Demystifying Migration Myths:
Social Discourse on the Impact of Immigrants and Refugees in Greece[1]

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This article is based on the analysis of statistical records and media coverage. The discussion focuses on the demystification of negative perceptions, stereotypes and myths regarding immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in urban localities, examining the social discourse on the repercussions of migration in Greek society. A strong contradiction has characterized the perceptions and practices towards migrants and refugees in Greece. On the one hand, as in other European countries, the social discourse regarding solidarity, support and humanitarianism is widespread. On the other hand, migrants and refugees have often been seen as 'unwanted individuals' or as a 'threat', a 'health time-bomb', 'criminals and dangerous', 'invaders/intruders', individuals who 'alter the homogeneity of the host country', people who are 'uneducated, uncultured and do not want to attend schools', and who 'take the jobs of native-born workers'. Social discourse in Europe and Greece ignores the role and contributions of third-country nationals to the advancement of the receiving societies. Also, academic literature focuses almost exclusively on the social effects of migration in the receiving countries and societies, disregarding the repercussions of migration on the migrant and the refugee.
Keywords: Immigrants, refugees, social exclusion, social integration, social discourse, Greece.

Introduction

Migrants are characterized by diversity, and the host society shows different responses towards them (Prato 2009a, 2020). Addressing negative perceptions, stereotypes and myths towards migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Greek society, one cannot ignore the role of media coverage of migrants before, during and after the 'refugee crisis' of 2015. The shocking photo of the drowned Syrian refugee child who washed up on the shores of Turkey on September 2015 (Smith 2015), as well as the hundreds of lives lost at the Mediterranean Sea from capsized boats overloaded with refugees, have brought the migration and refugee crisis to the world's attention (IOM 2017). However, as Europe and the world struggle to deal with the problem, many questions involving social, ethical, legal, political and economic concerns have arisen in relation to the problematic of integration (Prato 2009b, Andrews 2018, Ciubrinskas 2018, da Silva 2018, Giordano 2018, Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong 2018, Grillo 2002, Pardo 2020).

Greek society has experienced massive flows of migrants from neighbouring Balkan countries and the Republics of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, as well as from Africa, the Middle East and Asia in early 2010 (Fouskas and Tsevrenis 2014). In the late 1980s, Greece was mostly a country that received immigrants, rather than a country from which citizens emigrated. Census statistics prove that, in 1981, there were 180,000 foreigners residing in Greece, amounting to 2% of the total population, 63% of whom were from the most developed countries. In the 1991 census, although there were no significant changes in numbers, less than 50% of foreigners were from developed countries. However, in the 2001 census, the number of foreigners had more than quadrupled, including 762,000 individuals residing in

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Greece without Greek citizenship; these were 7% of the total population, which at the time was just over 11 million. The most recent census of 2011 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, ELSTAT 2011) registered 912,000 foreigners in Greece, an increase of 150,000 individuals from 2001.

Between 2015 and 2017, the in-coming refugees were mainly from Syria. The current migration flows are mixed, including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (Fouskas 2017, Fouskas et al. 2019a, Fouskas et al. 2019b). Under the 'hotspot approach' of the European Commission's European Agenda on Migration (EC 2015), an initial response to the exceptional flows involved the establishment of Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the islands of Lesvos, Kos, Chios, Samos and Leros (Table 1).

RIC	Lesvos	Chios	Samos	Leros	Kos	Total
Occ./Cap.	19,333/2,840	5,513/1,014	7,573/648	2,331/860	3,341/816	38,091/6,178

Table 1. Reception and Identification Centres - Occupancy/capacity Source: Ministry of Citizen Protection/National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum (NCCBCIA) (27/02/2020).

According to the Asylum Service (2020), the number of asylum applications by Third Country Nationals (henceforth, TCNs) in the Greek territory overmultiplied between 2013 and 2019, from 4,814 applications in 2013 (a monthly average of 688 applications) to 77,285 applications in 2019 (a monthly average of 6,440 applications). Regarding the recognition rate of refugee status, in 2013, the positive rate was 15.5%, while in 2019 it was 55.9% (Asylum Service 2020). The countries of origin with the highest recognition rates were Yemen, Syria and Palestine; those with the lowest recognition rates are Georgia, Albania and India (Asylum Service 2020).

According to the National Centre for Social Solidarity (2020), the estimated number of unaccompanied minors was 5,389 (92.7% males); 8.8% are under the age of 14. In both the islands and the mainland, there is total of 1,533 shelters — places of long-term accommodation — while 841 minors are in temporary accommodation (Safe zones/Emergency hotels). As of 31 January 2020, there are 542,813 TCNs residing legally in Greece (Ministry for Migration Policy 2020).

A strong contradiction has characterized the perceptions and practices towards migrants and refugees in Greece. On the one hand, the social discourse regarding solidarity, support and humanitarianism is widespread similarly to other European countries. On the other hand, according to newspapers and other media reports, migrants and refugees have often been seen by society as unwanted individuals or as a threat (Leontitsis and Tsagroni 2020, *Public Issue* 2017, The TOC 2020), a 'health time-bomb' (To Vima 2011), 'criminals and dangerous' (To Ethnos 2020), 'invaders/intruders' (To Ethnos 2021), individuals who 'alter the homogeneity of the host country' (Kathimerini 2020d), people who are 'uneducated, uncultured and do not want to attend schools' (*IN.GR* 2002), who 'take the jobs of native-born workers' (Kathimerini

2003, Avgi 2020, Aggelidis 2017) and who are 'responsible for the downgrading of various urban areas' (Onisenko 2010).

The abovementioned contradiction became more evident between 2015 and 2018, when the flows of refugees and migrants increased significantly. The island of Lesvos makes a representative ethnographic example. According to several media reports particularly during 2015, in Lesvos, the unconditional care, response and acts of solidarity provided by local communities and civil society to the incoming migrant populations were more pervasive than in other European and international contexts. Every day, Greek fishermen carried out several rescues. Individually and collectively, citizens showed outstanding solidarity and support to the refugees, providing every possible form of assistance and care, and engaged in collective and organized actions and awareness-raising/sensitisation campaigns. Across the country, professionals like medical doctors, teachers, students, entrepreneurs and others, provided humanitarian assistance (Imerisia 2015).

Nevertheless, in November 2017, Lesvos residents 'went on strike' to protest against European policies that had turned their island into a 'prison' for immigrants and asylum seekers (Kathimerini 2017). Islanders shut businesses, shops, municipal offices, nurseries and pharmacies, and dozens rallied in a central square, calling on the government to transfer asylum-seekers to the mainland, shouting that 'Lesvos is not a place of exile'. More recently, in February 2020, police officers clashed with migrant and refugee protesters as they marched from the Moria camp to the capital Mytilini to express their intolerance towards their appalling living conditions in the camp (Kathimerini 2020b). Prato's ethnographic work (2009b) on Albanians examines the dramatic shift in local people's attitude from solidarity, acceptance and enthusiasm to mistrust, discriminations and hostility due to various reasons, including mistrust linked to increasing reports of some migrant groups' involvement in illegal activities.

The events described above affect the relations and image of migrants and increase the aversion of Greek society towards foreigners, including extreme signs of racism and xenophobia. In 2018, the Racist Violence Recording Network (2018) recorded 117 incidents of racist violence and over 130 victims of such violence. In 74 cases, migrants or refugees were targeted due to ethnic origin, religion or skin colour; also targeted were migrant community associations and human rights advocates. Triandafyllidou (2015) maintained that public opinion in Greece remained overall welcoming to migrants and refugees. However, Glorius (2018) stated that respondents to a survey mostly agreed that it was a national responsibility to help refugees, although there was a decrease from 85% in 2015 to 70% in 2017. Negative attitudes were registered both to immigration from third countries and to immigrants' contribution to the country, while public opinion reacted positively to some acts of kindness by migrants (Wessendorf 2008, Poulakidakos 2018, Fouskas 2019b).

Anthropological and sociological studies (Nail 2016, Greenhill 2016) show that the social discourse in Europe and Greece ignores the role and contributions of migrants to the advancement of the receiving societies. Also, with only a few exceptions (Fakiolas 1999, Foner 2012, Fouskas 2014a, Joly 2000, Ohndorf 1989), academic literature focuses on the social effects of migration in receiving countries and societies, disregarding the repercussions of

migration on the migrant and the refugee. The discussion that follows is based mainly on the analysis of statistical records and media coverage about TCNs in Greek society and draws on sources from the fields of Social Anthropology, Sociology of Migration and Social Policy in an attempt to address and demystify negative perceptions, existing myths, prejudices, misperceptions and stereotypes on demography, employment, religion, education, the ghettoization of urban areas and delinquency.

How Much do Immigrants and Refugees Affect Greece's Demographic Problem?
According to Eurostat (2019), during 2017, a total of 4.4 million people migrated to one of the 28 EU Member States, while at least 3.1 million people were reported to have left an EU Member State. Among the 4.4 million immigrants, there were an estimated 2.0 million citizens of non-EU countries, around 1.0 million people who migrated to an EU Member State of which they had citizenship, 1.4 million citizens of an EU Member State different from the one to which they migrated, and some 11,000 stateless people (Eurostat 2019). On 1 January 2018, there were 22.3 million people residing in an EU Member State with citizenship of a non-member country, accounting for 4.4% of the EU-28 population. In 2017, Germany reported the largest total number of immigrants (917,100), followed by the United Kingdom (644,200), Spain (532,100), France (370,000) and Italy (343,400) (Eurostat 2019).

Greece is no exception to the general European demographic problem, arising mainly from a low birth rate and an increased life expectancy. This results in the increase of the average age of the population, with a significant proportion of people who are over 65. According to Martzoukos (2011), the main reasons causing the low birth rate in the Greek population are the abandonment of traditional Greek life patterns and the adoption of new social standards; the decline of the values of marriage, family and children; a loosening of morals; physical and mental fatigue; the over-protection of children; parents' professional occupation and social-materialistic eudemonism; increased interest in economic reassurance; unemployment; sterility; abortion; urbanisation; traffic accidents; drugs, smoking and alcoholism; ageing population; emigration; national and global insecurity. On the other hand, increased immigration is making Europe a multi-ethnic society — in the sense of 'poly-ethnic' (Prato 2009a) — in terms of race, religion and culture. Therefore, the need to focus on particular issues regarding the new social composition is essential for social cohesion and normality.

Do Migrants Take the Jobs of Native Workers?
International scholars and researchers who have studied the complex nature of the Greek labour market in the period 1990-2020 argue that TCNs operate for extended periods within the limits of informal work (Williams et al. 2016; Fouskas 2016b, 2019a; Fouskas et al. 2018). Undocumented TCNs are subjected to irregular and exploitative employment, often falling victims of human trafficking networks and organised crime (Fouskas et al. 2018). The unequal division of labour entraps TCNs almost exclusively into the informal sector of the economy, where employers gain economic profit by avoiding social security contributions and hiring people without contracts, including individuals who have second jobs but declare only one. In

Greece, TCNs do manual labour in agriculture,[2] construction, crafts, domestic work, food and hotel services, cleaning,[3] personal care services and itinerant trade (Fouskas et al. 2018). These jobs are not attractive, offer no social prestige and are socially inferior (Watson 1980). Pardo's analysis of migrants' employment in the informal sector (2020) contributes to unravelling how, due to uncontrolled irregular migration, the positive relationships and economic collaboration between locals and immigrants have transformed into polarised, dangerous and unliveable realities. In his study of the Naples case, some who arrive legally overstay beyond their temporary permit and then disappear, becoming caught in a limbo under appalling conditions of slavery and exploitation. At the same time, Pardo notes, the progressive worsening of the situation of co-existence breeds intolerance and conflict between indigenous people, legal immigrants and irregular migrants.

Greece is first among the 21 OECD country-members, with 24% of Greek GDP being formed by informal economic activities (Schneider and Williams 2013: 52-96). Moreover, the country has one of the world's highest percentages of uninsured workers (37.3%) and the highest percentage of working irregular immigrants (4.4%), followed by the USA (3.2%) and Italy (2%) (Schneider and Williams 2013: 52-96). Here, immigrants and refugees have become part of a cheap workforce reserve that is continually renewed, while the existing division of labour entraps into low-status/low-wage jobs migrants, who are classified in terms of class, gender and nationality (Psimmenos 2011). As we have said, migrants largely do unregistered jobs outside the margins of formal employment that are considered to be unattractive, without social prestige and inferior by the Greek workforce. However, they do provide economic profit and social status attainment for the employers and the customers (Portes et al. 1989, Parreñas 2000, Anderson 2000).

Immigrants mostly do precarious jobs that lack all the standard forms of labour security (Vosko 2006) and create enormous and complex barriers to labour organisation strategies, due to the isolated, atomized and non-unionized nature of migrant employment (Choudry and Thomas 2012; Fouskas 2014b, 2016b). This makes these immigrant workers more vulnerable in the labour market (Spyridakis et al. 2020). According to Eurostat (2017), non-EU citizens are more likely to become economically inactive and there is a higher proportion of inactive immigrants (21%) than inactive native-born who are willing to work (16%) — such migrants'

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[2] In the Nea Manolada area of the Peloponnese, farm owners have exploited and abused immigrants repeatedly. In 2013, twenty Bangladeshi workers were shot during a dispute over back pay (Kathimerini 2013). The incident occurred in the region of Ilia when some 200 pickers reportedly demanded six months' worth of unpaid wages from their employer. The workers were involved in an argument with three Greek supervisors, at least one of whom fired at the immigrants. It is thought that as many as thirty workers were injured in the incident, several critically. The farm owner, who was allegedly not present at the shooting, was arrested but the three supervisors were not. The case (Chowdury and Others v. Greece) was brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Court found there had been a violation of Art. 4(2) ECHR on the prohibition of forced labour.

[3] When an Egyptian immigrant window cleaner fell to his death (Kathimerini 2010) while working at the government building of the Greek Ministry of Labour, it was found that he did not have social insurance and that safety rules had not been followed.

inactivity has been labelled 'involuntary inactivity'; notably, according to the OECD, in Greece, there is a low number of inactive immigrants who would like to work (OECD/European Union 2015). In 2019 (Eurostat 2020), despite falling for six consecutive years, the unemployment rate in the EU Member-States among people born outside EU remained 6.3% higher than that for the native population.

Are Religious Spaces of Migrants Dangerous?

Religious spaces are of great importance, not only for religious observance. In his analysis on irregular migration, Syrigos (2011) mentions that in Greece there are no mosques in the inner-city areas, except in Thrace, where there is a substantial Greek-speaking Muslim minority. As a result, Muslims in these areas practice their religion in informal spaces. During festivals such as Ramadan and Eid-ul-Azha, they practice their religion in the open, mostly in stadiums. Arguably, even if an official mosque was built, the prayer rooms would not disappear, as they are scattered throughout neighbourhoods and serve daily needs (Syrigos 2011: 241). In May 2009, a violent demonstration took place in the centre of Athens, in which Muslims protested against an alleged insult to the Qur'an by a Greek police officer (Kathimerini 2009; Syrigos 2011: 241). The problem of Islamic radicalism is worsened by the fact that the majority of devout Muslims who have arrived in Greece do not speak Greek and have been marginalized (Syrigos 2011: 241). It has been observed that members of the immigrant communities retain their cultures only at the level of associations and among family members and friends (Sedmak 2011). However, there is substantial evidence from across the EU on mosques as hubs of radicalisation, and misconstrued comparative attempts have been made between the role of churches and mosques among the immigrant communities (Syrigos 2011).

In contrast to such misconstructions, ethnographic studies show the positive socialising role of Christian churches for many immigrants. For example, Romaniszyn (1996) has explored the role of the Polish church for undocumented Polish workers in Athens. For irregular immigrants the church is a space where they are welcomed and respected; a place where a special collectivity is created and useful information on jobs and housing is exchanged. Gradually, despite individual mobility and uncertain status, Polish immigrants were able to create and maintain a special collectivity there, which, although invisible and temporary, allows them to exchange information on available jobs, apartments or rooms for rent, and places available in vehicles travelling back to Poland (Romaniszyn 1996).

Are Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees a 'Health Time-bomb'?

Greek society was significantly negatively affected when a study carried out by the Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (HCDCP/KEELPNO 2012) was published. According to data from the mobile health units of HCDCP/KEELPNO in Omonia Square, Victoria Square, Attica Square, Larissa Square, Karaiskakis Square, Amerikis Square and Votanicos, there has been an increase in the rates of sexually transmitted diseases, such as genital warts (HPV), syphilis and gonorrhoea. There were also outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as hepatitis and tuberculosis, recurrence of diseases which had been eradicated, like polio,

and multiple cases of infection. These rates were attributed to the increase of male and female prostitution (legal and illegal) and the massive influx of undocumented migrants, who enter the country without having undergone vaccinations in their countries of origin (HCDCP/KEELPNO 2012). The following data obtained by HCDCP/KEELPNO through recording the medical history of immigrants were indicative of the situation regarding vaccination (see Table 2):

Afghanistan	70% vaccinated; 30% unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated.
Pakistan	68.30% vaccinated; 31.70% unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated.
Bangladesh	100% unvaccinated.
Rest	No adequate vaccination coverage.

Table 2. Vaccination Coverage of Immigrants Examined by HCDCP/KEELPNO Unit. Source: Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention, October 2012 (09/06/2011-25/09/12).

The impact of migration on public health is of particular concern to Greek immigration policy because most immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees are from Balkan, Asian and African states. As these people's epidemiological profile is completely different from that of Greeks and other Europeans, they pose a high risk to public health, also due to poor living condition both in their countries of origin and during their stay in Greece. Legally (Law 4368, in Government Gazette 2016), asylum seekers, persons without social insurance and the vulnerable are entitled to free access to basic health, pharmaceutical and hospital care, including psychiatric care (AIDA 2020b). Nevertheless, in practice, both foreigners' and the local population's actual access to health care services is hindered by significant shortages of resources and capacity, as a result of the austerity policies implemented in Greece and the lack of adequate cultural mediation in the health service (Fouskas et al. 2019b, 2019c). The resulting health challenges exemplify the formal and informal barriers that immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees face in accessing healthcare. Such barriers include legal restrictions, such as a stop to granting social security numbers to new immigrants (To Vima 2019, Kathimerini 2020a), denial of service provision, fear of being denounced to the Authorities and penalisation of health professionals' assistance to irregular migrants. Other factors that influence people's access to health care include corruption, under-the-table payments ('fakelaki' in Greek), language and cultural barriers, as well as lack of familiarity with how the national health insurance and the health system of the host country function.

A Provisional Insurance and Health Care Number (PAAYPA) is currently issued by the Asylum Service upon a migrant's completion of the application. For the following six months, this PAAYPA allows the asylum seekers to gain access to health care and to the labour market (Government Gazette 2020, Kathimerini 2020c). The situation is complicated by the conditions in the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the Greek islands, where TCNs face overcrowding, health problems, extreme violence and traumatic events resulting in physical and mental health issues (AIDA 2020a). At the same time, there is a lack of medical staff and cultural health mediators (AIDA 2020b). The combination of a restrictive legal framework with

the problems that arise in practice exacerbate the inaccessibility of health services for immigrants.

TCNs who do precarious, low-status, low wage jobs seem to develop attitudes which question the social importance of health care services and their significance in their lives (Psimmenos and Kassimati 2003, Psimmenos 2007, Fouskas 2016a). At the same time, following the COVID-19 emergency and social distancing, there has been a decrease in the kind of pro-immigrant mobilisations and solidarity that characterized the 2015-2018 reception crisis (Mazzola and Martiniello 2020). On 4th August 2020, a 48-year-old legal immigrant from Cameroon became a scapegoat for some passengers travelling by train from Athens to Thessaloniki. During routine checks at one of the train stops, he was found without a ticket for his destination, Karditsa, and was reportedly forced to leave the train, also due to complaints from passengers that he was a suspected case of COVID-19 (Naftemporiki 2020). All passengers reacted with panic and aggressiveness towards the Cameroonian and wanted him to get off the train. The train inspector asked him to sit on the floor of the wagon until the train reached the next station, Lianokladi. There, the authorities were waiting. He was made to leave the train and was transported, with police escort, by ambulance to the hospital of Lamia, where he was checked and found not to have any relevant symptoms of COVID-19. In another incident that took place in Chios on 12th August, a Greek was arrested following a complaint from the Racist Crime Observatory about a racist post on social media calling to action against the refugees; in the post, the Greek stated that 'they are destroying land properties and that are Wanted Dead or Alive' (Ta Nea 2020).

Is Education Unnecessary for Immigrant and Refugee Children?

In Greece, Spain and Italy, more than 40% of young immigrants are early school leavers (Dumčius et al. 2012: 3). Moreover, there are complaints from immigrant parents claiming that not enough attention is paid to their children's unique needs. Migrant parents feel tolerated and not accepted in Greek society, and Greek parents believe that the quality of education is negatively affected by the presence of immigrant pupils (Triandafyllidou 2011: 27-28). Until 2013, in Greece, there was little support for newly arrived migrant children at regional, local and school level, and there were no clear guidelines for teachers, parents and local communities (Dumčius et al. 2012: 8). Moreover, the vast majority of students in several schools in central Athens were immigrant children, as the geographic concentration of immigrants in urban community ghettos led to migrant children being overrepresented in particular schools resulting in school and residential segregation (Burgess et al. 2004, Dumčius et al. 2012, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019). Frequently, parents are unable to support their children's learning needs due to their irregular jobs, precariousness, lack of time and education. They face subjective difficulties, too; for example, when registering their children at school (Dumčius et al. 2012).

Moreover, immigrant children are characterized by background diversity and different needs that require flexible and inclusive tactics (Fouskas 2016c). Before 2016, Greece had a non-systematic educational support model characterized by the randomness of the support

provided. There is no clearly articulated national policy to support the integration of newly arrived migrant children; furthermore, insufficient resources have been allocated for such policy, which has often been ineffectively implemented. In 2016, new measures of access to early childhood education for immigrant and refugee children were implemented. The Ministry of Education established a programme of afternoon preparatory classes (Reception Facilities for Refugee Education-RFREs), which is implemented in public schools near immigrant camps or places of residence (UNHCR apartments, hotels and reception centres). The educational programme addresses all immigrant and refugee children without discrimination. It aims to ensure that, after a transitional period of preparation, children who remain in Greece receive psychosocial support and education and achieve a smooth integration into the Greek educational system. Additional support is offered through the Reception Classes (RCs), which are specifically designed for teaching the Greek language to immigrant and refugee pupils with little or no knowledge of the language. In December 2019, the estimated number of refugee and immigrant children in Greece was 37,000 (UNICEF 2019); as of June 2019, 12,800 of them, who are of school age (4-17 years old), are enrolled in formal education (UNICEF 2019). Article 51 of Law 4636/2019 (Government Gazette 2019) states that asylum-seeking children should have access to the education system, and that facilitation is provided in case of incomplete documentation.

Although the refugee education programme is highly welcomed, there are still issues to be solved. On the one hand, school attendance rate should be improved, and particular action should be taken in order to guarantee access to education to children in the islands (AIDA 2020c). On the other hand, various schools have registered several cases of anti-immigrant sentiments and shows of intolerance of third-county nationals' stay among parents and guardians of Greek pupils in various cities, such as Lamia, Chios, Oreokastro and Polygiros. Specifically, there is direct opposition to immigrant and refugee education and to reception facilities for refugees' education.

Are Immigrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees Responsible for the Ghettoization of Urban Areas?
There has been a continuous flow of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Greece. They have found shelter mainly in already deprived districts in the city centres (Psimmenos 1995, Rerres 2010). As pointed out by Pardo with reference to the Naples case (2020), the authorities' reiterated neglect of inner-city areas and neighbourhoods contributes to their degradation and creates a fertile soil for potential conflict between old and new residents. Thus, the real estate market is frozen, property values plummet constantly and apartments and stores are rented or sold below their value. Moreover, entrepreneurs leave these areas as their sales decline, and they find themselves unable to co-exist with the recession, street-crime, prostitution, drug use and drug dealing, begging. Environmental degradation contributes to the deterioration of the local quality of life, as the number of old and abandoned buildings increases, as do trash, low lighting, poor policing, traffic, concentration of services, itinerant trade and lack of infrastructure.

Consequently, consumers' purchasing power (shrunk by the recession) is transferred to markets in the suburbs. In this context, the Control Unit of Flea Markets and Outdoor Trade carry out inspections to eradicate illegal vending; for example, the sale of fake, counterfeit, pirated and illegal merchandise and tobacco (Hellenic Ministry of Citizen Protection 2012a). At the same time, special Police operations are conducted in collaboration with the Financial and Economic Crime Unit to detect the warehouses where these items are stored (Hellenic Ministry of Citizen Protection 2012b).

During the refugee and immigrant reception crisis of 2015, numerous citizen initiatives, volunteering, squatting in uninhabited buildings, self-management, and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants emerged in city centres, towns or public areas in the mainland and in the islands (Fouskas 2019b). Abandoned buildings have been converted into living spaces for immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees; there, men, women, families and sometimes young children are crammed into rooms and apartments in basements and warehouses that in many cases present health hazards as they lack basic facilities. Migrants from African and Asian countries live 5-40 together in abandoned apartments in the city centre or large rented rooms. They often pay high rent to owners or to the tenants from whom they sub-rent. One may reasonably assume that the profit of the owners is mostly untaxed. The lack of opportunities for interaction hinders mutual understanding among various groups and reinforce racial and ethnic stereotyping (Fong 2009: 48). Often, immigrants' petty-thieving or criminal acts of violence contribute to social polarisation and to aggression towards foreigners irrespective of nationality, gender or legal status.

Are Immigrants, Asylum and Refugees Responsible for Increased Crime?

The presence of immigrants, asylum and refugees in the country has been directly linked to crime, even though their presence is marginal. In many cases, violence is intra-community, and they are victims of criminal acts (Balatsou 2010). As migrants who engage in criminal activity (street crime, theft, burglaries, and robberies) are more visible, the image of violent criminal activity by migrants is strengthened (Tsiganou 2010: 80). It should be emphasised that the vulnerability of immigrants, the exploitation of their irregular status and the inability to enter Greece legally for work purposes, lead to an increase of organised groups' criminal activity (Balatsou 2010: 50).

There is a negative stereotypical association between immigration and crime. The equation 'illegal migrant=dangerous criminal' has become embedded in the social consciousness, leading to an incorrect supposition that there is some specific immigrant groups' ethnic predisposition to commit certain crimes (Tsiganou 2010: 81). This notion dominates even when the immigrant's legal status is regularised. Some migrant groups are over-represented in the crime statistics (Tsiganou 2010: 81) only because they happen to be more numerous (Balatsou 2010: 50). Similar to other European contexts (Pardo 2020), the most common criminal actions in which irregular migrants are involved along with Greeks and individuals of other nationalities, or with criminal gangs of Greeks or foreigners, include drug peddling, prostitution, human trafficking, smuggling of tobacco and other merchandise (like

CDs and DVDs), illegal vending, petty theft, pickpocketing, bag-snatching, forgery and counterfeiting, burglaries, robberies, beatings, online fraud, scams and protection rackets.

Moreover, of the 9,467 people held in the detention facilities, 5,221 (55%) are foreigners (Hellenic Ministry of Justice, September 2017). The criminal tendencies and patterns of immigrants match those of the Greeks and are incorporated into the existing underworld networks (Tsiganou 2010: 81).

One has to be careful when interpreting data on crime, concerning both Greeks and migrants. One should also be aware of the role of the media and politicians in the criminalisation process, the social construction of the migrant and the use of migrants as scapegoats (Lazaridis and Wickens 1999), which generates stigma against minorities and reinforces the fear of crime.

Racism is strongly associated with poverty in urban areas, where 'moral panic' produces the social exclusion of certain individuals — the poor, the 'other' with a different skin colour, and so on — who are demonised in the media and viewed as dangerous (Fernandes and Morte 2011: 83 and 90). The ultimate example of racist attitudes in the media reflects a widespread belief that crime is on the increase especially due to black youth and immigrants (Fernandes and Morte 2011: 90).

Conclusion

No one can ignore the social controversies, the policy inadequacies and the tragedies that accompany migration. Nor can one ignore the precarious life that immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees of both genders and all ages endure. They struggle to survive at the margins of society, while their social and human rights are encroached upon. In Greece, the escalation of migration concurred with the conversion of the country from one that sends migrants to one that receive migrants. Greek policy regulating the entry requirements for migrants, the reception mechanism and their social integration is vague and confusing and co-exists with various pressures and the inadequacy of state mechanisms.

Public opinion in Greece has wrongly been imbued with feelings of fear based on the view promoted by the media and some political parties that the country will be 'flooded by massive migration, and social cohesion will be threatened' by 'them'/'the foreigners'/'the others'/'the criminals'. That is, claims such as 'massive and sustained influx of migrants and the large volume of asylum claims could threaten social stability in Greece and security in the centres of large cities of Europe' create polarisation and intolerance to diversity while instrumentalizing the plight of thousands of migrants. However, such assertions generate multiple questions. These claims, one notes, apply to the precarious, low-status/low-wage work and undeclared employment involving the inflows of migrants, who are exploited as a cheap and flexible workforce; yet, the global economy and the formal and particularly the informal sectors of the labour market are benefiting from migrant workers.

In recent years, Manolada and other areas of rural Greece have been at the centre of several cases involving violence against immigrant workers. Such tragedies, which remind us of colonial attitudes towards natives treated as slaves, do not happen only in the agriculture sector. In the urban centres, there are numerous incidents of work accidents in construction sites

and factories, as well as instances of abuse of domestic workers. In most cases, these events are not recorded or remain hidden and even if they become known, the trade unions fail to act. The membership of the Greek trade unions does not include most third-country nationals, due to the informal, marginal nature of their work; this contributes to making many migrants vulnerable in the labour market and susceptible to exploitation and precariousness in the informal economy sector. As workers from Eastern Europe, Asia or Africa who protest against poverty wages and squalid living conditions are not supported by the trade unions, their actions are unsuccessful and exposed to loopholes in the law, State indifference and fear of employers' reaction and job loss.

This is a complicated situation. The dynamics that we have outlined result in the failed integration of third-country nationals, contributing to their stigma; this stigma dominates even when their legal status is regularized, allowing immigrants to be used as scapegoats. Immigrants are often blamed for all the evils in modern Greek society, ranging from the economic crisis to unemployment and petty crime. At the same time, there is much evidence of racism and xenophobia, which have negative consequences for both Greeks and immigrants, forcing polarisation in public opinion. The increasing pressure from immigration, the prolonged targeting of immigrants and the fact that for decades the State has not taken adequate measures and has not implemented policies that promote integration and encourage peaceful coexistence and social cohesion has led to the rise of extreme-right groups and nationalism.

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