

HLHR-KEMO



ANNUAL REPORT 2007

**Racism and Discrimination against  
Immigrants and Minorities in Greece  
the State of Play**

**Miltos Pavlou**

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HLHR-KEMO

## CONTENTS

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The myth of an emigration only country .....	2
Main recent developments and trends .....	2
Immigrants .....	3
Minorities .....	4
1. Immigrants and migration policy .....	6
Regularization and expulsion.....	6
Employment and detention .....	7
Two opposite views of human rights violation during detention.....	8
Education challenges.....	9
Health and social protection .....	10
Immigrants and political rights .....	10
2. Minorities and minority policies .....	11
Employment and religious diversity .....	11
Minority Education .....	11
Roma housing and evictions.....	12
Minority policies .....	13
3. Racism, discrimination and reactive / pro-active policies.....	14
3. Racism, discrimination and reactive / pro-active policies.....	14
Antidiscrimination and anti-racism shortcomings.....	14
Racist violence.....	15
Positive trends .....	16
4. Public discourse and attitudes .....	17
Immigrants' and minorities social inclusion.....	17

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## HLHR-KEMO

### Annual Report 2007

#### **Racism and discrimination against immigrants and minorities in Greece: the state of play**

*Miltos Pavlou<sup>1</sup>*

#### **The myth of an emigration only country**

One of the most widely accepted concepts about migration and minorities in Greece, that in fact resembles a myth, is that the latter as a nation-state has always been a homogeneous country and that only recently, namely in the 1990s, it has become that of immigration-reception. Moreover, the state acknowledges the existence of only one minority - the Muslim one of the Western Thrace - recognized through international treaties of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It denies such connotation ('minority') for social groups like Roma, gypsies etc. In reality however, Greece of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been an emigration, as well as an immigration country, especially following the exchange of populations after clashes with the vanishing Ottoman Empire, and due to territorial enlargement whether through wars and treaties, bilateral agreements, or by opening to the Arab world in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, Greece has indeed seen the growth of the percentage of foreign residents from a modest 2,5% in 1990, to 10% in 2001, according to the national census and other estimates. Immigrant population has increased four times its size since 1991, from 270.000 to 1,15 million persons. Most of them live in Athens (17% of the population total) and in Thessaloniki (7%).

The landscape of immigration, minority and anti-discrimination policies in Greece is largely marked by issues of recognition and of articulation of long term state initiatives and planning, as well as by shortcomings, critical social exclusion, racism phenomena and macro-political challenges.

This paper aims to expose an overview of the situation, the main trends, as well as the problems and challenges concerning immigrants, minorities and discrimination issues in Greece.

#### **Main recent developments and trends**

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On the one hand, between the years 2000-2005, some significant steps were taken by the Greek government regarding Roma housing and minorities' education programs, as well as introduction of anti-discrimination legislation (transposing the Race and Equality EC Directives). Furthermore, a major shift of public debate has taken place, especially as far as integration of immigrants and religious freedom are concerned.

On the other hand, state policies and initiatives in relation to racism, discrimination and the respect of equality are far from efficient while some are not even existent. This is especially true for combating anti-immigrant and anti-Roma racist violence and intolerance, forced evictions of Roma families' without offering a viable alternative or any means for housing, and police violence and impunity due to inefficiency of disciplinary internal procedures. There is a clearly inefficient operation of the anti-discrimination 'Equality bodies', and an absence of a central coordination, action plans and data collection mechanisms (mostly concerning racism and discrimination).

At the same time, debate in the public sphere marks a net shift and improvement towards a progressively more visible discourse about immigrant and minorities' rights and their integration into the Greek society. Nevertheless, this remains a declarative rhetoric, yet to lead to concrete policies, as surveys and numbers show a persistent intolerant attitude and racist violence trend. The migration management system is in perennial crisis. The relevant legislation is subject to repeated amendments and is mostly expressed through successive regularization programs.

The main points regarding the current situation and the most recent alarming trends are as follow:

### *Immigrants*

- A series of irregular immigrant workers legalization campaigns in the period 2001-2005 lead to the increasing participation of migrants in the social security system, though a large number still remains employed in the grey economy. All regularization programs provided amnesty to the employers and workers were the only ones obliged to pay social security contributions. Not all of them met the requirements of the law and thus remained under an illegal residence status.
- In view of complete lack of a policy for second and third generation of immigrants in summer 2006 new provisions have been adopted through a ministerial decision for regularizing those minors and adults, who are students or graduates of Greek primary, secondary schools or Universities. Nevertheless, this regularization aims at integration into the migration management system that still requires continuous legal employment in order to remain in regularity. Without a more generous citizenship policy the young immigrants born in the country remain in limbo and their issues are unresolved.
- A consequent and unchanged aspect of the immigrants and minorities' integration pattern in the labor market is that they receive lower wages and pay

higher social security contributions, although there are increasing claims of higher wages backed by the national and local worker unions. Furthermore, the National Action Plan for Employment still does not include immigrants as a target group.

- As far as self-employment is concerned there are contradictory trends. Success stories of immigrants are reported by the research, while on the other hand there is an increasing trend of legislative limitations and restrictions in their entrepreneurship (among various prerequisites provided by law n.3386/2005 in order to be allowed to start a business such is the requirement of a 60.000 € bank deposit).
- Living conditions in the refugee reception and detention centres, especially on the Aegean islands, and in the police departments throughout the country remain unacceptable and degrading for human dignity, as depicted by a long list of international and national organizations. There is an absence of any special treatment of minors and women or of the possible trafficking victims, while expulsion of unaccompanied minors is the norm.
- The dropout rate remains higher and increasing for immigrant children in relation to the total students' population in primary and secondary education, especially for educational levels above the compulsory.

Recent legislative efforts show that the political participation even for consultations is firmly denied to immigrants, the individual initiatives at a local level being the only exception.

### *Minorities*

- According to available official data, there has been a net improvement of the situation concerning the education of Roma and Muslim minority children since the 1990s. However, there are contradictory reports about Roma children enrolment and dropout rates.
- A persisting trend is that enrollment of Roma children in ordinary community schools continues to cause tension, intolerance and violent reactions, in some cases obliging the Roma children to attend special Roma school units, despite the firm commitment of the administration to avoid segregation of minorities in education.
- Despite the fragmentary efforts of the state, the Roma living, health and sanitary conditions in improvised settlements still remain a major social and humanitarian emergency.
- The housing program addressing the Roma community members, through bank loans under privileged terms represents a positive trend of the last years, and a major change in relation to the years 2000 and before. However, there is a low

rate of approvals and effective loans granted are thus not corresponding to the Roma housing needs. Furthermore, there are accusations of mismanagement of such funds and of loans not ending up in the hands of their lawful beneficiaries.

- In the last years (2004-2005) there has been an increase of evictions of Roma dwellings in the areas where major cultural and sport events had taken place or are going to take place in the near future (2004 Olympic Games of Athens, Patras Cultural Capital of Europe 2006, Votanikos area, site of a new Football Stadium). These are inevitably accompanied by tensions, local society intolerance and violent attacks against Roma.

### ***Anti-racism and anti-discrimination***

- Negative stereotypes against minority groups and legitimising of racial violence have proven difficult to extinguish. Experience has shown that occasional tensions such as a football game may provoke racist violence and clashes or even murders of immigrants.
- In the past years, the extreme right-wing groups have been targeting specific geographic areas of the country, especially where pro-immigrant initiatives and civil society sensibility is particularly prominent. However, such groups and their racist and intolerant activities are strongly opposed by the civil society and parliamentary and political parties and actors. Recently the extreme right-wing groups take advantage of sports fanaticism, drawing its supporters from and operating within the fan clubs, and expressing through hooliganism, the unregulated impunity area.
- There is no operative action plan against racism and racist violence. No crime incident has ever been prosecuted on the basis of the relevant anti-racist penal legislation (law 927/1979). There is no court cases' jurisprudence, and official data on complaints on the grounds of discrimination are extremely limited, while the only existing data come from the Greek Ombudsman, equality body responsible for discrimination by the public authorities.
- Declarative and verbalist political determination and firm commitment in combating racism and discrimination still waits to become productive through the application of the anti-discrimination legislation and the full operation of the equality bodies.
- Although the antidiscrimination directives existed on the political agenda for years (since 2001) until their transposition in 2005, there has been no diversity management or anti-discrimination policy in employment sector, whether public or private. The public awareness of the anti-discrimination legislation and existence of the equality bodies is highly limited or hardly existent.

## 1. Immigrants and migration policy

### *Regularization and expulsion*

One of the most widely known aspects of the Greek migration management system in the years 2001-2004, which is rather indicative of its inefficiency, is that due to long delays and administrative dysfunctions, residence and work permits were delivered to immigrants after their expiration date.

Furthermore, a strict bureaucratic system for admission to enter the country for work purposes has led to hundreds of thousand of undeclared immigrant workers. In 1997, 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2006 successive legalization programs took place in an effort to regularize irregular immigrants. These legalization campaigns provide amnesty to employers, while immigrant workers are called to pay social security contributions along with the expensive fees in order to regularize their work and residence status for 1 year.

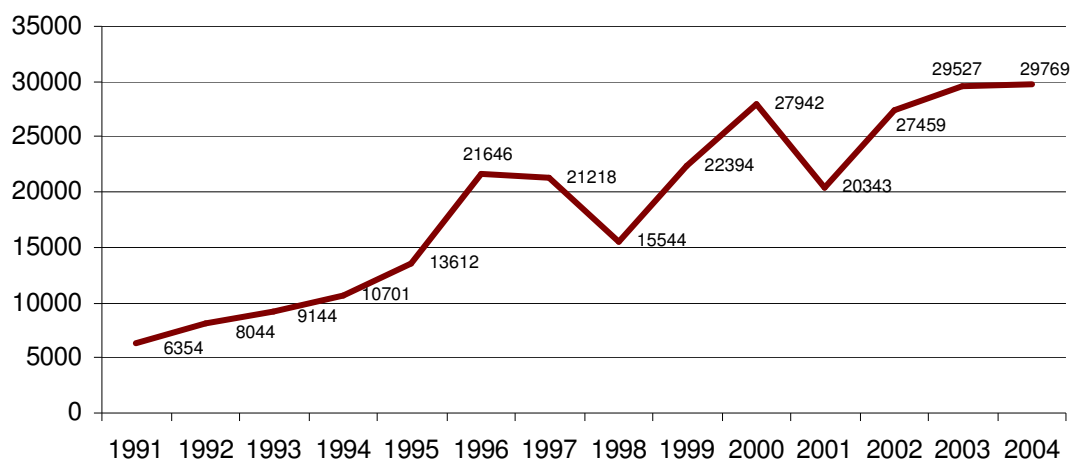
The most recent data at the end of 2006 indicate that only 285.840 residence permits were in force, while the immigrant population is estimated to range between 800 thousand (the minimum of foreign residents recorded by the 2001 national census) and 1.2 million persons (the estimate made by various agencies, such as the government Migration Policy Institute). These numbers may fluctuate according to the administration capacity to face the excessive workload; however the valid permits certainly did not exceed half a million.

It is also clear that Greece tends to delay full transposition or to avoid full implementation of the 'integration' long term residence status directive. Up to date no such application has been possible to submit to the authorities, even though migration in Greece is clearly marked by a long term or lifelong residence pattern, mostly by immigrants from neighboring countries. Whereas the aspect of long term residence status could potentially lead much more easily to the integration of immigrants, it also prompts the administration and the political elites to take a more negative stance towards the rights, recognition and participation of immigrants. This happens due to an ethnocentric fear of future minority issues and imaginary threats to the presumed ethnic homogeneity of the country (more on the legal and administrative aspects of the LTR directive transposition below).

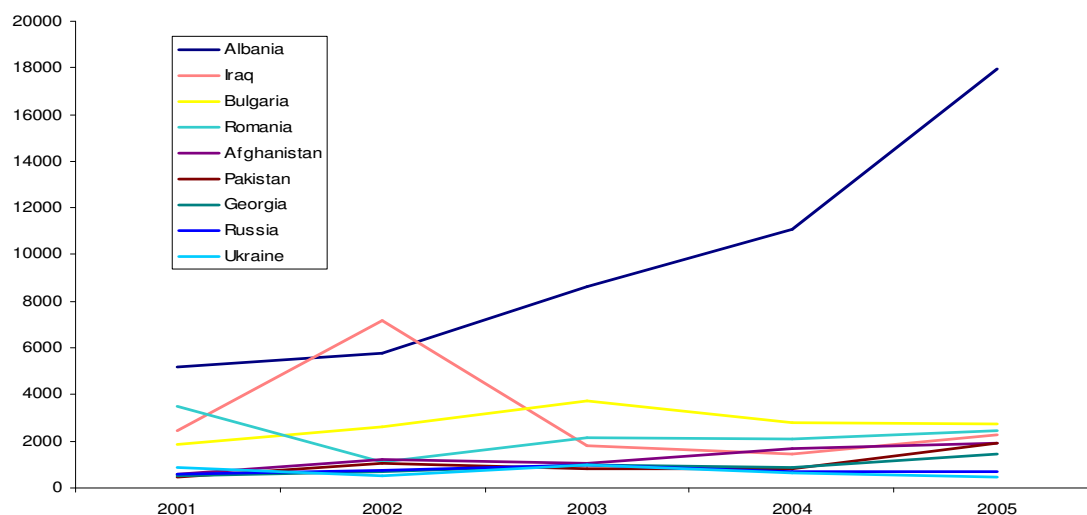
During the years 1991-2005, the police implemented a policy of increasing administrative expulsions of immigrants, especially of Albanians, as official data show.

Administrative expulsions in Greece are on the rise over the last decade, since the expelled immigrants often return into the country illegally, thereby increasing the 'stock' of illegal third country nationals.

*Arrests for administrative expulsions*



**Administrative expulsions –main nationalities**



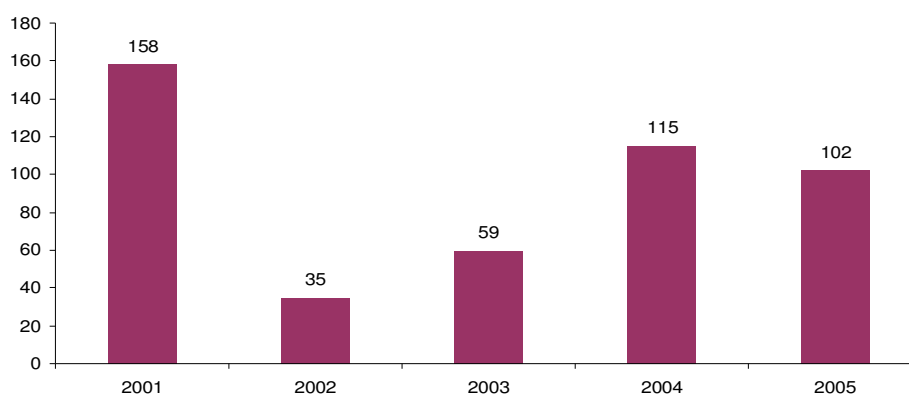
*Employment and detention*

The migration policy that prolongs the perennial insecurity of the suspended immigrant status, preserves the subaltern and vulnerable position of the immigrants in the labour market. It seems that there is an absence of a specific integration policy on immigration and that there are rather fragmentary measures and contradictory policies. The National Action Plan for Employment still does not include immigrants as a target group.

Surveys and researches on integration of immigrants and minorities' in the labor market show that the latter receive lower wages and pay higher social security contributions. There are however increasing claims of higher wages backed by the



unions of national and local workers. There are also increasing legislative limitations and restrictions in their entrepreneurship, concerning access to certain professions. On the other hand, the protection of irregular immigrant workers in informal economy is far from actuated. The legalization programs are not accompanied by measures or incentives to keep immigrant workers' employment regular, legal and away from the informal economy. The following chart shows the levels of illegal employment of immigrants found by the Labour Inspection Body. The Greek economy is marked by one of the higher percentages of informal activity and black labour among EU countries, estimated close to 40-50% of the GDP:



Regarding the reception policies, the living conditions in the refugee reception and detention centres, especially in the Aegean Islands and the police departments throughout the country still remain unacceptable in many cases and degrading for human dignity, as depicted by a long list of international and national organizations. Two of the most pressing interventions are exercised by the Greek Ombudsman especially for the detention and expulsion of unaccompanied minors ([www.synigoros.gr/reports/SR-detention-expulsionOCTOBER-2005.pdf](http://www.synigoros.gr/reports/SR-detention-expulsionOCTOBER-2005.pdf)) and by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

#### *Two opposite views of human rights violation during detention*

Two court cases, one of an Athens court and the other of the European Court for Human Rights reflect two diametrically opposite views about human rights violations during police detention of immigrants; one of the Greek administration and justice system and the other of the Strasbourg court and under the umbrella of the ECHR:

- The Athens Court of Appeal endorsed the argumentation of the Greek State (Minister of Finances) to appeal against a court decision to provide pecuniary compensation of 12,000 € to a Bangladeshi citizen who was illegally detained by the authorities for one year under degrading conditions. The court reduced the indemnity to 3000 €. In particular, according to the appeal and the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree court decision, the immigrant is considered to be 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 criminality rate*" and 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 under the light of the superior need to protect the Greek territory from the uncontrollable illegal migration wave".<sup>2</sup>*

- The European Court of Human Rights has published its Chamber judgment in the case of *Kaja v. Greece*<sup>3</sup> concerning inhuman detention conditions. The Court held unanimously that there had been a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) with respect to the conditions of the applicant's detention in the police detention centre in Larissa. Under Article 41 of the Convention (just satisfaction), the Court awarded the applicant 5,000 euros (EUR) for non-pecuniary damage.

The above discrepancy indicates serious shortcomings in combating discrimination and racism against immigrants and minorities in Greece not only by the administration, but also by the judges and the justice system. In fact racism and discrimination seem not to be an issue at all, let alone ground for political accountability and responsibility. When the same finance minister made publicly racist comments against black people a couple of years ago (2005), no official response, excuse, apology or even denial or disclaimer was provided, despite a relevant journalist question at the government press briefing<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, the relevant TV video fragment published on the web (YouTube) in early 2007<sup>5</sup>, with the Finance Minister stating in front of the laughing audience that "*this is a niger, not a human being*" still astonishes the viewers (4000 views in 1 month).

### *Education challenges*

The rapidly increasing participation of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant children in education is accompanied by an ever larger dropout rate, which remains higher for immigrant children in relation to the total students' population in primary and secondary education, though it is not to attribute to school performance. Isolated incidents of exclusion and discrimination against them are recorded, especially in relation to national festivities and parades, mainly due to the strongly ethnocentric aspects of Greek education. The main issues raised during the past years were one, the prohibition of enrolment of children of undocumented immigrants, later on withdrawn due to the Ombudsman intervention, and two, the question of whether alien pupils should carry the national flag during school parades. The later issue provokes intolerant reactions at the local level every year.

The state intercultural education consists of providing language support by specialized teachers and is implemented only in 26 intercultural schools operating throughout the country. It serves the needs of the children of over a million of immigrants. Measures for immigrant children in school do not challenge the structural and systemic role of the education system in the Greek society, still based on exclusion rather than inclusion and on ethnocentrism rather than multiculturalism.

<sup>2</sup> Sentence of the Athens Court of Appeal n.2390/2005 published on 22.02.2006.

<sup>3</sup> Application no. 32927/03, <http://www.echr.coe.int> (27.07.2006)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hri.org/news/greek/kyber/2005/05-06-01.kyber.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUOxKNEZJs>

### *Health and social protection*

Irregular immigrants are excluded from the provision of public health, unless and as long they are at immediate risk of life loss, while their appearance in the public hospitals should be reported to the police. In practice however, the medical staff of public hospitals does provide medical services, irrespective of the residence status of the patient.

Regular immigrants are holders of similar rights to those of Greek citizens, for a narrow field of social protection, namely provisions for natural disaster victims, but they are not eligible for regular disability and subsistence welfare programs, which are connected to Greek citizenship and/or ethnic origin.

### *Immigrants and political rights*

There are no provisions in place for granting voting rights in local municipal elections to subjects who are not Greek or EU nationals (third country). Nevertheless, there are isolated exceptions – in some municipalities in rural Greece, the non-voting consultative bodies representative of immigrant residents were created. This the case of the Mayor of Kozani (Northern Greece) P.Koukoulopoulos (also president of the National Union of Municipalities of Greece) who announced the establishment of the immigrant council taking on an advisory and consultation role in the area of Kozani, The council's members would be elected by the vote of the locally residing immigrants.

The Greek citizenship code does not provide access to citizenship to third country nationals, neither if they were born, nor if they lived their entire life in the country. Instead, the common procedure is an application after 12 years of legal residence in Greece, supported by expensive fees (1500€), with no deadline or even an obligation of the state to provide an answer. Many such requests are not given a response before a decade after the application date.

The Long Term Residence status EC Directive is yet to be fully transposed into the Greek legal order, while the application for this status is possible only after paying a hefty 900€ fee, and after passing an exam following a year-long course of Greek language, history and culture. However, there is a 'numerus clausus' for taking part in these courses, to an extent that in the best of cases, no more than 5-10.000 immigrants will be able to apply for LTR status until 2011. This is an extremely low percentage of long term residing immigrants in the country (estimated roughly between half and one million, and on the basis of the 2001 census records on the duration of residence).

The recent migration law draft (later voted law n.3536/2007) included the creation of a National Commission for the Integration of Immigrants, composed by 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 make part of such Commission, an aspect which has been heavily criticised by immigrant associations, political parties and civil society organisations.

## 2. Minorities and minority policies

### *Employment and religious diversity*

There are no diversity management policies in place, neither in public nor in private sector, while no percentage of job posts is reserved to ethnic cultural minorities whatsoever. Believers of religions other than Christian Orthodox are not allowed to abstain from work to exercise their religion. No other religions' festivities are recognised in employment sector for leave purposes.

During the past years, the Greek Forum of Migrants has been repeatedly, albeit unsuccessfully, asking for the recognition of Muslim festivities, such as Bairam and Ramadan for legitimate absence from work. In early 2005, after considerable pressure from the Pakistani community and a relevant issue being opened in the Parliament by an opposition MP, the Minister of Public Order responded negatively arguing that the wide number of existing religions makes this impossible to apply.

This issue brings up the long debated and ever pending issue of separation of Church and State in Greece.

In the late 2005, the Hellenic League for Human Rights presented a law draft proposing the redefinition of clear relations between the State and the Church in Greece. This provoked much discussion<sup>6</sup> among politicians and religious leaders regarding the separation issue, that in turn lead to heated media and parliamentary debates. The immediate outcome of such initiative was the abolishment of some old and long-criticised provisions (i.e. the law n.1363 of 1938 article 1), as well as establishing new positive measures, such as the law allowing cremation for the first time.

### *Minority Education*

According to available data, there has been a net improvement of the situation concerning the education of Roma and Muslim minority children since the 1990s. However, there are contradictory reports about Roma children enrolment and dropout rates.

A persisting trend is that enrollment of Roma children in ordinary community schools continues to cause tensions, intolerance and violent reactions, in some cases obliging the Roma children to attend special Roma school units, despite the firm commitment of the administration to avoid segregation of minorities in education.

The major intolerance incidents in education regard the enrolment and participation of Roma children in primary schools. In the beginning of the school year 2004-05, serious incidents of obstructing Roma children from going to school by non-Roma parents (ethnic Greek immigrants from former USSR) have taken place in Aspropyrgos (wider Athens area). Violence against Roma minority, especially in cases of housing – settlements and education, is marked by the appearance of a new

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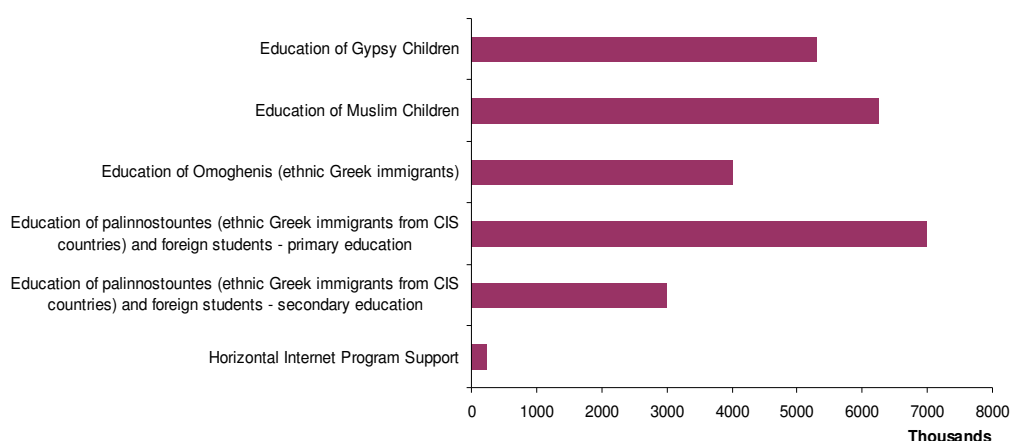
<sup>6</sup> <http://www.hlhr.gr/kratos-ekkl.htm>

'intra-minority group' aspect. Those who strongly and violently oppose the enrolment of Roma children in schools are ethnic Greek immigrants living in the same downgraded suburban industrial area. Once more, the shortcomings are lack of infrastructure, human and material resources, in particular in education. In this way, the absence of process of integrating Roma children in school system, while declared as a major priority, becomes the fertile ground for the emergence of racist violence.

No special treatment is provided to other religions in work or schooling, except the optional exemption from Religion classes, while no tension has been recorded in Greece regarding religious symbols (headscarves etc.).

A number of pro-active and positive discrimination measures aims at improving the educational opportunities of Thrace Muslim minority members. A large proportion of these consists of Muslim minority education EU-funded projects and Roma minority education EU-funded projects as the table below shows:

#### **Integrated Programs 2006-2007 for intercultural education (European Structural Fund and National funding)**



#### *Roma housing and evictions*

The housing program addressing the Roma community members, through bank loans under privilege terms represents a positive trend of the last years, and a major change in relation to the years prior to 2000. However, there is a low rate of approvals and effective loans granted, thus not corresponding to the Roma housing needs.

Over the last couple of years (2004-2005) there has been an increase of evictions of Roma dwellings in the areas where major cultural and sport events had taken place or are going to take place in the near future (2004 Olympic Games of Athens, Patras Cultural Capital of Europe 2006, Votanikos area, site of a new Football Stadium). These are inevitably accompanied by tensions, local society intolerance and violent attacks against Roma.

In particular, the forced evictions and the settlement problem in Patras developed in 2006 leading to a situation marked by severe tensions among diverse institutional

and civil society operators. Among these was the tension between the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, and the local administration representatives, in the case of the Municipality of Patras in September 2006 during and after the HCHR's visit to Patras.

In June 2006 the Patras Prosecutor's Office initiated penal prosecution for environmental pollution and disrespect of public hygiene by requesting police preliminary investigation against any responsible, either public services or settlers, and the GHM NGO as inciting illegal activities. The evictions were criticized in early September 2006 by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (see above). The European Commission for Social Rights (ECSR) concluded that 'situation in Greece is in violation of Art.16 of the European Social Charter' because of the lack of adequate housing according to the number and the needs of Roma families, which do not enjoy full and adequate legal protection.<sup>7</sup>

The situation of the Roma minority led the Greek Ombudsman to talk about '*institutionalised practices of discrimination*'. Among its Annual report key findings is that Roma exclusion, especially in housing, is due to '*institutionalised practices of discrimination*' and that '*the persistent practices of social exclusion of the Greek Roma rest in structural characteristics of Greek society (such as the non-transparent organization of employment market, the anarchic residential structure of the country and the clientelistic nature of political life, particularly at a local level)*'<sup>8</sup>.

However, as the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe pointed out '*under international law, resistance at local level is not a valid reason for exonerating a Government from responsibility for human rights breaches persistently occurring at local level*'. The Commissioner urged the Greek Government '*to take all adequate action to ensure that the basic human rights of Roma citizens are now rapidly respected in places like Aspropyrgos, Amaroussia, Patras or elsewhere*'.

### Minority policies

For what concerns the Thrace Muslim minority (under international treaties) and ethnic-cultural minorities in general (e.g. populations using less spoken languages), the ECRI in its second and third report for Greece has encouraged the Greek state to ensure that all groups, Macedonians and Turks included, may exercise their rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression in accordance with international legal standards, and to allow the registration of associations whose title includes the adjective 'Turkish'. In reality, the Greek Supreme Court in 2005 judged that the 'Turkish Union of Xanthi' should be dissolved since 'it constitutes an attempt to affirm the presence of a Turkish minority in Greece' despite the fact that in relevant cases such practice was judged to be in breach with the ECHR (art.11) by the European Court for Human Rights of Strasbourg.

In 2006 the Hellenic League for Human Rights organized a series of conferences on the role of the Mufti in Thrace and Athens, the incompatibilities of the *shariah* law with the Greek constitutional legal order, as well as on the situation and the perspectives of the Muslim minority in Thrace.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> [www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/esc/3\\_reporting\\_procedure/2\\_recent\\_conclusions/1\\_by\\_state/Greece\\_2006\\_XVIII\\_1\\_A4\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/esc/3_reporting_procedure/2_recent_conclusions/1_by_state/Greece_2006_XVIII_1_A4_EN.pdf), ECSR, pp.19-22 (July 2006).

<sup>8</sup> The Greek Ombudsman, 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Report as National Equality Body, 2006., p.10.

<sup>9</sup> [www.hlhr.gr](http://www.hlhr.gr)

### 3. Racism, discrimination and reactive / pro-active policies

#### *Antidiscrimination and anti-racism shortcomings*

In early 2005 the anti-discrimination directives have been transposed into the Greek legal order and a set of equality bodies with complementary mandates has been provided, some of which do not fully conform to the Paris Principles. After two years of implementation of the anti-discrimination legislation there are extremely few discrimination cases within the field of the anti-discrimination law, almost all of them handled by the Greek Ombudsman, which seems to be the only fully operative Equality Body in Greece. No official case of racist violence and crime has been recorded on the basis of the relevant anti-racist penal legislation (law 927/1979), although violence against immigrants and minorities, in many cases by police officers, is a reality.

The above depict a landscape of a problematic implementation of anti-racist and anti-discrimination laws, due to institutional shortcomings and the underlying attitudes.

Moreover, there is a lack of public mainstreaming, campaigning and promoting equal treatment and anti-discrimination practices and attitudes through programs targeting either specific groups or the general population.

Negative stereotypes against minority groups and legitimisation of racial violence have proven difficult to extinguish. A football game between Greece and Albania readily sets off racist tensions that lead to clashes between Greeks and Albanians and even murders. What raises concerns is that the episodes cannot be attributed to a few nationalist and fascist groups, but that they are legitimised through a mainstream anti-Albanian attitude, tolerated or shared by a large proportion of the Greek society.

The problem of police and portual corps violence against immigrants-refugees and minorities is exacerbated by the fact that the internal police audit control and investigations procedures often lead to the offenders' impunity. Only in a very small and insignificant number of cases has the investigation led to disciplinary measures, while in the absolute majority the complaint cases close as unfounded.

Social research provides indications that weak antiracist attitudes especially by the police may constitute the core of the problem. A survey published in 2006<sup>10</sup> based on interviews with Greek police detectives, indicates the attitudes of Greek police towards migrant communities and racist violence. The survey demonstrates that not only are migrant communities, particularly the Albanian, viewed as hotbeds of crime, but racist violence against these communities is not perceived as a significant problem by the Greek police. The latter is usually indifferent to racially motivated crimes and often view racist incidents as acts of self-defence by Greeks against the criminal 'other'. According to the author, a transformation of such attitudes would require a public recognition of the widespread racism that exists in the Greek society.

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<sup>10</sup> Antonopoulos G.A., Greece: policing racist violence in the 'fenceless vineyard', *Race & Class*, Institute of Race Relations Vol. 48(2): 92–100, <http://rac.sagepub.com>, 2006.

It goes noted that in 2006, the Police Chief issued relevant circulars in order to improve the situation while the police officers' training programmes do include topics about racism, xenophobia, minorities and racist discourse.

Through the Circular Order n.71100/4/3/24.05.06 entitled 'Confronting racism, xenophobia and intolerance during police action' police officers are ordered to investigate eventual racist motivation in cases where immigrants or vulnerable group members are involved. Through the Circular Order n.4803/22/210 -κ/26.06.06, the Police Chief recommends the investigation of the eventual racist motivation in audit and internal disciplinary investigations, therefore taking under consideration the European Court of Human Rights Judgement in the Bekos and Koutropoulos vs. Greece case.

As far as public opinion is concerned, after the killing of a young Albanian in Crete on 01.01.2006 an opinion poll by the V-PRC poll company commissioned for a national radio network (Sky radio) showed that a large part of the public is reluctant to condemn deadly violence against Albanian immigrants. The 44% of the interviewed sample found the assassination to be an '*unjustified act*', while 34% said that '*it is also the Albanians' fault*' (!). A significant 24% of the sample refused to respond at all and therefore to give a judgment about the murder.<sup>11</sup>

### *Racist violence*

The complete absence of official data on racist violence, since racist motivation is not investigated in practice, makes it impossible to draw a clear pattern or trend. However, the number of violent incidents against immigrants and minorities as reported by the press and the competent non-governmental agencies allow to depict a generic, although not completely reliable, picture of the situation in Greece over the last years.

### **Major racist violence incidents against immigrants and minorities (2003-2006)**

	2003	2004	2005	2006
<i>Major racist violence incidents*</i>				
against immigrants and refugees	5	11	12	16
against Roma	2	3	3	2
against religious minorities	-	2	1	3
alleged police, border & costal guard racist violence incidents (included above)	4	4	9	7
Violence against immigrants - death toll	1 <sup>12</sup>	1 <sup>13</sup>	1 <sup>14</sup>	2 <sup>15</sup>

\* as recorded by NFP 'Antigone' RAXEN National Annual Reports 2003, 2004, 2005 and on the basis of data collected in 2006.

The above do not represent a reliable set of data and may reflect a fluctuation of reporting capacity either of the media and NGOs or of the RAXEN NFP, rather than the effective racist crime rate throughout the years. Overall, the above reporting

<sup>11</sup> Eleftherotipia, (13.01.2006)

<sup>12</sup> Nigerian male immigrant.

<sup>13</sup> Albanian male immigrant. The murderer of the 20 years old Albanian immigrant in Zakynthos after the 2004 football match between Albania and Greece has been condemned to life imprisonment in mid 2006, although the court has not taken into account eventual racist motivation (Athens Indymedia, 07.05.2006)

<sup>14</sup> Albanian male immigrant.

<sup>15</sup> Albanian and Georgian male immigrants, both stabbed to death in the island of Crete.



sample may provide an indicative trend of a constant or increasing number of violent incidents against immigrants and minorities.

The Olympic policing-racial profiling of Muslims and their surveillance because of anti-terrorist measures has led to a major incident of mass abduction and interrogation under undefined circumstances by Greek and foreign secret services in summer 2004. This issue has led to a heated debate in the Parliament and has been under the focus of international media in 2005. The arrest of the Pakistani community leader in Greece upon a Pakistan government request has been allegedly connected to the above case.

### *Positive trends*

In 2006 the Greek Ombudsman has extended its institutional mandate to gender discrimination, as well as to sexual harassment at the workplace. Such provisions do not regard directly ethnic and racial discrimination. However in view of the fact that immigrants and minorities may experience multiple and indirect discrimination, this is a significant legislation in terms of extension of the Ombudsman's activities as the only fully operative and efficient equality body in Greece<sup>16</sup>. In fact, more stakeholders and experts indicate the Greek Ombudsman as the body that should assume the entire anti-discrimination equality body mandate, private sector included.

The religion-oriented racism is not usually the case in the Greek society and intolerance towards Muslims or islamophobia incidents have not been detected or reported. The public policies are not terror-fear driven and no particular security measures have been taken towards Muslim religious minority group in Greece.

While there are sporadic episodes of Anti-Semitic vandalism against monuments and verbal threats through street graffiti, no violent incident against persons on the basis of their religious beliefs has been recorded over the last years. Furthermore, a 2004 law has set a date (27 of January) for Commemoration of the Greek Jews Holocaust Martyrs. However, during the 2006 Lebanon war, the state of Israel was depicted as the 4th Reich and anti-semitism had marked a segment of media and political discourse, mostly the extreme right-wing one.

Notwithstanding the great number of immigrants of Muslim religion and the practical absence of racist tensions against them, no official mosque still exists outside of the Western Thrace Region, while a notable number of unofficial mosques operate in Athens informally but without intolerance problems. A late 2006 law provides for building a mosque in Athens in order to satisfy the needs of Muslim inhabitants. The downside is that the law provides for the administration of the mosque by Christian orthodox public officers and the designation of the imam by the Minister of Education and Religions upon their recommendation.

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<sup>16</sup> Law n.3488/2006.

#### 4. Public discourse and attitudes

The 'Greek majority priority' principle, a perception deeply rooted in Greek society, provides the base for discrimination against minority groups and foreigners, and constitutes an obstacle for development of the society on the basis of equality and non-discrimination. The hard-to-die negative stereotypes against minority groups legitimize racist violence. These are accompanied by the resolute and contradictory emerging attitudes versus the foreigners (co-existence of positive/negative views).

A major challenge for the future is a decisive role of the representatives of the political spectrum in shielding the public sphere from extreme right-wing xenophobic and racist discourse and practices legitimized in the name of a nationalist patriotism and the preservation of the 'Greekness'. While public condemnations against such views are frequent and generalized as rhetoric, the main arguments and repertoires of racist discourse permeate a great part of the political class and parties. The media offers fertile ground to xenophobic and racist discourse and gives floor to extreme right-wing political spectrum representatives.

A number of noteworthy good practices and civil society's voluntary activities depict a rather robust and dynamic landscape of anti-discrimination action, some having significant impact on the public sphere. Civil society organisations and agencies are conducting a strongly anti-racist and pro-integration activity and a considerable part of substantial good practices concern promotion of multicultural society through high impact cultural activities. A significant number of local initiatives by civil society organizations are focused on the intercultural contact and exchanges, as well as on the provision of specialized support to vulnerable groups, especially immigrant and refugees-asylum seekers, women and minors in major cities and periphery. After a decade of immigration, Greek cinematography is producing more films and theatrical representations with a strong reference to the migration phenomena and the way it shapes Greek modern society.

##### *Immigrants' and minorities social inclusion*

A significant 2006 initiative is the foundation of a political party by the Greek Roma under the name ASPIDA by federations and associations of Greek Roma in order to represent the Roma community through national elections, currently not represented in Parliament, and roughly estimated to amount 200.000-300.000 members.

Under the light of public discussion regarding the management of migration it is obvious that some things have changed indeed in terms of dealing with immigrants as subjects entitled to basic rights, while the declarative perspective is their integration into, rather than their exclusion from, the Greek society.

The debate about concession of political rights to immigrants has been initiated, and most parliamentary parties propose political rights especially to long-term residents and at the local elections.

As the newly elected president of the Hellenic Republic has put it at his first presidential address to the nation (25/3/2005), integration of immigrants is one of the main future challenges for Greek democracy: *'(...) the protection of human rights and personal freedoms without discrimination and smooth integration of immigrants, are serious challenges for modern Greece'*.