different mentality. In every class in my children's school, there were Roma kids. And the locals have fully accepted that. And the Roma too. So there is a sense of openness, of hospitality. You don't feel the difference.

She felt like a very active and well-appreciated member of the community. Her children have maintained friendships made there and they often return.

Ava's son is 15 and her daughter 13. There is no question about their own identity, she says.

They feel absolutely Greek. Their father is Greek, they were born here, they were raised here, they go to school here, and their friends are here.

Sometimes Ava reminisces about her first period in Athens. She recalls both the good and the bad moments. But she chooses to stick to the positive ones, like the first gift she received: a book of Greek and a tape of Maria Callas. But she no longer sings.

No, not any more, not at all. I don't want to sing and to hear myself now, how far from perfect I have become. You know, the voice is like an instrument, you have to practise, to co-ordinate, to train constantly, if you don't, it all goes. So I don't sing, I no longer sing. Well, except once, not so long ago, when we were in the car with the kids. And a friend and her child were there too. And we were driving out of Athens, to Epidavros, having a lot of fun. And they were all urging me to sing, but of course I refused, they insisted I should, and I insisted I shouldn't. And then, when we were there, I sang. And it was beautiful, it just came out, it poured out of me, and it was, I don't know how to describe it, but I think it was almost perfect.

3. Nadia



Name: Nadia
Sex: Female
Age: 32
Nationality: Romanian
Occupation: Personal trainer

Nadia is a personal trainer. She works from seven in the morning until about nine in the evening, often the only break being the time that she spends driving from one place to another. She works at a gym and gives Pilates courses in private. What makes her popular among her clientele is her energy, her dedication to her work, and her bright smile. Nadia will burst into laughter even during the last course of the day. And she will exercise together with her trainees and not just give instructions, playing her music loudly.

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Nadia was born in Romania and went to school there. When her parents divorced and her mother, who was of Greek origin, returned to Greece, she came along and studied physical education at the university. Most of her friends are Greek.

Her Greek is impeccable as she has completed the major part of her education in the country, and her accent does not convey her origins. She does not talk about her origins often. Yet she goes back whenever she has the chance, in order to visit her father who lives there and to spend some time in the country.

I like Bucharest more now than I did when I was younger. It is changing rapidly. And it is beautiful, you know? There are also other places that I haven't been to, like Maramures, up in the mountains, and the more I think about it, the more I'd like to go now. But I wouldn't live there. Never. It makes me feel gloomy. I'd live anywhere in the rest of the world, outside Europe even, but not in Bucharest. The unknown scares me less than what I know. You don't know it, so it doesn't matter anyway.

I like my work a lot, and also the people who I work with. It is important that I have the choice and can work with the people that I like. Usually I work with them for years and I feel comfortable with them and they feel at ease with me. They are friends by now. That's why I never get aggravated and nervous at work, it just feels like play, even when I get exhausted. If I don't like some people, if I don't get on with them, I don't work with them. I have the choice.

I don't get to do much outside work, as I have no time during the day. Only sometimes I like to party till I drop. And at the weekends, I like to go to different places, skiing or swimming, or to see a film.

She likes Athens, she likes the way of life:

It is laid-back, people don't work much, they don't go crazy about careers and all that. They hang around. That's why the city is so lively. Any hour of the day the place is full of people.

Nadia lives on her own in a leafy suburb of Athens, near where she works. Her mother lives nearby. She has been thinking of setting up her own business, something related to sports.

It is not the easiest thing in the world if you are a woman in Greece, but then again I'd like to have something of my own, something that I can

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control. I am not thinking of getting married and all that. I would nonetheless like to have a child. I think I would like that.

But all that could be anywhere else in the world. North America or South America, anywhere. Who knows, maybe that is indeed the land of opportunity. I have no commitments, I can just go anywhere.

4. Christina-Anna



Name: Christina-Anna
Sex: Female
Age: 74
Nationality: American-Greek
Occupation: Retired art teacher

Christina-Anna settled in Greece eight years ago, when she retired. She is of Greek origin but has lived all her life in the United States. She is currently taking a Greek language course twice a week.

Sometimes, it is easier to get by without understanding everything.

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Her husband, a distinguished engineer, who fulfilled his dream to return and live in the house in which he was born, spends most of his time indoors, reading, watching the news and working on his computer. Christina-Anna, on the contrary, is very outgoing and likes to make new acquaintances of different nationalities. Frequently she invites people over to her beautifully overgrown garden: her husband's classmates, their family members, the neighbours, visitors from abroad. Although she always belonged to gourmet clubs and once ran her own catering business, she likes to have an easy life and cook simple food: Cretan salad with rusks, for example, with the tomatoes and herbs that she grows. The Albanian woman who used to help with the house chores won the lottery and moved to America with all her family and with a lot of help and advice from Christina-Anna about where to settle and the children's education. Christina-Anna wakes up early and spends her favourite time of the day on her own, reading, exercising, going through old cookery books and photo albums, and looking after her plants. She has converted the old family house into a place that suits their individual needs, for themselves as well as for their two daughters who have one foot in Greece but travel incessantly.

I don't know what to tell them, whether I should insist on them living here. We may be Greek, but do we have things in common with the people around? And even if I find things in common, would they? I have more to talk about to Joe, the gardener next door who comes from Burma, than to some of the people I meet.

All her life she taught art, from kindergarten to university, before retiring as chairman of a visual arts department. She visits exhibitions and art fairs all over Athens and follows the cultural life of the city. She also keeps in touch with her former students and colleagues through e-mail. At times they visit on their journeys to Europe. She takes them around Athens, 'her Athens', in order to show them the parts of the city that she loves. The First Cemetery for example, one of the most beautiful walks in the city, and also one she feels the locals do not appreciate. Or to the *laiki*, the open-air fruit and vegetable market.

Christina-Anna is an active member of three clubs: one for newcomers, an association for women with links to the US, and a cookery club. She attends cookery courses as well as Greek courses and was preparing to travel to Beijing in order to work for the Olympic Games. She planned to stay there for two months, with her two daughters. 'I am still standing' she says with a mischievous smile.

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5. Felicity



Name: Felicity
Sex: Female
Age: 52
Nationality: Filipina
Occupation: Housekeeper

Felicity is 52 years old and has lived in Athens for the past 15 years. When she left the Philippines her youngest son was two. Her five children grew up with their father. He has a farm there, and looks after the house. Felicity sends them her savings twice a month. The older children have graduated and already work, while the youngest one is about to start college. Her aim is to stay in Greece until his graduation.

When she first arrived, she was looking after a child who was the same age as her youngest son. She sang to him the same lullabies, in Tagalog, her mother tongue. Little Dimitris grew very fond of her, and understood Tagalog more than he understood Greek. At the weekends, when Felicity was away, he used to speak to his parents in Tagalog and they had to phone her in order to translate.

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Felicity now lives in Kolonaki, in the centre of Athens, near the Evangelismos hospital. She shares a ground floor flat with her sister. Every morning she takes the bus to Kifisia, to the house that she looks after. On her way, she stops at the market to buy fresh vegetables and fruit, as well as fish. She knows how to choose well, and her boss, an 80-year-old man, trusts her more than anyone. The last time she went back home, she brought him some of the mangoes from her own garden – you can't compare them with ones that she finds here, their flesh is tastier and aromatic as they ripen on the tree, and they have no fibre at all. She goes back once every two years, for five weeks in all. The remaining 99 weeks, Felicity prepares for that journey. She buys things for her children and her nephews and nieces, for their houses, for their babies. She also collects the things that are given to her, clothes, kitchenware or stuff for the house, and then makes a careful selection. When the time comes to depart, she has something for everyone, a gift which will certainly have some use, and which is chosen with a lot of thought.

Felicity supplements her income with an afternoon job, sewing and mending clothes. She knows where to find the best zips and cotton and buttons, she makes pillows and cushions and can turn almost anything into something else. She does not always charge for this, especially for the children of her friends and acquaintances. She often alters their clothes free, as a gift, something new for something old.

She has many friends here, they do things together especially on Sundays, after church. Felicity has found work for many of the newcomers, members of her extended family or people from her village. She offers her help whenever she can. They are her family away from home.

6. Gabi



Name: Gabi
Sex: Male
Age: 38
Nationality: Romanian
Occupation: Construction worker

Gabi grew up in Romania, in a small town of about 6,000 inhabitants. Some years ago he took the bus from Liusna, with some fellow villagers, to seek a better life.

I wanted to work, to do hard work with my hands, I wanted an opportunity to show what I can do.

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He had a dream: to become someone, to do something worthwhile. It could be anywhere, Italy, Spain or Greece. As long as he would not have to return to his village without having achieved something.

He found work in construction. He did well from the very start. Having studied at a technical school in Romania, he already knew about all the aspects of building a house: electricity, plumbing, tiling, plastering and painting walls. What he did not know, he learned. His eagerness was noticed by the people who hired him, and soon after he gained the trust of an accomplished Greek engineer who appreciated his keenness and rewarded him by letting him use an old storage space that had been long out of use. Gabi lived there for a while at first with his brother, in a small, enclosed corner slightly bigger than a cupboard. He used the rest of the space as a store for all sorts of things that he collected from various jobs that would otherwise have been thrown away: scrap metal, old doors, broken furniture and all kinds of debris, always asking the owner's permission. In his free time, instead of resting, he repaired them. At the same time he saved money. Soon he set up a small group of workers with diverse, complementary skills. They worked with him in the jobs that he undertook. They all came from the same village. Not all of them remained in the group: *'Those who are lazy, who cheat and who do not understand what hard work means have no place beside me'* he says. Those who did remain however, became closer than family, creating familial bonds through weddings and christenings.

My dream is to have my own group, a group of workers that will be able to build a house from scratch. I will get uniforms for them, like the ones in racing cars, you know in Formula 1, and call them 'General Gabi's Group'.

A shrewd businessman, he charges a high fee for himself and for the other members of the group and is familiar with the legislation about insurance, so as not to be cheated or exploited.

But I will do the job quicker than anyone else, and I will never let you down in an emergency.

Gabi bought a house, which he refurbished by himself, and seven years after his arrival in Greece, he brought his whole family from Romania in order to attend his wedding. He is now expecting his second child.

7. Ivan



Name: Ivan
Sex: Male
Age: 67
Nationality: Russian
Occupation: Retired food engineer

Ivan came to Greece from Russia in 1992. His father had Greek origins and they even spoke Greek occasionally at home, near Novorossisk. That is where he grew up, and often visited his grandmother's mountain village in the Caucasus, a place he remembers fondly. When he came to Greece, he brought with him a prefabricated wooden house, which he installed on a plot of land outside Loutsas, a coastal area in the vicinity of Athens. He has a garden in which he cultivates herbs and tomatoes, and even has a lemon-tree, roses and jasmine.

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His wife has stayed in Russia together with their one son. (To their sorrow, their other son died some years ago.) Ivan goes back to see them as often as he can but he considers Greece as his place of residence.

In Russia he went to the technical university and trained as a food engineer. He did well at his work and taught at the same school where he had received his education. For four years he lived in Algeria, working at a local university.

I liked the experience, to be in such a different place. But I prefer it here, I have my roots here, I have relatives.

When he settled in Athens he took a job at one of the big supermarkets, stocking products and helping with the packing. His friendly and polite manner made him popular among the regular customers, who not only asked him for extra help in fetching their shopping but also befriended him in time.

I don't like to see people sad; I want to see them smile. I have known sadness myself, so as far as I can I want to make people smile, to say a good word, to make them think about the good things...

He goes around the neighbourhood pushing the trolley up and down one of the main avenues of Athens, even in rain or the summer heat. He enters houses briefly and discreetly, and he sometimes sits for a bit, just to take a breath and drink a glass of water.

People want to be with him because of his sweet disposition and his pleasant, generous manner but also because of another skill: Ivan knows how to interpret dreams. He learned this from his mother and his grandmother. He listens carefully, and then thinks before explaining. He speaks kindly, softly, avoiding negative remarks and harsh interpretations:

Dreams are nothing to be afraid of; they are like knots which you have to untie gently. And we all have them.

Now that he has retired, he spends most of his time around the house and the garden.

I don't go to the coffee shop, I don't like to hang around waiting for people to come in and chat. I prefer to look after my plants, or to make jams and preserves. Some days I take the bus and go to Kallithea or Menidi where my cousins live, to catch up. Other times I go visit other

friends or my sister in the centre of the city. I enjoy resting and doing what I like. And I want to improve my English now that I have the time.

As Ivan's pension has been delayed due to a bureaucratic error, he has taken his case to the Ombudsman and is waiting for a resolution.

8. Letio



Name: Letio

Sex: Male

Age: 28

Nationality: Albanian

Occupation: Photographer

Letio travelled to Greece with his parents and his elder sister when he was 11. He had been anticipating it for a while: with his friends in their neighbourhood in Tirana, they used to dream about leaving.

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How do you call those flowers that you blow and make a wish? Dandelion clocks, I think they are called. We used to blow them with my friends and make a wish to leave the country. We picked as many as we could and made many wishes, for Greece, for Italy, for other countries...

Meanwhile they played endlessly. He remembers a happy childhood, with his friends all around, and his with parents a lot of the time.

They used to be around a lot. I remember them dressing up and going out to a concert or a play. My mother was very beautiful.

In Athens, they first stayed at a hotel near Omonoia. They had a room on the second floor. Beside them there were other families from Albania. On the first floor ‘there were the girls’ he recalls:

They dressed up in colourful clothes and called me and my sister in as we were passing by, in order to give us sweets and pocket money.

After a while they moved to a neighbourhood with many other immigrants and a lot of children. He became friends with the two young men next door who gave him his first bike: a BMX. The men used to sell bikes and resell them. But he was their friend, and so the bike was a gift. When he rides his brand new motorcycle around the streets of Athens, he often remembers that first BMX bike.

Letio’s memories are vibrating images. So is the world around him: he likes to look at things in his own way, to shuffle them, to put them in a different order and to find what is there behind what can be seen. That is why he became a photographer. He now works at one of the biggest newspapers in the country, but he also photographs migrants and their life in Athens.

Looking through the lens, I try to find the hidden happy side of the migrants’ lives. I want the images to convey a playful disposition, a good mood, which is so often suppressed by their efforts to integrate and, above all, to survive. My aim was to exorcise the sorrow and pain, which usually burden this subject. Many times I went to places and I sat for days watching, not taking any pictures, so that I became familiar to these people, to pass unnoticed, to win their trust. I knew, from being in a foreign country, that it is easy to be suspicious. In time and with a smile, I succeeded in getting them to open up more freely, and in becoming relaxed myself.

What was difficult was to look beyond the sad, troubled people who have been hardened by circumstances, and capture what lies beneath in small lettering: their dignity and dynamism. Some of the stolen glances were also the greatest affirmation of what I know exists there. This is maybe one facet unscathed by the changes which result from migration, which erases the the months or years. It is a journey in time, an excavation into what these people were in their past without bloodshed, when they were in their own 'home', before they came here.

9. Dilani



Name: Dilani
Sex: Female
Age: 34
Nationality: Sri Lankan
Occupation: Nanny

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Dilani left Sri Lanka after her home was set on fire during the civil strife. She was 19, and she was the only one in her family who survived. She embarked on a boat without knowing the destination, with a little money given to her by a relative, and with major burns all over her body. She believed that the fire that had deprived her of her past would also deprive her of a future and the ability to ever bear a child.

The boat took her to the port of Basra, in Iraq. She lived an uprooted life there, and in Baghdad, for over a decade. In 2002 she married another displaced person, a man of African origin. A year later she found herself in the port of Piraeus, six months pregnant, escaping from the war in search of a safer place. On the last day of that year she gave birth to Agnes. She received aid from Médecins du Monde, and during the final months of her pregnancy she found shelter at the hostel of the Greek Council for Refugees until it was closed down.

My name is Dilani. Why should I tell my story? So many others have been through more. So many have not survived. At least I am alive, I am here, I have my child, my home. A few days ago 31 Ethiopians died. They drowned. They were trying to make a crossing in a plastic dinghy. But they drowned in the sea. I am from Sri Lanka. I speak Sinhala. I am a Christian Catholic.

She narrates a story of displacements that brought her to Greece, for reasons beyond her control:

When we finally reached Piraeus, they told us where we were. We left the harbour carefully so that the police wouldn't see us. We didn't bid farewell nor did we ever see the others again. We walked through the narrow streets until I saw a pregnant woman. I approached her and made a sign, putting my hand to my mouth, that I was hungry. She was Russian. She took us to her house, gave us food, juice for me to drink, offered me some of her clothes, and I had a bath. Then she put us in a taxi and sent us to Pedion Areos where she'd heard there were other Africans; Frederick could ask them for help. We stayed there for the first few days. On the benches. I would buy a tomato, bread and a tin of sardines or tuna and we would eat. Thankfully there was a lot of water. This is where I felt the baby move for the first time.

Dilani was not granted asylum, but she acquired legal documents and now lives and works in Athens as a nanny and housekeeper. She lives in Kypseli with her husband and child. They both save money in order to send Agnes to

a private, anglophone kindergarden. She plans to move however, when she can afford to:

I want to find a house near Alexandra's park. That's the first place I know in Greece, that's where I want to live.

She sometimes meets her compatriots, particularly in the ethnic food stores that she regularly visits, and has managed through them to re-establish a connection with her country. Last year, she visited her village with her husband and child. Other than her daughter's education, her main concern is to look after her relatives there. They speak on the phone regularly, via a cheap network card. In her free time, she walks around the city gathering gifts and sweets to send to them. Eventually, she hopes to manage to buy a small plot of land near the house where she once lived.

10. Louise



Name: Louise
Sex: Female
Age: 40
Nationality: Nigerian
Occupation: Assistant chef, activist

Louise is a 40-year-old woman from Nigeria, who came to Athens in 1994. She lives with her husband and two children. She works as a chef's assistant in a restaurant. As her employment is not steady, she sometimes works as a nanny. Cooking is her passion and her childhood dream. Her mother ran a small catering business in Nigeria, and ever since then, Louise has seen herself doing this as well. She feels that she learned all the tricks of the trade when she was young. With her education at a cookery school and the further

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studies that she would like to pursue, she is convinced that she could really succeed.

I'd open up a small café somewhere in the centre and make my own special food. Or even run a catering business by myself. I can make beautiful pies, and all the vegetables you know in ways that you cannot even imagine. And yam, and plantains. And also I love to bake cakes. The glazing I do is nothing like you find in pastry shops. And I make everything from scratch.

Her face lightens up at the sound of all the ingredients, exotic or ordinary. As she describes what she can make with her hands her mouth is filled with joy.

I also know how to cook Greek food, of course. One day, when I go back I will be able to say I went there and learned all that and here are all my qualifications. But, oh, all the African stuff that I know how to make...

Louise is also a founding member as well as the president of the Nigerian Women's Organization, representing the women of one of the biggest African communities in Greece. Together with a small group of active women of the same origin, and with little support from elsewhere, they aim to give women from their country a voice. They organise events and workshops for them, they participate in campaigns, especially for children's rights, they do charity work, support an orphanage in Nigeria and also work with human trafficking victims. She refers to the organisation as:

Something that was formed to enable the voice of women to be heard. Because we didn't have a centre where you could be with women. There was no organisation for the women. So it was as if the women were being cut off.

Despite the criticism that she has received, she believes that in order to succeed, you have to fight, you have to be committed, and you have to be open:

You can never be right. When you are dealing with things, you learn, you learn to keep an open mind. To listen to everybody and to reach a common agreement. You don't trick others to behave like 'I own you, I own your reasoning', no, you don't do that, it does not work. And we are calling out loud: We are women, if we want to decide things as women, I mean, give us a break, give us a break.

In a way, some African men have the feeling that the wives will talk back to them if they come with us, claim rights and all that. So they don't want them to come to us. But they don't realise that a woman needs her freedom, a woman needs to be open, to do right, to do something. And they are like, 'don't go here, don't do that'. They think that their women get bad information and influence from the others. So they fear that and they don't understand and it stops them from allowing their women to come to the organisation.

Yes. But I must say that we have gained ground with our people. They trust the women in this organisation now. Because they know that we really are doing the job, and we fight for the rights of the children, we are there, we don't hesitate to be there and we don't support things that are not right. They know that. They know that. So they really respect us a lot. We gained their respect. So where we have a problem is really convincing some women to attend. But I think the time will come for that. The time will come for that. Because we go along, and they see what we are doing. And then they will come. They will come. So we are not so much in a hurry. The time will come. And some things happen slowly.

And you know, it has really helped me, in organising myself and these women, to think about projects that I never thought I could do on my own.

Part 3. Analysis

3.1. Legal status, protection and dealing with authorities

The burden of illegal status and the desire for integration

One of the first issues to emerge in a conversation with immigrants in Athens is their legal status; the key word being 'regularisation'.

Legal status is a frequent issue of importance for migrants who have been resident in Athens for many years – even in the case of those born in the country. Hence integration and participation are often merely theoretical concepts compared to securing the regularisation of residence status. In the past, this was mainly due to the deregulated legal framework, whereas today it is attributed to rigid and inefficient migration policies.

The burden of illegal status and the effort to live productively despite the fear of arrest and deportation marks the migrants' experience deeply and – as they eloquently confide – *'haunts them in their dreams'* – even after they have managed to settle permanently and legally in the country. The frequent illegal pattern of migration results from the fact that most immigrants are either 'overstayers'; or they do not manage to retain legal residence status because the rigid migration system does not respond either to their real needs or to that of the host Greek society. In fact, illegal or 'suspended' status is a condition that migrants may easily fall into once the migration management system and rules fail to secure their continuity of legal status. Most of the time residence permits are issued after their formal expiry date. But strict rules and heavy requirements often make it impossible to renew this legal residence status. Most immigrants are holders of expired permits or of certificates that they submitted on application for the resident permit. With this certification they are allowed to travel only to their countries of origin and only during Christmas, Easter and summer vacations, as prescribed by ministerial decisions.

Most migrants entered the country either by crossing the border illegally, or by overstaying after the expiry of a tourist or short-term visa. Three regularisation programmes (1997, 2001–03, 2005–07) offered a number of migrants the possibility of regulating their stay in the country. However, fewer than half a million hold a valid residence permit today, while the total migrant population is estimated to be up to 1.25 million people. In late 2007, in the Athens region, 181,000 migrants held a valid residence permit, most of whom (40 per cent) were in the age range of 19–40.

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A subject frequently emerging from our interviews with the migrant community of Athens and stakeholders is the present – and future – situation of the ‘second generation’. The status of the born-in-Greece children of migrants is an important issue and the object of the fundamental claims of migrants in Athens. The integration of children is jeopardised by their limited access to citizenship. The second generation is today the most dynamic element of the migrant community in Athens and Greece, bringing a breath of fresh air in their claims for equal participation in the city and society. Through campaigns and events, through publications and blogs, young migrants claim their own Athens and Greece.⁸ It is also the subject of sensationalist media stories in Athens in the press and on television, which have increased over recent years. These stories are based on the inefficiency of migration policy: young migrants, even those born in the country, fall under the very same rules as their parents or a newly arrived immigrant, once they reach 18. They have to find an employer and a work contract in order not to be deported, and no special path to citizenship is provided for them.

Despite legal measures and restrictions, intercultural dialogue and participation patterns take various forms and the host society is helping to create de facto integration.

Access to services

Health and welfare

One of the most serious shortcomings is the limited access of migrants to health services, making Greece a country with one of the lower rates of medical care in the EU.

There are two reasons for this. First, immigrants without legal status are excluded from the provision of public health, unless they are at immediate risk of loss of life, while their presence at public hospitals is supposed to be reported to the police. In practice, however, in most cases the medical staff of public hospitals do provide medical services, irrespective of the residence status of the patient. Second, migrants are often not aware of the formal access to health services.

⁸ www.kounia.org/ <http://secondgeneration07.blogspot.com/2007/11/second-generation.html>

As a comparative European survey⁹ of Médecins du Monde indicates, irregular immigrants have, in theory, access to health services in 78 per cent of cases in the European countries studied. In Greece, however, only 6.9 per cent of the sample, the lowest among the countries surveyed, has theoretical legal access to medical care, and 84 per cent of the sample, the highest in the survey, is unaware of its rights to health services in general such as the option to perform a free-of-charge HIV test.

Psychological research¹⁰ performed comparatively on a sample of Albanians and Greeks indicated signs of depression and stress produced by the significant difficulties faced by migrants trying to settle in Athens: depression, symptoms of stress and other psychological disorders are on the increase among immigrants. Findings show that 37 per cent of Albanian and 29 per cent of Bulgarian immigrants have symptoms of depression, while the respective percentage for Greeks is only 14.6 per cent. Additionally, the risk of psychological distress in immigrants is greater for those who were older when they migrated to Greece; for those who have fewer children; for those who have less support from family and friends; and for those who describe themselves as being less resilient. Other decisive factors contributing to symptoms of depression were shown to be: fewer years of education, and being female.

Education

Education is a crucial factor for integration and participation of immigrants in Greece and in the wider area of Athens. Most public schools have a large percentage of immigrant children, while a number of voluntary organisations provide language lessons for adult immigrants. Pressure and recommendations by the Greek Ombudsman for Children's Rights to allow migrant children to enrol in schools even though they have no legal residence status, has been one major step towards the smooth integration of migrant children into the Greek education system.

9 Médecins du Monde, First European Observatory on Access to Medical Care (2007), 'Without papers, without health?', European Survey about the access of immigrants without regular stay permit to medical care, (25.September 2007); www.mdmgreece.gr/pdf/070925_paratiritiro.pdf, www.mdmgreece.gr/pdf/070925_full_report.pdf

10 Efrosini Spanea, Anastasia Kalantzi-Azizi (2007), Ψυχοκοινωνικοί παράγοντες, διαδικασία επιπολιτισμού και ψυχική υγεία σε οικονομικούς μετανάστες από την Αλβανία και την Βουλγαρία στην Ελλάδα, Department of Civic status, aliens and migration of Messinia Prefecture, University of Athens. Reported also: Kiriakatiki Eleftherotipia, (29.07.2007) www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=112,dt=29.07.2007,id=1155496

Many teachers and school communities have developed informal yet significant means of integration which have helped overcome the problems of migration legislation.

Most of the complaints to the Ombudsman in defence of immigrant minors are submitted by Greeks and often by their schoolteachers in order to avoid their deportation and bring to an end their detention.

Since 2003, teachers of the 132 Elementary School of Athens have been – on a voluntary basis – implementing a wide multicultural educational programme, which has brought about remarkable results. One such example is that Greek language lessons were offered to migrant parents and Albanian and Arabic languages to the children.

The school is not officially characterised as ‘intercultural’, but it nevertheless provides education for a student population among whom more than 70 per cent do not have Greek as their mother tongue.

The positive outcomes of this self-promoted activity are the nil drop-out rate of migrant children and the avoidance of conflict, bullying and the cessation of the exclusion of newly enrolled migrant pupils. It has enabled parents to communicate with teachers and to participate in the school’s community and activities.

However, this excellent practice, instead of being replicated by other schools in Athens, has been abolished. This informal, yet highly successful experiment is being demolished in the same way as it was created: informally. The new headmaster has abolished all alternative and special activities and initiatives, which has resulted in great tensions and media exposure.

Housing

You know, for migrants each new place they move into is an experience of integration in the society, wherever they go, it’s a new experience, do you get me? (Artemis, female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

The integration of migrants in Athens through housing and residence patterns is twofold. On one hand, our interviews with migrants and research findings demonstrate that they face discrimination in access to housing – and to higher-quality accommodation and housing infrastructures. On the other hand, Athens seems to be a unique European metropolis where ghettos are not the norm, although segregation trends do exist.

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So my daughter decides that we find a new apartment. She talks on the phone with the landlord, and she tells me, 'mum, you are not going to say a word.'

(Artemis, female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

According to a major 'discrimination testing' survey,¹¹ Albanians face housing discrimination by landlords when they seek to rent. The likelihood of Albanians receiving an invitation to view a property was lower than that for Greeks by 23 per cent in low status areas, followed by 32.4 per cent in medium status areas, and by 41.9 per cent in high status areas.

As soon as we moved in, people were saying that 'an Albanian bought this house'.

(Ava, female, 38, Albanian, sociologist, PhD candidate)

Research based on the 2001 National Census¹² showed that the urban space of Athens is not characterised by visible or 'hard' segregation of immigrants. It pointed out the unequal spatial residential distribution of immigrants and a 'soft' or selective segregation dominant pattern. A research paper¹³ focused on the links between the segregation of immigrants and the processes of urban development in southern European cities with particular emphasis on Athens. The paper concluded that, although Athens can be considered as one of the most pluralistic Southern European metropolises, new forms of centralised and decentralised socio-ethnic segregation have emerged. According to the research, Athens is 'turning outside-in' as the urban centre draws immigrants into its zone.

However, significant differences exist among immigrants of different origin and nationality. Albanian nationals appear to share residential space with Greeks. Given that they constitute the largest proportion of the total immigrant population, their capacity to spread across large city areas contributes to overall low segregation levels. Immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe and from less-developed Asian and African countries tend to be concentrated in smaller communities. The Athens spatial segregation is not defined by different neighbourhoods inhabited by migrants and/or minorities but by a 'horizontal ghetto'. Migrants occupy the least prestigious

11 N. Drydakis (2007), *And the House Goes to... Ethnic Discrimination in the Greek Rental Market*, University of Crete.

12 Vasilis Arapoglou, 'In-group divisions of immigrants in Athens and policies of their management', paper presented at the Minority Group Research Centre's conference (15–17 December 2006) www.kemo.gr

13 Vassilis P. Arapoglou, Immigration, segregation and urban development in Athens: the relevance of the LA debate for southern European Metropolises in: *The Greek Review of Social Research*, special issue 121, Ca 2006, pp.11-38

apartments, namely ground floor and basements, reviving large zones of the old centre that had been abandoned by locals. Although there is no overwhelming level of departure of host citizens, the trend of Athenians to move to the residential suburbs has been accelerated. Migrants have boosted the demand for old apartments in low status areas which provides an economic motive for this trend to continue.

Consumer rights

Whereas in many areas of social life, access to goods and services on the basis of their legal status is a daily struggle, migrants are highly appreciated as bank customers, and a range of services has been developed for them. According to a 2003 bank survey, the number of migrants in Greece has been calculated to be 800,000–1,000,000, with an average annual family income of 12,000 euros. Results of this survey showed an increased degree of consolidation in Greek society: Albanian families possess some 250,000 accounts in Greek banks, with an average deposit of 10,000–15,000 euros. According to the same study, all migrant households have a television and 75 per cent have telephones.¹⁴

Following this successful trend in recent years the banking system has started to provide special services for immigrants, mainly for money transfers and remittances.¹⁵ Therefore, despite the absence of specific anti-discrimination mechanisms, there is an increasing interest in providing some targeted services to immigrants such as bank client services.

Employment

Integration through employment

Informal employment and low wages are another factor for migrant workers without legal status, especially in the industrial, suburban and rural economy of the wider Athens area (Attica). It is also an explanation of their unofficial status in the economy and in their relationship with the state. Very often it is up to them to pay hefty social security contributions in order to legalise their residence. Employers enjoy a tacit amnesty.

A well-publicised incident indicates the spread of the informal employment of migrant workers. In autumn 2007, the Minister of Employment resigned,

14 'Fifty per cent' in: Kathimerini English Edition, 14 September 2004.

15 Tzivilivakis, K. (2004), 'Doing more than moving money for migrants', in: *Athens News*, 17 September 2004.

following the revelations that he had informally employed three Indian domestic workers as domestic workers. They were undeclared and their social security contributions were not paid. The Minister was responsible for the ongoing effort to reform the social security system. These revelations and his resignation triggered extensive public discussion on the precarious conditions of immigrants in employment. No fine was imposed on the ex-minister as required by the migration law.¹⁶

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)¹⁷ a major research project regarding a comparative study of the integration policies throughout EU – indicates that Greece has one of the least favourable policies (25th among the 28 countries compared) concerning immigrants' labour market status. In particular, according to the MIPEX findings, Greek policy for integration of migrants lacks measures encouraging integration, and migrants are only partially secure, since they lose their residence permit if they are unemployed, regardless of the number of years they may have worked in Greece. Moreover, the rights of migrant workers are restricted by rigorous rules on starting a business, changing employer, position or kind of employment, and location.¹⁸

A January 2007 edition of the Eurobarometer¹⁹ indicated that in Greece, illegal immigrants were considered to be significantly active in the undeclared labour market.²⁰ By one of the highest percentages in the EU (67 per cent, second only to Cyprus: 70 per cent), Greeks believe that illegal immigrants are the category most likely to carry out undeclared work.²¹

A Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) survey found that some employers do not treat migrant and Greek workers equally. Employers do not make social security contributions for 3.5 percent of Greeks, whereas 12.9 percent of migrants work uninsured. Furthermore, the average monthly income of a migrant household is 1,538€, significantly lower than that of a Greek family

16 Maria Kagkelidou, Athens News, Scandalous tide claims minister, (21.12.2007),

http://www.athensnews.gr/athweb/nathens.print_unique?e=C&f=13266&m=A05&aa=3&eidos=A

17 www.integrationindex.eu. MIPEX is produced by a consortium of 25 organisations. Associate partners for Greece are the Hellenic League for Human Rights and the Greek Ombudsman. MIPEX is led by the British Council and Migration Policy Group (MPG). For a comprehensive presentation of the comparative results with a specific focus on Greece see www.hlhr.gr – Pavlou M., Miltos (2007), MIPEX 2007 -Presentation Results & Comments for Greece, (16 October 2007), www.hlhr.gr/hlhr-kemo/docs/Pavlou-mipex2007.ppt [EL/EN].

18 see www.hlhr.gr – Pavlou Miltos (2007), MIPEX 2007 -Presentation Results & Comments for Greece, (16.10.2007), <http://www.hlhr.gr/hlhr-kemo/docs/Pavlou-mipex2007.ppt> [EL/EN].

19 Special Eurobarometer 284 – Undeclared work in the European Union (October 2007) Fieldwork: May – June 2007, For Greece the sample was 1000 persons interviewed between 26 May 2007 – 20 June 2007.

20 Special Eurobarometer 284 – Undeclared work in the European Union (October 2007) p.40.

21 Special Eurobarometer 284 – Undeclared work in the European Union (October 2007) p.70.

(approximately 600€ less).²² The same research indicated that immigrant labour increases the Gross National Product by 1.5 per cent.²³

The INE-GSEE has also issued a report²⁴, which shows that the majority (54 per cent), of immigrants who have come to Greece mostly for work purposes feel *personae non gratae*, due to the absence or the breakdown of integration and reception of public policies and services.

And according to opinion surveys, more than half of the employers expressed negative feelings about the presence of immigrants in Greece.²⁵ It is noteworthy that more negative opinions come from those who do not employ immigrants.

Studies also show²⁶ that both limited access and the disadvantaged position of immigrants in the labour market are a consequence of discriminatory treatment by the 'gate keepers', i.e. the public employees who are the chief actors ('migration managers') in the day-to-day implementation of migration law and policies. The research undertaken through fieldwork emphasised mentalities which lead to discrimination or racism.²⁷

An ever increasing number of studies²⁸ show that immigrant workers are at a greater risk of being laid off than are their native counterparts. They also face relatively more exploitation at work and the widespread unwillingness of employers to pay them adequate wages and to provide insurance for them.

Attitude surveys and other research both confirm that public opinion is formed by low immigrant labour costs. The predominant perceptions are that foreign workers are a source of unemployment, of other problems in the labour market in general, and in society as a whole (especially in relation to

22 Kathimerini, Migrant families grow fast, (20.01.2007)
<http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/news/content.asp?aid=79115>.

23 Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) www.imepo.gr.

24 Research by Kritikidis G., in: I.Georgakis, 'One in two feels persona non grata in Greece', 3 January 2005.

25 Research performed by the Athens University – Department of Mass Media, reported in: 'Arnitiki eikona echoun oi ergodotes gia tous xenous ergates' (Employers have a negative image of foreign workers), in: *Eleftherotypia*, 27 September 2004.

26 Getimis, P., Petrinioti, X. (2003) Erevna gia ta provlimata pou antimetopizoun stelechi tou dimosiou stin exypiretisi ton metanaston-palinnostoun-ton-prosfygon (Research on the problems faced by public administration officers in dealing with immigrants-repatriated-refugees), Athens: Institute for Urban Environment and Human Resources, Panteion Athens of University.

27 Psimmenos, I., Kassimati, K. (2003) 'Immigration control pathways: organizational culture and work values of Greek welfare officers.

28 Kasimis, C.; Papadopoulos, A. G.; Zacoboulou, E. (2003), 'Migrants in Rural Greece', *Sociologia Ruralis*; Vol.43; No. 2, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

crime rates). At the same time, research has shown²⁹ that the presence of immigrants has not affected the rate of Greek workers in employment; while Greek women have become more active in the labour market because of migration, since employers tend to prefer hiring women to immigrants. According to the research, throughout the country, with the exception of Attica, migrants suffer higher unemployment rates than Greeks, even though the former are paid lower salaries. Other recent surveys³⁰ on migrants' working conditions confirm that migrants are underpaid and overworked. More than half of immigrants work between 41 and 60 or more hours per week, earning an average of 600 euros per month (only one out of four immigrants earns more than 750 euros per month). Media reports³¹ confirm that the average daily wage for seasonal employment in agriculture is 20–30 euros, in some cases, for example at the tobacco harvest, sometimes reaching the level of 35–40 euros.³²

A survey was conducted by the Athens Labour Centre and other partners under an EQUAL consortium initiative.³³ It showed that immigrant workers employed in the construction sector and at petrol stations appear to be generally satisfied with their working conditions, including their salary, although the average daily wage in the construction sector for legal and illegal immigrants equals about 25 euros and 27 euros respectively. However, 43 per cent of immigrant workers declared they were paid less than their Greek colleagues, although only 20 per cent said that they faced difficulties. 10 per cent declared that they had faced racist verbal attacks in their interactions with their fellow workers. Only 25 per cent of immigrant construction workers are members of a trade union and 77 per cent of the latter are members of a union for the first time.

29 Lianos, Th. (2003) 'Sygxroni metanastefsi stin Ellada: Oikonomiki Dierevnisi' (Contemporary immigration in Greece: Economic Research), in: *Meletes*, Vol.51, Athens: KEPE, p.125.

30 A National Employment Observatory (NFPGR0234) commissioned survey, reported in: Tzilivakis, K. (2004) 'Long hours, little pay', in: *Athens News*, 24 September 2004.

31 Macedonian Press Agency, '60,000 eisagomeni agrotas sti Voria Ellada' (60,000 'imported' agriculture workers in Northern Greece), (7 May 2005), K.Tzilivakis, 'Migrant workers and social (in)security', in: *Athens News*, 18 February 2005.

32 Athens Indymedia, 'Conditions of Employment', (11 March 2005).

33 Kapsalis A., 'Implementation of research to working immigrants concerning the particular characteristics and problems of their employment in the areas of construction, gas stations and clothing', EQUAL initiative for equality and social cohesion, December 2004.

Participation and unionisation

A recent study³⁴ has shown that political parties and trade unions are not interested in immigrant membership and the immigrant participation in trade unions varies from limited to non-existent. The main reasons for this lack of activism appear to be the uncertain legal status of the majority of immigrant workers, their mistrust of the Greek state and its institutions, as well as a lack of personal resources to get involved in any activities apart from paid work.

However, in this context it is noteworthy that some immigrant associations do operate as a network of mechanisms for information, and for the protection and support of immigrant workers in the workplace. An example is one of the longest established immigrant associations, the KASAPI association of Filipino immigrants³⁵ in Athens.

As for the participation of migrant workers in the trade unions, according to the General Confederation of Greek Workers, today some 20 immigrants are administration board members of trade unions. No immigrant appeared as a representative of the respective trade union at the latest Annual GSEE Congress (March 2007).

There is evidence of an increasing awareness of trade unions as to their role in assisting discrimination victims. The Labour Institute of the General Confederation of Workers and its vocational training centre (KEK) implement a number of activities in order to empower migrant and refugee workers to deal with discrimination, and to exercise their labour rights (see section below: 'good practices').

Social security

The repeated regularisation programmes allowed undocumented workers to pay social security contributions and declare their presence in the labour market. However, a general amnesty has been tacitly given to informal economy employers. They are entirely absolved of any obligation to make social security contributions. In this way the invisible economy never comes to light, while immigrant workers are called to pay for the recognition of their work and in order to be allowed to reside legally in the country. In fact, the new Law 3386/2005 provided the same scheme for regularisation of immigrants residing illegally, i.e. through the purchase of social security contributions). Once again, the employers had no obligation to make social

34 Gropas, R. & Triantafyllidou, A., Active and Civic participation of immigrants, POLITIS project, 2005, Athens.

35 Association of Filipino Immigrants in Greece (Kaisahan Samahan G Magranteng Pilipino).

contributions. No different from the preceding laws, this legalisation programme failed to establish any pro-active measures. It provided no particular incentive to employers to make the position of immigrant workers legal nor to help them stay away from the grey economy.

According to data provided by IKA³⁶ (the main social security fund for dependent contract workers) the number of insured foreign workers represents 12.5 per cent of the total number of insured workers, irrespective of nationality. The Albanian nationals constitute 53.9 per cent of the foreign workers. The majority (70.6 per cent) are employed as unskilled and blue-collar workers. According to INE-GSEE (Labour Institute of the National Confederation of Workers),³⁷ the theory that about immigrants saving the social security system is no longer believable, since the immigrant workers appear to be employed for fewer days (monthly average of 14.17 days in relation to 17.64 for Greek workers) and to receive lower salaries.

The Athens Olympic Games and the migrant workers

The speed with which Olympic venues were constructed came at the cost of safety measures and working conditions, especially for immigrants who constituted a large part of the workforce (particularly in construction). Fourteen dead workers, among them eight immigrants, marked the completion of works.³⁸ Issues of bad or precarious working conditions have also been dealt with in a survey performed by the Athens Labour Centre.³⁹

Relationships with the authorities

The police

The circle of the migrant experience in Athens, Greece, starts and ends with the police, as they intervene on the legality of migrants.

In October 2005 the Greek Ombudsman for Children's Rights issued a special report requesting the abolition of detention and deportation of unaccompanied minors for migration law violations and recommending alternative protection measures.

36 According to IKA Statistical Bulletin May 2005 and I. Georgakis, 'Immigrants are 12.5 per cent of the insured at IKA', in: Ta Nea (28 February 2005).

37 Robolis S, Romanias G., Margios V., Hadjivasiloglou I., Actuarial study about IKA – Insurance Fund for salary workers, Labour Institute of the Greek Confederation of Workers (April 2005)

38 Morfonios, N. (2004) 'Rekor tis Olympiadas sta ergatika atychimata' (Record number of work accidents during the Olympic Games preparation), in: Avgi.

39 Athens Labour Centre, EQUAL Survey Report on Construction Migrant Workers.



*Unaccompanied minors in police detention (Athens 2006)
Photo by Miltos Pavlou*

Yet until today, as international institutions and organisations have pointed out, the general practice of the arrest, detention and expulsion of unaccompanied minors is the most acute problem of migrants' relationships with the police second only to the – less numerous – violent incidents of ill-treatment and torture.

In fact, only in 2007, Greece was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights in six cases for ill-treatment of migrants and minorities.

The police is the public authority with which migrants often interact and sometimes fear the most. Racist violence in the past years was marked by the participation of police, border guards or port police officers as perpetrators of almost half of the alleged incidents which were unofficially reported. (HLHR-KEMO, National Focal Point on Racism and Xenophobia)

According to HLHR-KEMO, the National Focal Point on Racism and Xenophobia (RAXEN), 2007 was marked by a dramatic increase of racist crime against migrants (+175 per cent).⁴⁰ Yet, no racist crime has been recorded as such by the police, even when reported widely by the media and unofficial sources. The most indicative example is the YouTube video⁴¹ that showed the torture and humiliation of young immigrants by police officers. The police officers involved were suspended by the public order ministry, while the Athens public prosecutor brought criminal charges against them. The recurrence of such incidents by the police mostly against immigrants over recent years has not led to them being defined as racially motivated crimes, but rather as an issue of police violence in general. Civil society

⁴⁰ www.hlhr.gr/press/PR-21-3-2008-HLHR-%CA%C5%CC%CFDay-R.pdf

⁴¹ The video showed two youths in the Athens police station of Omonia being forced to slap one another on the face, while a police officer was kicking and hitting them with a wooden stick, ordering them to 'hit harder'. <http://athens.indymedia.org/features.php3?id=477>.

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organisations, including Amnesty International and the Hellenic League for Human Rights issued press releases advocating the protection of victims and the end of impunity.⁴²

The majority of unofficially reported racist crimes happen in the city of Athens, where there is an increased awareness on the part of the reporting agents. Because of the absence of any official policy and police attention, such crimes are reported by the media and NGOs, reporting agents heavily concentrated in Athens.

Justice

A dark page in the history of migration in Athens concerns the way migrants are treated by the judicial system. Migrants make up almost half of the Athens prison population. In the past two years two different examples indicate the negative and positive extremes of relations with the justice system.

At one extreme, in 2006, there was a case of a Bangladeshi citizen illegally detained by the authorities for a whole year in degrading conditions. The Athens Court of Appeal endorsed the argument of the Greek State (Minister of Finances) to appeal against a court decision to provide compensation of 12,000 euros. The court reduced the amount to 3,000 euros.



*Unaccompanied minors in police detention – Athens 2005
Photo by Miltos Pavlou*

According to the appeal and the second degree court decision, the immigrant was considered co-responsible for the ill-treatment he suffered as a detainee because of his illegal residence in the country despite the order to leave.

Moreover, the court accepted the argument given by the Minister of Finances in his appeal that ‘irregular migrants are responsible for the increase in the crime rate’; that ‘when they break the law, the behaviour of the police officers is justified on the grounds of attempting to contain such crime rate’; and that ‘ill-treatment of detained immigrants does not offend their dignity because of

42 Ioanna Sotirhou, Διεθνής Αμνηστία: Να σταματήσει αμέσως η ατιμωρησία, in: *Eleftherotipia*, (19 June 2007), www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=112,id=60380516.

the superior need to protect the Greek territory from the uncontrollable illegal migration wave'.⁴³

At the other extreme, with a milestone ruling in 2007, the Supreme Court judged that migrant workers are bearers of workers' rights and may claim social security contributions irrespective of their legal status of work and residence in the country.

Public services

Research has indicated that a common complaint of immigrants refers to maltreatment and offensive behaviour from public officers towards them during transactions. They often behave as migration policy operators and border guards protecting the country against the undesired incoming migrants. However, this situation has improved. State and public administration specialised agencies have held a number of conferences, seminars and training events concerning living together in a multicultural society. Many of those events had public officers as a target group.

The host community's experience of living together

Everyday life and interaction

One of the most significant indicators of the stance of Greek nationals living alongside migrants in Athens is the solidarity and the passion with which they very often defend them, especially with respect to the infringement of their rights and their legitimate and rightful claims for the recognition of their participation in Greek society.

The unregulated and absurd legal framework for migration and residence permits has often led to civic disobedience. There are instances of hospital staff providing medical services to illegal migrants despite the law. Another example is the mobilisation of entire neighbourhoods or schools to combat paradoxes and shortcomings of migration legislation. The paradoxes and shortcomings include the deportation of children of migrants who have never known either the language or the country of their parents' origin. Yet they are considered to be illegal migrants and are ordered to be expelled.

In 2005 during the parliamentary discussion on a major migration bill (later Law 3386/2005), political representatives from all parties, the Interior

43 HLHR-KEMO, Annual Report 2007, Racism and discrimination against immigrants and minorities in Greece: the state of play, by Miltos Pavlou. www.hlhr.gr

Minister included, tried to find a way to avoid the expulsion of a Pakistani woman and her daughter by overriding the legal provisions they themselves had passed.⁴⁴

State and institutional stakeholders

The Municipal Authority of Athens is well aware of the significance of migrants as city residents and users of the urban infrastructure and services. A number of activities target the needs of immigrants. These include the provision of information and support, and more recently of Greek language teaching for adult immigrants.

The Athens Municipality has taken the initiative, adopting policies and implementing programmes reinforcing social cohesion, promoting harmonious coexistence and immigrants' integration. (Municipality of Athens)

Migration is not a problem as long as it is managed properly and providing integration means more than social embodiment and includes equal opportunities and the right to citizenship. (Municipality of Athens)

⁴⁵

What Athens needs is the immigrant to change from a guest to a co-tenant.

(N. Kaklamanis, Mayor of Athens)

However, the potential of the local administration to shape and implement integration policies is often contained and – regarding political participation – limited by national government policies and legislation. Most recently Nikitas Kaklamanis, the Mayor of Athens, after his meeting with the Prime Minister, urged the central government to take measures regarding irregular immigrants in Athens. He said that the situation is like a ‘*bomb about to explode*’.⁴⁶ The Mayor referred to conflicts between municipal police and migrants, while he reaffirmed that Athens is already a multicultural city and that ‘*we have to learn to live alongside our new fellow townsmen*’.

⁴⁴ The woman had migrated as a minor and lived for 30 years in Greece. She was not regularised. Her 17-year-old daughter was born in Greece and had no bonds whatsoever with Pakistan. They were arrested upon the husband's call to the police after a beating, and they were detained in Athens Police Station detention cell, expecting to be expelled. Cfr. Parliamentary proceedings: www.parliament.gr/ergasies/showfile.asp?file=end050803.txt

⁴⁵ www.cityofathens.gr/katoikoi/allodapoi-metanastes

⁴⁶ 7.11.2007, <http://www.diavotirio.net/diavat/news.php?extend.1738>

Government and Migration Policy Institute officials claim that migrants can still not be appointed officially as members of the National Committee for Social Integration of Migrants. This is the only existing consultative body on migration. Migrants have no representatives' election procedure and therefore they lack reliable representation in the public sphere.

Nevertheless, a number of EU-driven initiatives and European institutional bodies recognise the existing initiatives of migrants' representative organisations. This is mainly the Greek Forum of Migrants, while there are other highly representative associations and migrant communities, such as the Albanian migrants' associations, Confederation, Union and Community.

The Greek Forum of Migrants is a partner of the RAXEN National Focal Point on Racism and Xenophobia (HLHR-KEMO) which provides relevant reports to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), together with the Hellenic League for Human Rights, the Research Centre for Minority Groups and the Greek Ombudsman.

We plan to make Athens a city where the Greek element blends harmoniously with the diversity, a city where our children speak the same language; that of understanding and common objectives. We are transforming Athens into a multicultural metropolis of the world. (Municipality of Athens).

3.2. Social and cultural life

Culture and intercultural dialogue is interwoven with political claims of democracy, and goes hand-in-hand with political activity and the promotion of migrants' claims, in a context of legal constraints of participation and limited access to formal rights.

Anti-racism and culture

Anti-racist festivals are held in eight Greek cities. The festival in Athens was the first to be organised and it represents a unique intercultural meeting point between thousands of migrants and Greek nationals. In 2008, for the 13th consecutive year, the Athens Antiracist Festival⁴⁷ was co-organised by a number of NGOs and migrant associations and co-ordinated by the Network for Social Support of Immigrants and Refugees.

⁴⁷ <http://antiracistfestival.gr/>

The 13th Anti-racist Festival organised in July 2008 focused on the state's restraining policy for refugees and on the discriminations that even 'legal' emigrants are experiencing while living in Greece. It also highlighted the social and cultural contribution of second generation.

The Athens Anti-racist Festival is also a way of bringing together and linking the concerns, the resources and the claims of migrants with those of other social groups who are effective or potential discrimination victims. It thus shows the way towards the unity and greater political strength of various antiracist movements. It helps individuals and organisations move towards intercultural understanding and mutual respect.

Migrants in Athens do not have many opportunities to express themselves politically in public discourse, so it is not surprising that, by and large, they express their claims for participation through culture. Migrant associations and Greek political and human rights NGOs organise mainly musical events and public gatherings in the heart of Athens. Most events aim at raising public awareness and promoting equal rights and antiracism, all the more so in view of the recent trend of a steep increase in racist violence in Athens and the growing strength of extreme right wing political parties.

The politicians and the media, have done much harm. I am dead certain, if you do a survey with questionnaires and ask 'do you want immigrants in the block or the building' they're going to say 'No', 90% But then if we migrants do an event there, those very same Greeks will come to see. They have the intention and desire to know and not to have prejudice.
(Artemis, female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

The majority of these events are held in the central spaces of the Greek capital, Syntagma Square, Omonia Square, the old centre of Kypseli, 1 May Square, and the university campus areas.

New ways of using a shared and commonly defined urban space emerge, indicating the desire for participation. The public events in central Athens target the citizens of Athens in general, and young people in particular.



Migrants at an antiracist protest in the central Athens 'Omonia' square in early 2006

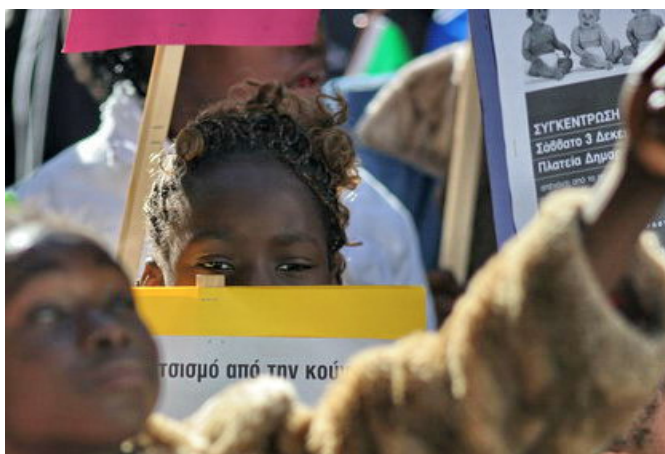


Other migrants, passers by, stop and watch in front of a kiosk with migrants' newspapers
Photos by Miltos Pavlou

Generations and participation

Many migrants used to say that they – the so called ‘first generation’ – are a ‘lost’ generation. All efforts and claims of migrants in Athens are aimed at the integration of their children and young migrants. They demand full equal rights and equal participation. The migrant community realises that political obstacles to a full participation and political rights cannot be overcome within a public climate of ethnocentrism and regional national fears and demonising. The growing visibility of young migrants, who were either born in Athens or grew up there, pose what is rightfully considered to be a major challenge to modern Greek political history and its future.

The issue of the so-called ‘second generation’ is at the core of migrants’ civil claims for political participation.



Migrant organisations and other NGOs claim equal rights and citizenship for the migrant children born in the country - Photo by Miltos Pavlou

Religious life

The Greek legal system has been developed on the basis of a culturally and religiously homogeneous society. It lacks provisions for migrants to respect their cultural and religious beliefs and thus denies them certain rights. This denial of their most personal needs causes suffering, for example no positive measures have been established to facilitate or promote the religious activities of minority groups in their workplace.

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During recent years, the Greek Forum of Migrants has repeatedly – albeit unsuccessfully – asked for the recognition of Muslim festivities, such as Bairam and Ramadan, as a legitimate absence from work.⁴⁸ In early 2005, after considerable pressure from the Pakistani community and being brought up in Parliament by an opposition MP, the Minister of Public Order responded negatively, arguing that the vast number of religions would make this impossible to apply.⁴⁹

Faith and community

The absence of official mosques and worship places is a serious shortcoming for Muslim migrants in Athens. In spite of the great number of Muslim immigrants and the practical absence of racist tension towards them, there is as yet no official mosque outside the Thrace region in northern Greece. Some five years ago the construction of a big mosque was announced, initially to serve Muslim athletes of the 2004 Olympic Games. It was never built. After the Games the government again announced the building of a mosque. This triggered a heated public discussion, in which the Greek Orthodox Church had a major say. The main dispute was whether the mosque should be constructed in Peania – an Athens suburb – or in the central area of Votanikos. This led to an impasse. Finally, a law in late 2006 provided for the building of a mosque in Athens to satisfy the needs of Muslim inhabitants. The downside is that the law provides for the administration of the mosque to be appointed by Christian orthodox public officers and the designation of the imam on the recommendation of the Minister of Education and Religions. The mosque is still not in place and there is no sign of when its construction and the relevant procedures will begin. Muslim migrants still face difficulties in practising their religion. Due to this impasse, an ever-growing number of improvised unofficial and informal mosques have been established in apartments in various areas of Athens.

Among other problems, Muslim migrants in Athens have to travel to northern Greece, to Western Thrace where they may bury their dead since it is the only area where official Muslim religious authorities operate legally.

Muslim migrants in Athens usually celebrate major festivities such as Bairam at the large stadiums and sport halls of the capital like the Olympic Athletic Complex and the Peace and Friendship Stadium in Piraeus.

48 According to the organisation members and leaders' interviews performed for the needs of Rapid Response Islamophobia 2005.

49 According to documentation provided in 2005 to NFP 'Antigone' by the Pakistani community in Athens.

Respect and understanding

Religion-oriented racism is not common in Greek society. Intolerance towards Muslims, or ‘Islamophobia’, has not been detected or reported. Public policies are not driven by fear of terror, and no particular security measures have been taken in the past years towards Muslim religious minority groups in Greece in view of any so-called ‘radicalisation’ threat.

However, the longstanding respect for improvised mosques over the past years has recently weakened. First in 2007, police agents invaded an improvised mosque in Geraniou Street in Athens during Ramadan prayer to carry out a drugs raid. They paid no respect either to the large number of people at the site – immigrants mostly from Pakistan and Bangladesh – or to the religious character of the site (police officers did not remove their shoes). According to the mosque’s Bangladeshi imam, this was the fourth police drug raid within 15 days, albeit without any result.⁵⁰ NGOs report that this unusual practice has not been encountered in the past.⁵¹ Most recently media reports claim that there is a fear of radicalisation through improvised mosques, although no such indication whatsoever comes from official public policies or political discourse.

Political participation

The 2007 MIPEx survey implemented by the Migration Policy Group and the British Council (with Greek national partners, the Hellenic League for Human Rights and the Greek Ombudsman) has ranked Greek migration policy among the least favourable, when compared with other EU countries, particularly in respect of political participation and citizenship policies.

The long-term residence directive has still not been properly implemented: only a handful of migrants have reached such status so far. Less than half a million immigrants hold a valid residence permit (less than half of those estimated to live and work in the country). The participation in decision making either at local or national level is still an unfulfilled – though legitimate – claim, and a desire based on a common sense of belonging.

When at times we express an opinion suggesting that our neighbourhood, our city, could be better, we occasionally get the reaction from Greeks: ‘Go back to your country! Is it better there?’ And I try to explain to the people, when I say something is wrong or not well done, it is because I want it to be great, because I live here, here is my

50 Eleftherotipia, (04.10.2007), www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=112,id=90381088.

51 HLHR-KEMO press release on the rise of racist violence in Greece (15 October 2007), www.hlhr.gr/press/10-2007-RAC-Attacks%20HLHR-%CA%C5%CC%CF.pdf.

life. (Artemis, female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

Under the current legislation, it is very difficult – even for migrants who have lived in Greece for many years – to obtain full access to political rights even at the local level.

There are strict and rigid citizenship policies. In order to be able to apply for citizenship, a migrant has to have resided legally in Greece for a minimum of ten years within an overall 12-year period. He or she has to pay a non-refundable fee of 1,500 euros. The Greek state bears no legal obligation to respond to the application within a defined period of time and once it issues a decision, it bears no obligation to justify a rejection. Thus it may take over a decade to receive a rejection, and there are limited legal means to appeal.

There are also demanding and generally discouraging requirements for submitting an application for long-term residence status: a non-refundable 900-euro fee; a quota of only 500–1,000 participants in Greek language and history lessons, that are free, but mandatory, and take place only in the morning hours of working days; and examinations. In fact, according to the most recent early 2008 official numbers, about five migrants are long-term resident status holders and another 15 are waiting to hear the results of their application.

There are no public procedures for migration policy consultation. The migrants' representatives or associations have no formal access to the only existing consultative body for the migrants' integration policy. The establishment of this body – the National Commission for the Integration of Immigrants – was provided by the recent migration law. It is based in Athens as a consultative body annexed to the Interior Minister. It is composed of 24 members from the public and private sector, as well as from the Greek Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, no immigrants' representative or competent civil society stakeholders and organisations are part of the Commission, a factor that has been heavily criticised by immigrant associations, political parties and civil society organisations.⁵²

Since he is not a registered Athens citizen, the migrant has no right to say anything. Since there is a municipal council, there should also be an informal immigrants' council in place. (Artemis, female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

52 HLHR-KEMO, Annual Report 2007, Racism and discrimination against immigrants and minorities in Greece: the state of play, by Miltos Pavlou. www.hlhr.gr

The answers to these obstacles have been self-organisation and self-promotion of rights and participation claims. With no public funding or any assistance whatsoever, migrants in Athens, and in other Greek cities, sat down together and came up with forms of activism involving other migrants and migrant communities. After many years of hard work their initiatives have achieved high visibility in the public sphere. They have established fruitful relations with social partners, civil society and Greek NGOs in developing common initiatives and public intervention.

Self-organisation of migrants in Athens

The Greek Forum of Migrants is the main self-organised association of migrant communities in Greece. The forum is based in Athens and in early 2008 it acquired a legal entity and a formal statute.

It is the main organisation of migrants in Athens and in Greece. Its wide spectrum of activities, from political action to cultural events and intercultural dialogue, has made it the main point of reference for migrants in the city and in the country.

The Greek Forum of Migrants, along with the majority of migrant organisations, ethnic communities and associations – most of which are based in Athens – provide a wide range of activities, from political pressure and protest marches to provision of information, support, and the promotion of inter-ethnic dialogue and culture.



*Protest against racist killings – Athens 2006
Photo by Miltos Pavlou*

The Pan-Hellenic Migrant Women’s Network, the African Women’s Association and the Cradle movement are among other significant migrant initiatives claiming participation rights and intercultural dialogue in Athens.

Migration policy consultation – national migration dialogues

The lack of regular and institutionalised public consultation has been partially counterbalanced by the initiatives of migrants, social partners and NGOs. They focus on organising public events to exchange views and share ideas, aiming at raising the accountability of state officials in the decision-making process regarding migration and citizenship policy.

Under the auspices of European Migration Dialogue and the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), the Hellenic League for Human Rights organised three National Migration Dialogue round tables, two in 2005 and one in 2008. The events aimed at bringing together state officials, migrants and migration experts. They produced a number of legislative proposals for amendment of the migration law and for the promotion of immigrants' integration policy. The proposals were submitted to the government.

Sharing the city

Athens migrants' experience, like migration throughout history, is marked by personal stories of social and transnational networks of support for the initial settlement and for establishing social bonds and ways of living and of integrating in the host society.

We left the harbour carefully so that the police wouldn't see us. We didn't bid farewell nor did we ever see the others again. We walked through the narrow streets until I saw a pregnant woman. I approached her and made a sign, putting my hand to my mouth, that I was hungry. She was Russian. She took us to her house, gave us food, juice for me to drink, offered me some of her clothes, and I had a bath... (Dilani, female, 34, Sri Lankan, nanny)

In a city where ghettos are still not a reality, crowded parks, Sunday markets and local celebrations are indeed the meeting points of migrants and natives. They lead to the finding of common values and cultural reference milestones.

Myself I grew up in Fieri and my town was called Apollonia, there we also have the ancient theatres and all that, with the gates and the pillars... and it is much like Acropolis. When I came to Athens I went up there, in fact I felt it, I was so much moved' (Artemis female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

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The easy-going character of Athens as a city of recreation and entertainment is an aspect which is highly valued by many immigrants.

It is laid-back, people don't work much, they don't go crazy about careers and all that. They hang around. That's why the city is so lively. Any hour of the day the place is full of people. (Nadia, female, 32, Romanian, personal trainer)

In Athens and adjacent municipalities a number of local celebrations and festivals are welcomed by the majority of migrant inhabitants, who represent a good 20 per cent of the total population. In most cases they do not form distinct neighbourhoods they form a lively and productive part of the city, shaping a highly multi-ethnic and multicultural Athens.

Recent violent racist incidents carried out by far right organised groups against Pakistanis in their homes provoked intense reaction. The incidents occurred in the Piraeus area of Egaleo and Renti between October 2007 and April 2008. In response to the much delayed arrival of local police and its unfruitful investigations, local nationals as well as Greek NGOs and activist groups intervened and defended the victims effectively.

The arts

Athens is a city of many theatres, and modern Athenians are keen theatre-goers. It is significant that an ever-growing number of plays deal with migration. Most importantly, there are contemporary plays with migrant actors, and the same groundbreaking trend is also found in the Greek cinema.

The Neos Kosmos theatre in Athens staged a notorious yet highly successful play, *One in ten*. Directed by an Albanian, it was performed by a Georgian, an Albanian and a Bulgarian.. The play, based on personal migrant experience, described the difficult road to integration into Greek society.

In a recent film, *You're never gonna become Greek*,⁵³ a Greek nationalist is shocked to discover that he is the brother of an Albanian migrant. The main Albanian actor in this film divided his real life working day between acting in the film and working as a construction worker.

⁵³ <http://mftm.blogspot.com/2008/05/2008-set-visit.html>

Greek language learning

Despite the fact that one million migrants live in Greece, the state does not have a permanent dedicated institution for teaching the Greek language to adult migrants. In the few cases where such centres or schools do operate (usually at the universities), attendance requires a residence permit and a deposit of what amounts to a significant amount of money for many migrants. This means that illegal migrants and those who are not well-off are automatically excluded. The gap is frequently filled by volunteers, who set up informal schools and teach Greek language to all migrants regardless of their place of origin and educational background.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, grassroots activities such as the ‘Sunday School for migrants’⁵⁵ provide a model, and positive initiatives are increasing. During May 2008, the Athens mayor announced a programme for teaching Greek to the migrant parents of children enrolled in the municipal nurseries of Athens.

I am a person who wants to know what’s going on, so I don’t just walk happy-go-lucky, I don’t walk like this. I have to see what is written there, how it is written, and I have to learn to speak Greek well, to be able to read the signs and know what this office is about, it may be something interesting.

(Artemis female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

Greek language learning programmes within the framework of the implementation of the Long-term Residence Directive become operational in 2008 but will apply to only a small portion of the general migrant population.

According to the conclusions of the November 2007 major conference of the Greek Forum of Migrants in Athens, Greek language learning is clearly the main vehicle for integration. It is also a medium of knowledge and power that may counterbalance the often disadvantageous position of migrants vis-à-vis the implementation of the law, and discrimination and exploitation. It is essential for migrants to be able to claim their legitimate rights and fulfil their obligations. It helps them avoid depending on personal connections and informal networks around the so-called ‘residence permit market’. It enables them to get closer to the nationals in everyday life.

Participation in media

54 M. Bouziouri, Learning practical Greek, in: *Kathimerini* (18 February 007) www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/news/content.asp?aid=80390 . www.olimazi.eu/?articleid=1629 (23 October 2007).

⁵⁵ www.ksm.gr

Although far from satisfactory, there is some public presence of migrants in the media and there are some programmes targeting migrants.

There is a new, much-criticised media licensing law (3592/2007), which states that in order to obtain a radio licence one must fulfil various rigid requirements, such as a minimum deposit of 30,000 or even 100,000 euros, 24-hour broadcasting, and having Greek as the main transmission language. According to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Miklos Haraszti, this *'endangers pluralism by putting a high threshold for minority, community or low-cost broadcasters'*.⁵⁶

But there are some positive initiatives in media production and inter-ethnic information. The Athens International Radio offers a number of programmes for migrants, as well as Greek language learning. The Athens Municipality network operates a frequency dedicated to immigrants, where it provides specialised information on migration law, as well as general, financial and political news and entertainment in 12 languages.

Though migrants are not participating in mainstream and national media, with no possibility or encouragement for their own language media, there is a large number of newspapers printed in the various migrant languages. They play an important role in providing information on the labyrinthine procedures and requirements of migration legislation.

And there is rapid growth in migrants' participation in cyberspace, particularly through blogs. The primary issue is that of the 'second generation'.

3.3. Sense of belonging and identity

The streets of Athens today demonstrate a city of contrasts and contradictions, a city in the process of being shaped irreversibly by migration; transformed into a place of new urban and social spaces. It has both nurtured, and resulted from, a new sense of belonging and community.

Renegotiation and appropriation of a common urban space

⁵⁶ OSCE Press release: *New radio licensing law in Greece restricts minority media, says OSCE media freedom watchdog*, available at: www.osce.org/fom/item_1_25793.html (27 July 2007). Similar reactions were observed from the Thrace Muslim minority representatives and the press.

Migrants and nationals meet in everyday life in the open spaces of the city, the parks, the markets and at festivities and celebrations. Migrants also help to preserve the old centre of Athens and its market with clusters of residence and ethnic businesses in Kypseli, Patisia, Athenas street, and the wider Omonia area.

You walk down the streets and you say, I've worked here, I used to live in that house once, here is the child's school, and you feel how so many city spots have so much to do with your life. (Artemis female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

Major events, festivals and political manifestations are organised around the capital's main squares, Omonia and Syntagma, under the shadow of the Greek Parliament. The main squares of adjacent and wider Athens municipalities also host migrant cultural events.

The negotiation of space is the most visible aspect of the emergence of the migrants' sense of belonging, in an exciting burst of resilience and a desire to be a part of a new homeland.

The immigrant in fact feels Athens as his or her own city. We feel it is our city, our homeland, I say so. (Artemis, female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

They feel absolutely Greek. Their father is Greek, they were born here, they were raised here, they go to school here, their friends are here.
(Ava, female, 38, Albanian, sociologist, PhD candidate)

Building multiple identities means also sharing the public space without denying proper ethnic and cultural identity. Migrants infuse the city, like a refreshing injection, bringing their own music, culture and art from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Street lights in Athens are often decorated with posters in Albanian about popular Albanian music concerts.

Intolerance and racism manifested by nationals, and the fragility of legal status or even illegality despite many years of residing in Athens, are counterbalanced by stories of solidarity and intercultural understanding and by an informal, yet strong response of segments of Greek civil society and social networks.

Rooting and belonging in a new homeland

I have my roots here, I have relatives. (Ivan, male, 67, Russian, retired food engineer)

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The roots migrants grow are deeper in the areas where they first settled in their new homeland, the places where they started to build their new lives. In Athens this is one of the most notable patterns among migrants.

I want to find a house near Alexandra's Park. That's the first place I got to know in Greece, that's where I want to live. (Dilani, female, 34, Sri Lankan, nanny)

In some cases, interviewed migrants revealed that – even once they managed to settle in other Athens areas permanently and on a long-term basis – they returned to the areas of the city that they had first come to know.

Even though migrants put down roots in their new homeland they do not deny their land of origin. They are not unconditionally assimilated into the host society. Nevertheless, even when they face great difficulties in being accepted and respected by nationals, they feel irreversibly bonded to the city in which they chose to live and invest their creativity.

I don't compare Albania to Greece. I feel more foreign there, than here. (Artemis female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

Contradictions of public opinion

Living together in the Greek capital is marked by contrasts in migrants' experiences of integration and intolerance and by contradictions in Greek attitudes of xenophobia and hospitality.

I remember the first impression of Athens from my relations with the people I found here, not only friends, but also people from the first job, which I found through a newspaper. They treated me really well and they trusted me to handle so much money and do all the business transactions. (Ava, female, 38, Albanian, sociologist, PhD candidate)

Regarding public opinion, there have been various shocking statements and opinions in the past. For instance, on 1 January 2006 in Crete, a young Albanian was killed. An opinion poll was conducted immediately after by the V-PRC poll company commissioned for a national radio network (Sky radio). It showed that a large part of the public was reluctant to condemn the deadly violence against Albanian immigrants. Forty-four per cent of those interviewed found the assassination to be an 'unjustified act', though 34 per

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cent said that 'it is also the Albanians' fault'. A significant 24 per cent refused to respond at all and therefore to give any opinion about the murder.

However, instances of inequality, racism and xenophobia are balanced by stories of smooth integration and respect. As experts and scholars confirm, this is a record level of migration in Greece; there is a continuing situation of relative acceptance and, overall, low levels of tension.

But the truth may be harsher: while rhetoric is improving and migrants are recognised to be major contributors to the Athens and Greek economy, the contradiction of public attitudes seems to be shaped exactly around that reality. As long as migrants are economically valuable, productive and useful (they are relatively low-paid workers financing one of the most developing EU economies), then they are welcome, but only while they have no access to equal social or full political rights.

Greece needs the migrants, as much the migrant needs Greece.
(Artemis, female, 52, Albanian, literature teacher, migrant rights activist)

Part 4. Conclusion

Intercultural dialogue is based on participation and interaction between the host community and migrants. Equality and respect of rights are a fundamental element for intercultural dialogue to be substantial or even possible.

While the legal framework and the shortcomings of the migration management system hinder full participation and formal access to goods and services, the real life of migrants and their integration in the city is shaped by the dynamics of change and by the community within the host society.

In this process, culture and intercultural dialogue is not folklore or ethnic consumption; interwoven with political claims of democracy, it functions as an open door and as a vehicle of unrelenting change towards rethinking Athens and living together.

Unlike the problematic legal status of migrants and the inflexible or inefficient migration management legislation, the reality of migration in the city of Athens is one of participation, intercultural encounters, political struggle and the shaping of common space and a sense of belonging.

How to build on good practice

The children of migrants account for more than one third of the total school population in Athens. Encouraging and reproducing good practice like that introduced by the 132nd elementary school of Athens is an imperative towards a de facto multi-ethnic and multicultural education. There are other significant examples of good practice in the areas of health, welfare, employment and discrimination:

- The ‘Mosaic’ centre run by the Therapy Centre for Dependent Individuals (KETHEA). It is one of the most notable co-funded programmes for health and social care provision for migrants and refugees. Its aim is to assist and protect immigrants, refugees and the repatriated from the risk of addictive substances, within the framework of the National Action Plan against drugs, supported by volunteers.
- The ARSIS activities and legal aid provided by the Greek Council for Refugees, for asylum seekers (and migrants); social and psychological services, and in particular, the Pyxida centre for children.

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- The implementation by the NGO PRAKSIS of a number of projects addressing migrants and minorities, by providing legal support, labour counselling and medical and psychological services for immigrants.
- The Observatory for Access to medical care implemented by the NGO Médecins du Monde' in Greece. It provides health and social care to migrants and minorities and it participates in the network of the European Observatory for Access to Health.
- The monitoring and follow-up of racist violence and support of victims in Greece. HLHR-KEMO RAXEN as a national focal point has elaborated and disseminated online anti-discrimination forms to NGOs, civil society organisations and stakeholders, as well as to the wider public, in order to facilitate and increase the validity and credibility of reporting of racist violence incidents and of good practices related to combating discrimination and racism. The respective forms were also distributed to the competent public administration services within the framework of networking and data collection for RAXEN 2007.

How to respond to the main issues raised by migrants, communities and stakeholders

Below is a list of the possible answers to the main issues raised by migrants and natives in order to confront the migration challenges and shortcomings of policies in Athens and Greece:

- establish Municipal Consultative Councils of Migrants
- fund and promote political participation by migrant associations and communities.
- include migrants on the municipal registers as/permanent inhabitants
- establish voting rights at local elections for all migrants residing permanently in the municipalities of Athens area and throughout Greece.
- provide a priority path to citizenship for migrant children born in Greece and those who grew up in Greece through a major citizenship law reform.
- establish regular and widely available Greek language learning and training programmes for migrants, irrespective of age and/or legal residence status.

- establish a wide-scale permanent (open) regularisation system for those who are employed illegally or informally and preserve their workers' rights, instead of expelling them and granting amnesties to their employers.
- this system should also include a one-off regularisation and long-term residence status provision to migrants living in the country for more than ten years, irrespective of the legality of status and its continuity.
- give opportunities to migrant-driven and migrant-initiated media and information programmes and activities. Integrate the various migrants' views and speech into the mainstream media, starting with state-owned television and radio, broadcasting on a regular basis.



From the protest march of 2nd generation migrants in Athens – December 2005 (Photo by Miltos Pavlou)

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Likely future trends in the city

There are two probable future trends:

- The first concerns the second generation immigrants who have still not been granted long-term or permanent residence status and have no preferential path to citizenship. Thousands of them have already reshaped the Greek education system and social networks in an ongoing vigorous, yet unplanned and uncoordinated intercultural dialogue. It is unlikely however, that they will tolerate the situation of an insecure status and low wages in the same way as their parents. They will claim full participation and citizenship, bringing groundbreaking reforms and the metamorphosis of modern Athens and Greece.
- The second is the growing numbers of newcomers and refugees from Asian and African countries, among them many minors. The overwhelming majority of asylum applications are submitted in Athens. Less than 2.5 per cent of them are granted asylum status. They are employed illegally, smuggled dangerously and many of them settle unsafely in Athens in a perennial temporary status. They form ethnic markets, quasi-ghettos and slums in central Athens's old neighbourhoods and districts, such as Kypseli, Omonia and Metaxourgio. In some ways their Athens is the old Athens, repopulated and revisited, through stories of exclusion and exploitation, and through the cultural inflows and the rebirth of a multicultural metropolis.

Facing these trends and the transformation of Athens, intercultural dialogue is dependent on migrants' participation and rights:

- Interaction and participation cannot be realised ad infinitum in a vacuum of policies providing and protecting migrants' rights. An extensive and continuous regularisation programme based on the effective employment and/or social and personal bonds with the host society is the minimum first step for such a process.
- Moreover, legal migrants still need to be effectively protected and respected in a wider spectrum of their social and economic life, and this is the minimum precondition for an egalitarian intercultural dialogue.

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- The real challenge and urgency of major policy reform lies in the issues of the second generation and long-term resident immigrants. They are the ones who may rightfully claim either citizenship or full political participation at the local level, yet they are still excluded from them. The objective is equality of rights irrespective of status and not at the expense of denying cultural and ethnic identities.



*“Greece we are your children!”
From the protest march of 2nd generation
migrants in Athens – December 2005
Photo by Miltos Pavlou*

In the absence of the above, an integration process among unequal parties may go on endlessly through contrasts and conflicts. Its outcomes may oscillate between exploitation and abusive social relations to oases of mutual respect and understanding in the different socio-political and economic contexts of modern multi-faceted and complex Athens. In no case, however, can they lead to a society that will be rich and open to change.

Equality in employment and access to full enjoyment of social rights side-by-side with the right to participate in the local and/or national political community is a key element of intercultural dialogue if it is going to be more than EU rhetoric linked with the European Year 2008 and a celebration of good intentions.

This makes the migrants’ claims for rights not only legitimate, but fundamental and indispensable for the peaceful formation of an intercultural and multiethnic Athens of diversity and equal participation.

Athens is a city which may be ready to rethink itself through dialogue among people and cultures and around political values. After all, this is one of the most exciting and groundbreaking promises of migration and this is what so many people in Athens, migrants and natives, feel and long for.

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