



INTI Project: One-Stop Shop: A New Answer for Immigrant Integration?

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Country Report for Greece

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Contents

0. Introduction
1. Legal Framework for Immigration
2. Identification of Integration Support Services
3. Identification of Integration Support Services
 - 3.1. Official integration policy
 - 3.2. Integration Support Services
 - 3.3. Joined-up Government and partnerships
 - 3.4. One Stop Shop models
4. Immigrants' Experiences of Government Services
5. Discussion
6. Recommendations

0. Introduction

Traditionally, Greece has been a country of emigration. In fact, almost two million Greeks emigrated from 1890 to 1974 to countries of Northern America (especially the USA), Oceania and Northwestern Europe. In 1974 though, the migratory balance became positive for Greece, as can be seen in the following table.

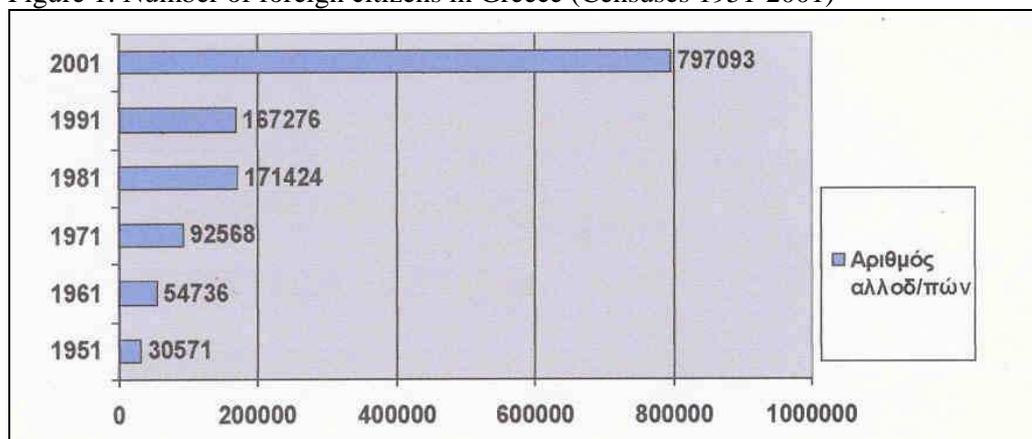
Table 1: Contribution of natural increase and migration flows to the real increase of the population in Greece (1961-2001)

Decades	Increase in (net) real population	Natural increase	Migration flows
1961-1970	380 088	839 425	- 459 337
1971-1980	971 776	637 368	334 408
1981-1990	519 483	272 441	247 042
1991-2000	679 871	21 617	658 254

Source: Manolis Drettakis, "The increase in the population only due to migrants", *Eleftherotypia*, 28.03.2001 (in Greek); Manolis Drettakis, "The children of the Diaspora and foreigners are over 5% of pupils", *Syghroni Ekpaidefsi*, Vol. 113 (July-August), 2000, 38-44 (in Greek).

Mostly, this change has to do with the return of a large number of Greek migrants but, furthermore, the first waves of foreign immigrants arrive in the country. Certainly, the great boom occurred in the early 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the former socialist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe. The figure below shows the evolution of in-migration flows during the second half of the twentieth century.

Figure 1: Number of foreign citizens in Greece (Censuses 1951-2001)



Source: Michalis Chletsos *et al.*, *Economic dimensions of migration. Impact on the agricultural sector*, Athens, Hellenic Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO), 2005.

Today, migrants constitute a significant part of the population. According to the 2001 *Population Census* of the *National Statistical Service* of Greece, which remains the most valuable resource, migrants represented 7.3% of the total population, corresponding to 797,091 people. More than half of them came from Albania (57.5%), while the rest came from a wide range of countries especially from Eastern Europe. Women represent 45% of the total foreign population.¹ Almost all belong to the category of economic migrants and thus are mainly drawn from productive age groups.

As far as nationalities are concerned, besides Albanians who comprise by far the largest migrant community in Greece, there is a wide range of emigration countries. Apart from older and newer EU member state nationals and Northern American and Australian citizens, the largest nationalities, according to the 2001 Census, are: Albanians (55.6% of the total foreign population, EU and non-EU), Georgians (2.9%), Russians (2.3%), Ukrainians (1.8%), Pakistanis (1.4%), Turks (1%), Egyptians (1%), Armenians (1%), Indians (0.9%), Iraqis (0.9%) and Filipinos (0.9%).²

¹ With some cases, such as Ukrainians and Filipinos, where the proportion of women is much higher; see for example Leodinito Y. Canete, “The community of Filipinos in Greece at the end of the twentieth Century”, in Athanassios Marvakis, Dimitris Parsanoglou & Miltos Pavlou (eds), *Migrants in Greece*, Athens: Ellinika Grammata – Nikos Poulantzas Society, 2001, 277-304. (in Greek).

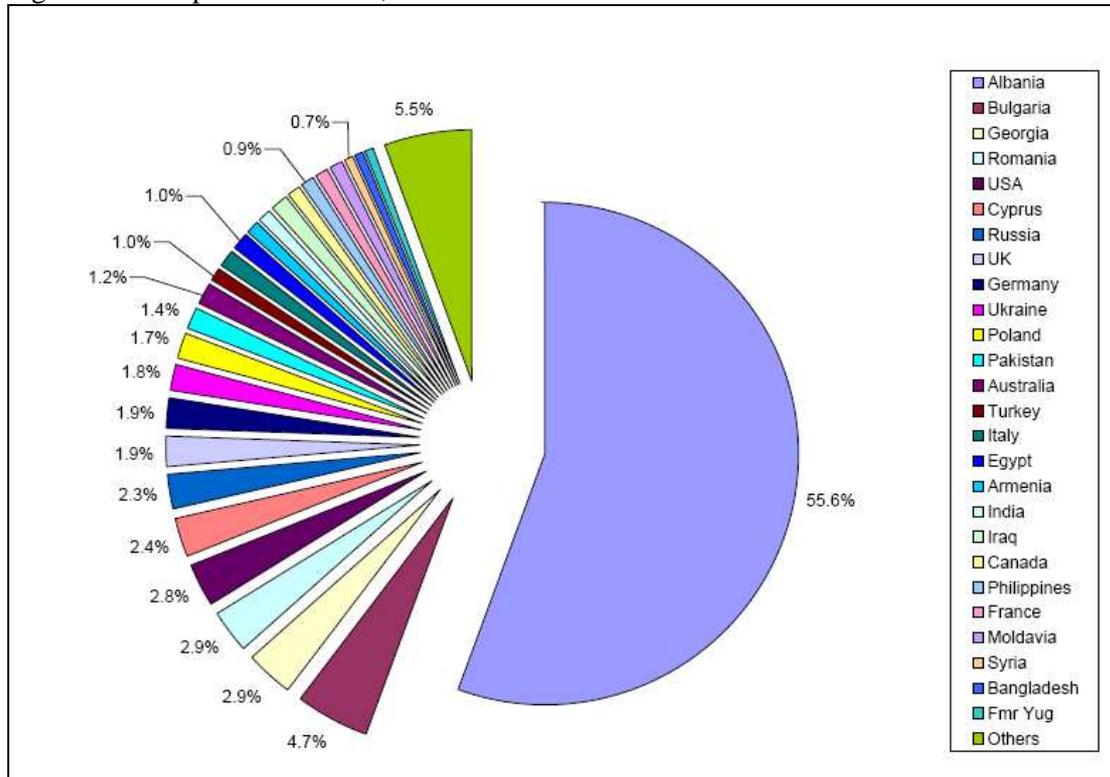
² Bulgarians and Romanians are also very significant nationalities (4.7%, and 2.9% respectively). Even though since January 2007 they have been counted as EU citizens, we must note that they entered Greece as third country nationals; in addition, migration from these two countries is still in a transitory period. Until 2009 (when this will be re-examined) Bulgarian and Romanian citizens do not have the right of free settlement in Greece (as well as in many other countries of the EU), but they have to follow the conditions imposed by the Immigration Law 3386/2005: see Circular 09.02.2007 of the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection.

Table 2: Foreigners per nationality and gender (main nationalities)

Country of origin	Total	%/total migrants (EU+non EU)	Women	%/total of same nationality
Albania	443,550	55.6	182,048	41
Georgia	23,159	2.9	13,179	57
USA	22,507	2.8	11,494	51
Russian Federation	18,219	2.3	11,318	62
Ukraine	14,149	1.8	10,516	74
Pakistan	11,192	1.4	489	4
Australia	9,677	1.2	5,097	53
Turkey	8,297	1.0	3,959	48
Egypt	7,846	1.0	1,759	22
Armenia	7,808	1.0	4,160	53
India	7,409	0.9	533	7
Iraq	7,188	0.9	2,126	30
Canada	6,909	0.9	3,572	52
Philippines	6,861	0.9	4,919	72
Moldova	5,898	0.7	4,099	69
Syria	5,638	0.7	1,174	21
Bangladesh	4,927	0.6	169	3
Serbia & Montenegro	4,051	0.5	2,104	52
Other	43,971	5.5	23,209	53
Total Migrants	797,091		360,684	45
Total Population	10,964,020		5,532,204	
% migrants/ population	7.3		6.5	

Source: Census 2001

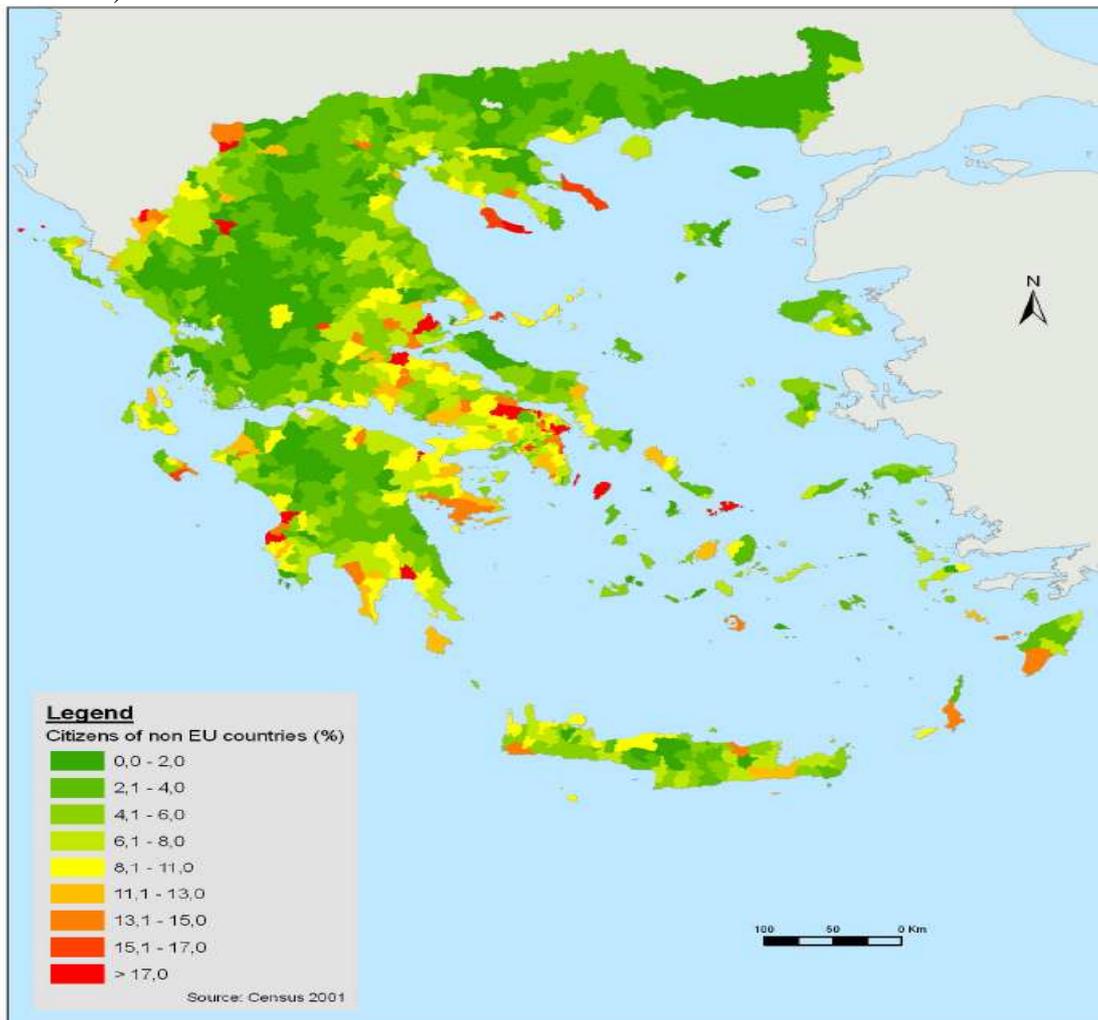
Figure 2: Principal nationalities, Census 2001



Source: Martin Baldwin-Edwards, *Statistical Data for immigrants in Greece: An analytical study of the available data, and recommendations for compliance with EU standards*, Athens: Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) – Research Institute of Urban Environment and Human Resources, Panteion University of Athens, 2004.

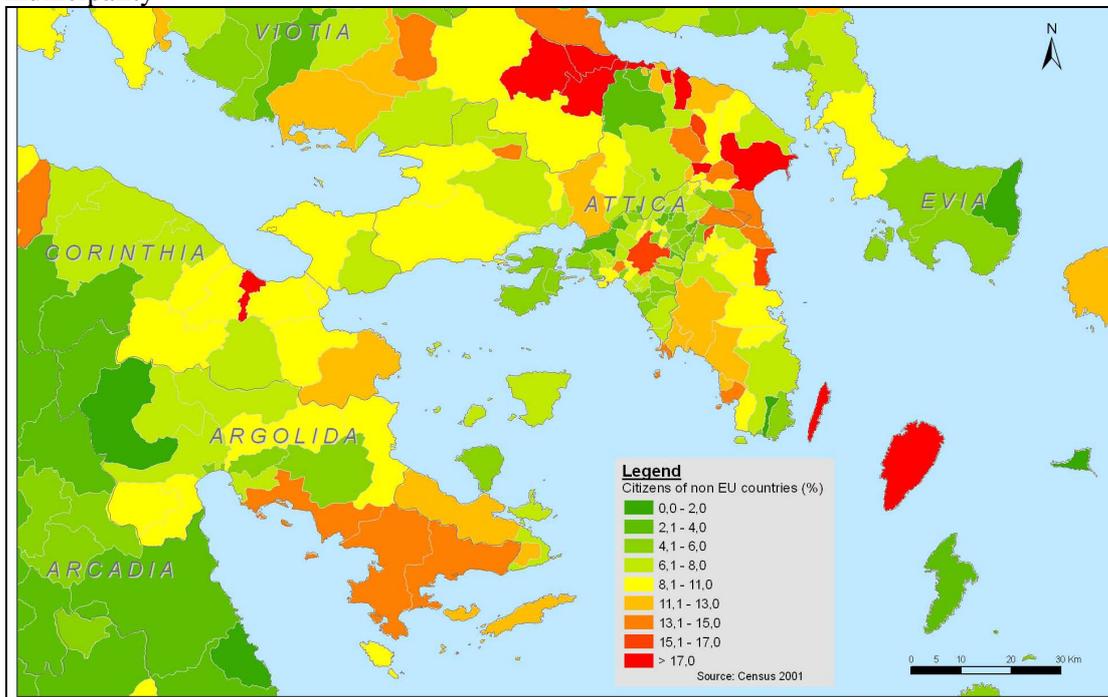
Looking at the geographical dispersion of non-EU nationals, we can conclude that the greatest concentrations (13-25%) are found on the islands (Mykonos, Kea, Skiathos, Zakynthos), in Attica and close to Athens, and on the North-western Greek border (see Map 1). On the contrary, the lowest (0-1.7%) is to be found in the Northeast of Greece, around Alexandroupoli and also in a few economically disadvantaged regions of the country. Map 2 shows the non-EU immigrant population ratios of the Attica region, the most important immigrant location in Greece. The greatest cluster of non-EU immigrant population is in the Municipality of Athens where they represent 17% of the total population. Thessaloniki is the second largest cluster, reaching 7% of the population.

Map 1: Immigrants to Total Population Ratios by Municipality (Non-EU Nationals)



Source: Martin Baldwin-Edwards, *Statistical Data for immigrants in Greece: An analytical study of the available data, and recommendations for compliance with EU standards*, Athens: Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) – Research Institute of Urban Environment and Human Resources, Panteion University of Athens, 2004.

Map 2: Non EU nationals to Total Population in the Department of Attica and Environs, by municipality



Source: Martin Baldwin-Edwards, Statistical Data for immigrants in Greece: An analytical study of the available data, and recommendations for compliance with EU standards, Athens, Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) – Research Institute of Urban Environment and Human Resources, Panteion University of Athens, 2004

Immigrant population by legal status

The fact that immigration flows occurred in a rather non-regulated manner explains to a certain extent the large numbers of undocumented migrants residing in Greece. According to the Department of Social Integration of the Ministry of Interior, the total number of residence permit holders in 2004 was 672,584. Divergences with the data from the 2001 Census as far as total numbers and proportion of certain nationalities are concerned can be explained either by recent dynamics in migrant flows or by differentiated levels of access to regularisation procedures.

Table 3: All-type residence permits per nationality and gender (30/08/2004)

NATIONALITY	TOTAL	%	MEN	%	WOMEN	%
Albania	425,187	63.2%	325,784	76.6%	99,403	23.4%
Bulgaria	65,239	9.7%	25,748	39.5%	39,490	60.5%
Romania	28,647	4.3%	17,457	60.9%	11,190	39.1%
Ukraine	22,764	3.4%	4,498	19.8%	18,266	80.2%
Pakistan	16,604	2.5%	16,471	99.2%	133	0.8%
Georgia	15,101	2.2%	5,376	35.6%	9,725	64.4%
Moldova	11,310	1.7%	3,447	30.5%	7,863	69.5%
Egypt	10,778	1.6%	10,063	93.4%	715	6.6%
India	10,283	1.5%	9,676	94.1%	607	5.9%
Russia	10,054	1.5%	2,005	19.9%	8,049	80.1%
Poland	6,722	1.0%	3,197	47.6%	3,525	52.4%
Philippines	5,993	0.9%	1,136	19.0%	4,857	81.0%
Bangladesh	5,662	0.8%	5,577	98.5%	85	1.5%
Syria	5,517	0.8%	4,979	90.2%	538	9.8%
Armenia	5,075	0.8%	2,339	46.1%	2,736	53.9%
Serbia & Montenegro	4,600	0.7%	2,196	47.7%	2,404	52.3%
China	2,638	0.4%	1,757	66.6%	881	33.4%
USA	1,726	0.3%	905	52.4%	821	47.6%
FYR Macedonia	1,670	0.2%	1,092	65.4%	578	34.6%
Nigeria	1,531	0.2%	1,175	76.7%	356	23.3%
Others	15,483	2.3%	7,443	48.1%	8,035	51.9%
Total	672,584	100.0%	452,321	67.3%	220,257	32.7%

Source: Ministry of Interior – Department of Social Integration

More recent data from the Ministry of Interior (15.10.2007) show that the valid residence permits upon that date were 481,501. This difference in numbers in the relation to data from the 2001 Census can be explained from the fact that serious problems occurred during processes of renewal of residence permits. It is quite common that many migrants fail to keep their residents permits renewed and subsequently they lose their legal status. As far as the types of residence permits are concerned, the one that dominates is the residence permit for salaried employment (58.8%) followed by residence permits for family members that in total reaches 36.5%, as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 4: Valid residence permits per type of residence permit (15.10.2007)

Type of residence permit	Total	%
Indefinite duration	5	0.0%
Independent for members of third country national's family	5,884	1.2%
Long-term	1	0.0%
Seasonal employment	5,342	1.1%
Salaried employment	283,332	58.8%
Independent economic activity	1,454	0.3%
Other employment	438	0.1%
Employment – company executives	1,447	0.3%
Researchers	35	0.0%
Other	1,888	0.4%
Members of EU citizen's family	6,608	1.4%
Members of EU citizen's family – spouse	45,337	9.4%
Members of Third country national's family	123,790	25.7%
Regularisation according to Law 3386, article 91, paragraph 11	505	0.1%
Regularisation according to Law 3536, article 18, paragraph 4	650	0.1%
Regularisation according to Common Ministerial Decision 11702	529	0.1%
Studies	3,994	0.8%
Studies – other categories	262	0.1%
Grand Total	481,501	100.0%

Source: Ministry of Interior – Department of Social Integration

Other relevant statistical information

Apart from the data from the *Census 2001* and the numbers of residence permits presented above, relevant statistical information is provided also by the Social Insurance organisations and institutions. According to the *Social Insurance Institute (IKA)*, the largest social insurance organisation in the country, around 14% of insured workers are foreigners, a percentage that is higher than the percentage of foreign population in the country.

Table 5: Insured individuals in enterprises and constructions with at least one day of insurance in the year

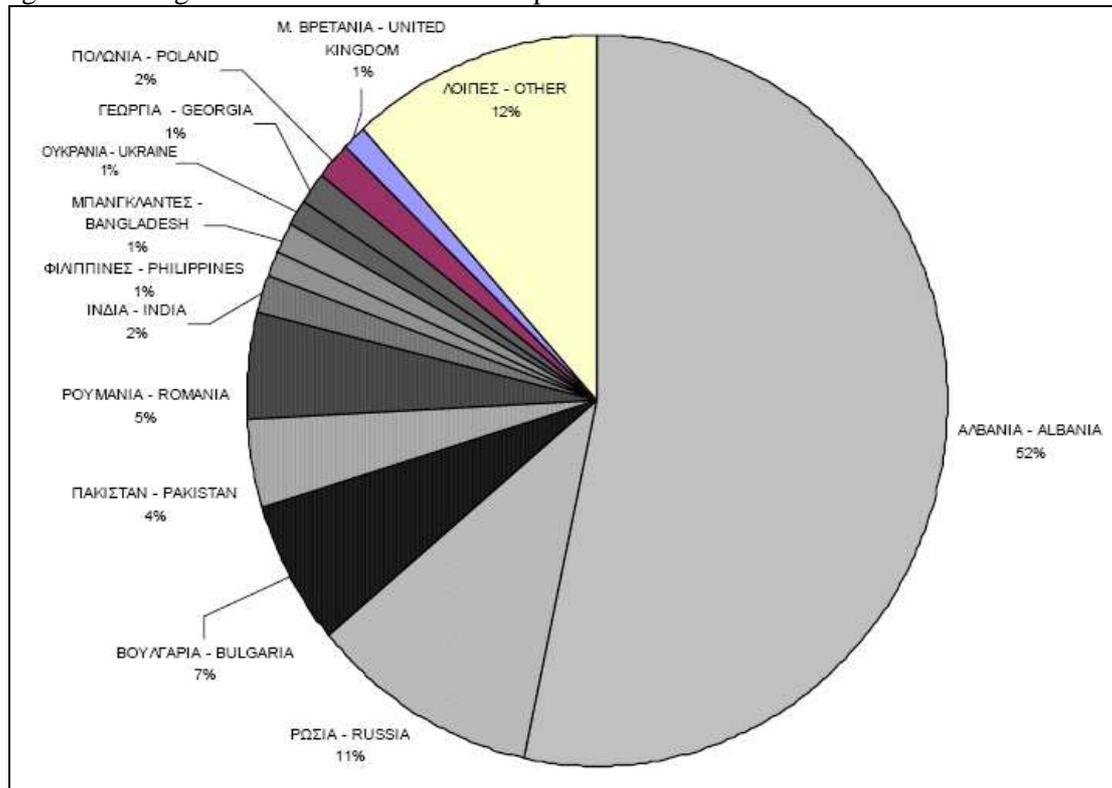
Nationality	2003	%	2004	%	2005	%
Greeks	2,114,588	85.8%	2,164,977	86.0%	2,165,978	86.1%
Foreigners	350,408	14.2%	352,010	14.0%	350,769	13.9%
Total	2,464,996	100.0%	2,516,987	100.0%	2,516,747	100.0%

Source: Social Insurance Institute (IKA)

From these 350,769 insured foreign citizens, 258,313 (73.6%) enjoy full sickness benefits since they contribute for full coverage.

As far as nationalities are concerned, Albanians constitute more than the half of foreign insured individuals, followed by Russians (11%), Bulgarians (7%), Romanians (5%), and Pakistanis (4%). Other important nationalities are Indians, Filipinos, Bangladeshis, Ukrainians, Georgians and Poles.

Figure 3: Foreign insured individuals in enterprises and constructions



Source: Electra Petracou, Antonis Kontis, Maria Economou, Panayiotis Zampelis, Panayiotis Nikolopoulos, Athina Kehagia, *Analytical Study for the Consequences of Migration in Social Insurance*, Athens: Hellenic Migration Policy Institute – Department of Geography of the Aegean University – MENTORING S.A., 2007.

We must also note that 55,542 foreigners were insured in 2004 in two other major social insurance institutions, the *Organisation of Agricultural Insurance* (OGA) and the *Organisation for the Insurance of the Self-Employed* (TEVE), 41,817 and 13,725 respectively.

The Children of Immigrants

A very important aspect of migration is the question of the “second generation” of migrants, as it is generally called.³ Especially in the aftermath of the riots in the French suburbs in 2005, in many European countries this question has raised lively debates about the efficiency or even the sufficiency of the integration models followed.

In Greece this question has not yet “invaded” the public agenda to a large extent, given the fact that contemporary migration is a quite recent phenomenon. Nevertheless, as the number of residence permits granted to family members indicates, there is a constantly increasing youth population with migrant background residing in the country. According to official data from the *Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies* (IPODE), which is the competent authority affiliated to the *Ministry of Education* for consulting and monitoring multicultural education, children without Greek citizenship constituted in 2004 8.3% of the total school population. This number keeps growing in all levels of education.⁴

Table 6: Number of pupils in primary and secondary schools (2002-2004)

Academic year	Greek	Foreigners	%/Total	Total
2002-03	1,332,611	96,899	7.3	1,460,464
2003-04	1,312,313	109,130	8.3	1,449,112
Percentage rate of change				
2002-04	-1.52%	12.62%		-0.78%

Source: Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies (IPODE). (http://www.ipode.gr/default.asp?V_ITEM_ID=904&V_LANG_ID=6)

³ For a critical account for the concept of “second generation” see: Alvaro Dimitri, Athanassios Marvakis, Dimitris Parsanoglou & Electra Petracou, “Precarious Trajectories: Migrant youth regimes in Greece” in Gavan Titley (ed.), *The Politics of Diversity*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2008.

⁴ “The migrants have crowded the schools”, *Eleftherotypia*, 19.12.2007 (in Greek).

What we have tried to do in this short introduction was to draw a rough sketch of a rather rich and complicated migration reality in Greece. The fact that approximately 10% of the Greek population are migrants, if we take into account the undocumented ones as well,⁵ renders immigration and migrant integration vital issues for the Greek State and society.

⁵ Martin Baldwin-Edwards, *Statistical Data for immigrants in Greece: An analytical study of the available data, and recommendations for compliance with EU standards*, Athens: Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) – Research Institute of Urban Environment and Human Resources, Panteion University of Athens, 2004. See also the OECD *Annual Reports of the Continuous Reporting System on Migration – SOPEMI*.

1. Legal Framework for Immigration

Contemporary Greek migration policy came into effect with the entry into force of Immigration Law (1975/1991), (sixty-two years after the previous one which entered into force in 1929). There was no practical provision for the regularisation of migrants who had started to enter the country in a mass migration flow. On the contrary, as the title of the draft law shows (“Entry-exit, stay, deportation of foreigners, procedure of foreign refugees’ recognition and other clauses”) the main concern was to respond to migration with defensive and policing measures.⁶

The first regularisation programme took place in 1998 with two Presidential Decrees. During this procedure, 371,641 migrants obtained an initial temporary residence permit for six months. Subsequently, only 212,860 applied for a longer residence permit of two years. Accordingly, between the first and second phase of this regularisation process there was a drop-out rate of 42.7%. In addition, it is estimated that approximately 150,000 migrants who met the requirements did not participate either in the first phase and remained undocumented.⁷ Hence, one could argue that the first regularisation procedure had modest results.

The first attempt to deal more systematically with migration took place in 2001 with Law 2910. For the first time provisions, though quite strict, for a naturalisation procedure took place, while a new regularisation programme was set up within the framework of this new law. On the other hand, the competence for migration issues passed from the Ministry of Public Order and the Police to the Ministry of Interior and local authorities (to Prefectures for work permits and Municipalities for residence permits), since “foreigners do not constitute a supplementary charge for the Police, but

⁶ Jacques Barou, *Europe, terre d’immigration. Flux migratoires et intégration*, Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2001, p. 75: “La première loi sur l’immigration, votée en 1991, est à tonalité essentiellement répressive”.

⁷ Jenny Cavounidis, *Migrants’ characteristics: the Greek regularization programme of 1998*, Athens-Thessaloniki: Sakkoulas (National Institute of Employment), 2002, p. 32. (in Greek).

persons and a social group with which the whole society must regulate its relations, through its institutional settings”.⁸

With the last law passed in 2005,⁹ migration policy has been further elaborated, while social integration of migrants has for the first time become a policy objective. One of the most important innovations has been the unification of *work* and *residence* permits into *one residence permit*. Additionally, European Directive 2004/81/EC on *Victims of Trafficking* has been transposed into national legislation, followed a year later by Directive 2003/86/EC on *Family Reunification* (with Presidential Decree 131/2006)¹⁰ and 2003/109/EC on *Long-term Residents* (with Presidential Decree 150/2006).

The types of residence permits for which a third country national can apply have been divided into seven large categories, with several specific subcategories:

⁸ Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, *Foreigners' entrance and stay in Greece, possession of Greek citizenship with naturalisation and other clauses*, Law Circular 29.10.2001, Athens: National Press, 2001, p. 12 (in Greek).

⁹ Law 3386/2005, “Entry, stay and social integration of third country nationals into Greek Territory”.

¹⁰ We must note that the possibility of issuing residence permits for family reunification was provided already by the Law 2910/2001.

Table 7: Types of residence permits according to Law 3386/2005, article 9, paragraph 2

A)	Residence permits for employment:
A1.	Salaried employment or service or work rendering
A2.	Seasonal employment
A3.	Company executives
A4.	Temporary shift for service provision
A5.	Athletes – Trainers
A6.	Members of art groups
A7.	Intellectual creators
A8.	Members of foreign archaeological schools
B)	Residence permit for independent financial activity:
B1.	Independent financial activity
B2.	Development of investment activity
C)	Residence permits for special reasons:
C1.	Pursuit of studies
C2.	Vocational training
C3.	Scholars – Special programmes
C4.	Studies in military schools
C5.	Acquisition of special medical treatment
C6.	Financially self-supported persons
C7.	Adult minors of diplomatic employees
C8.	Staff or servants of diplomatic delegations
C9.	Reporters of foreign press
C10.	Ministers of known religions
C11.	Athonite School
C12.	Mastery of, acquaintance with and exercise of monastic life
C13.	Organised Tour Guides
C14.	Researchers
D)	Residence permits for exceptional reasons:
D1.	Humanitarian grounds
D2.	Public interest
D3.	Victims of trafficking
E)	Residence permits for family reunification :
E1.	Family members of a third country national.
E2.	Independent residence permit for the members of the family of a third country national
F)	Residence permit of indefinite duration.
G)	Residence permit of long-term duration.

For each type of residence permit certain criteria must be fulfilled by the applicant. Just to take two examples that concern the majority of applications (see Table 3), residence permit for *employment* and for *family reunification*.

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- For the issue and renewal of the first type, among other requirements, a labour contract with an employer is required¹¹ as well as a certain number of insured days (200) per year.¹²
 - For the issue and renewal of a residence permit for family reunification purposes, apart from the general conditions, the sponsor has to prove that he/she has a stable and regular income, sufficient to cover the needs of his/her family. This income cannot be less than the annual income of an unskilled worker, increased by 20% for the spouse and 15% for each minor child.¹³

¹¹ With the exception of “persons working in *agriculture*, in *construction*, in *care* and *domestic services* having more than one employer, [who] are not required to present a labour contract in order to apply for issue or renewal of a residence permit”. Law 3536/2007, article 6, paragraph 1.

¹² With the exception of “third country nationals who are employed within salaried employment by more than one employer (construction workers, care and domestic workers)”. Common Ministerial Decision 160/03.01.2006.

¹³ Law 3386/2005, article 53.

2. Identification of Integration Support Services

2.1. National integration policy

As it has been mentioned before, migrant integration is a quite new concern for Greek migration policy. The first time that integration was mentioned in an official legislation text was in Law 3386/2005, according to which the official definition of social integration contains two fundamental elements underlined below:

“Social integration aims at providing third country nationals with rights, which ensure on the one hand their analogous *equal participation* in the financial, social and cultural life of the country and on the other aim at the *obligatory respect* of the fundamental rules and values of Hellenic society, (...), while retaining their national identity (article 65, paragraph 1; our emphasis)”.

This law outlined the general scope and basic principles of the Greek state’s integration policy, which are summarised as follows:

- a) Avoidance of any discrimination against third country nationals due to sex, race, colour, nationality or social origin, sexual characteristics, language, religion or belief, political or other beliefs, status as a member of a national minority, property, disabilities, age or sexual orientation.
- b) Equal treatment in every aspect of financial, social and cultural life, regardless of racial or national origin, aiming at the promotion of economic and social cohesion.
- c) Respect for third country nationals’ fundamental rights, as these are enshrined in national law and order, regarding the protection of cultural and religious peculiarities (sic).
- d) Support and promotion of their personal contribution to broader social, financial and cultural activities as well as of their efforts to serve themselves and personally participate in the improvement of their quality of life.
- e) Support of their family cohesion and enhancement of existing supportive social networks in which they participate.

f) Enhancement of their real participation as partners, in the planning, implementation and evaluation of social integration policies and development of stable consulting structures to this end.

An *Integrated Action Plan*, inspired by these principles, is about to take shape through a Common Ministerial Decision. The Plan, called “HESTIA”, will be monitored by an Inter-ministerial Committee for the Monitoring of Migration Policy¹⁴ and the National Committee for the Social Integration of Migrants.¹⁵ The coordinator of the latter is the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO), which is responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of integration policies as well as for the design of further policy recommendations. The Plan was based on IMEPO’s recommendations.

The *Integrated Action Plan* includes the following specific axes:

- i. Information and mainstreaming
- ii. Employment
- iii. Education
- iv. Health and housing
- v. Culture
- vi. Penitentiary system and reintegration of released persons

¹⁴ Introduced by Law 3386/2005 and amended by Law 3536/2007, comprising the Ministers of Interior, Public Administration & Decentralisation, of Economy & Finance, of Foreign Affairs, of National Defence, of Development, of Education and Religious Affairs, of Employment & Social Protection, of Health & Welfare, of Rural Development & Food, of Justice, of Culture and of the Merchant Marine.

¹⁵ Introduced by Law 3536/2007, passed in February 2007, in order a) to propose policies and actions regarding the social integration of migrants to the competent Inter-ministerial Committee b) to manage the social dialogue on integration and c) to work out and monitor actions and programmes particularly within the framework of the *Integrated Plan for Social Integration* (article 1, paragraph 4). This Committee is composed of General Secretaries of eight ministries, the President of the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute, representatives of local authorities, of the Greek-Orthodox Church, University Professors, and representatives of parliamentary political parties, trade unions, employers’ associations, of the International Organization for Migration and of the Athens Bar Association.

The programmes launched through the *Integrated Action Plan* will cover the period 2007-2013. They will be funded both by national resources, and by the newly established European Integration Fund.¹⁶ The main objectives are: a) to map the current situation per fields of integration, b) to outline the situation in other European countries and gain from experiences and good practices carried out elsewhere, and c) to define the priorities of the national policy and undertake sustainable measures and actions.

Besides the *Integrated Action Plan*, which will be the main framework of the integration policy, two other important legislative steps have already been made towards more egalitarian treatment of migrants:

- a) Law 927/1979 on the “punishment of acts or activities that lead to racial discrimination”, as amended by Law 1419/1984 and Immigration Law 2910/2001 (article 39, paragraph 4) which provides for the possibility of prosecution *ex officio* by the Public Prosecutor.
- b) Law 3304/2005 on the “Implementation of the principle of equal treatment regardless of race or national origin, religion or other beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation” that transposed into national legislation the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43EC) and the Employment Framework Directive (2000/78EC). The institutions appointed as special bodies for the promotion of the principle of equal treatment are the Greek Ombudsman and the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection.

Education, employment, health and other relevant areas

The general pattern as far as rights, social benefits and public goods (employment, education, health, housing, etc.) are concerned has been officially based on equality between Greek citizens and legal migrants: legal migrants have the same rights as Greek citizens. However, the only field where certain specific measures have been undertaken

¹⁶ This project follows on from pilot integration projects, known as INTI, carried out since 2002. The Commission launched the idea of a European Integration Fund at an inter-ministerial conference on integration during the Dutch Presidency during the second semester of 2004:

(<http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l14509.htm>)

is that of education. As early as the 1980s, the Ministry of Education had legislated for special measures to facilitate the integration of repatriated Greek children into the educational system.

In 1980, a Ministerial Decision (4139/20-10-1980) provided for the creation of *reception classes* for children coming from abroad in order to support, mainly through language courses, their integration into the Greek educational system and society. In 1983, reception classes as well as tutorial classes were enforced by Law (1404/1983). These initial steps were followed by a redefinition of educational policy *vis-à-vis* migrant children in the aftermath of massive inflows from Eastern Europe and especially Albania (Law 1894/1990).¹⁷ In addition, in 1996 a legislative framework for intercultural education was established for the first time. The objective of this new form of educational integration policy is defined as “the organisation and the function of primary and secondary schools in order to provide education to young people with educational, social and cultural specificities” (Law 2413/1996, article 34).

To summarise, at the official level, compulsory education is provided to all migrant children regardless of their parents’ legal status. In addition, language courses for adult migrants have to be provided throughout the country by the Institute for Continuous Adult Education (IDEKE) which belongs to the Ministry of Education.¹⁸

Political participation

Participation in political parties, associations and local organisations is certainly allowed, but voting rights are not granted to legal migrants yet. One step forward is the proposed intention of the Government to give in the future the possibility to long-term residence permit holders to participate in local elections.

¹⁷ Eleni Skourtou, Constantinos Vratsalis & Christos Govaris, *Migration in Greece and Education: An evaluation of intercultural education in Greece*, Athens: Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) – Pedagogic Department of Primary Education, Aegean University, 2004, pp. 23-24 (in Greek).

¹⁸ For more details, see section 2.2.

Naturalisation

Citizenship has been, since the establishment of nation-states, the main demarcation line between natives and foreigners. On the other hand, citizenship is the basic means of concrete exercise of political rights in the majority of nation-states. In Greece it is based upon the principle of *jus sanguinis*. Nevertheless, with Law 2910/2001 the possibility to obtain citizenship through naturalisation has been legislated for. The main conditions, as they have been transposed also into the new Greek Nationality Code (Law 3284/2004), are the following:

- Being an adult at the time of application
- Not having been sentenced during the ten years prior to the application for a series of crimes
- No pending decision for deportation
- Ten years of continuous legal residence during the previous twelve years
- Sufficient knowledge of Greek language, history and culture

If the above conditions are fulfilled by a migrant, he/she can file an application with the required administrative documents at the municipality of their place of residence. The final decision is taken by the Minister of Interior and in case of rejection it is not justified (Law 3284/2004, article 8).

2.2. Integration Support Services

Although official integration policy has not yet been thoroughly elaborated, there are several institutions and structures that provide services to migrants encouraging their integration into the receiving society. Within these institutions and structures several stakeholders of different types play a key role. We can distinguish between three general types of stakeholders: government agencies, immigrant associations and non-

governmental organisations. In what follows, we give a brief overview of integration support services in the country, focusing on some important examples.

Education

Children

Education, as we mentioned above, has been until now the most privileged area of intervention on the part of public institutions. We have already referred to the institutional framework set up several years ago. Reception and tutorial classes have been for a long time the main means of integration of migrant children into the Greek educational system. To give an idea of the extent or size of these classes during the academic year 2002-03, 422 reception classes and 556 tutorial classes have functioned in public schools throughout the country.¹⁹ In addition, relevant educational material has been produced within the programme “Education of Repatriated and Foreign Students” (www.keda.gr) in the framework of the *Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training* (EPEAEK).

As far as intercultural schools are concerned, a total of 26 schools of this type have been set up throughout Greece since 1996. These schools, according to the Ministry of Education, “will continue to increase in number, guaranteeing equality of opportunity to every student in the country, while the cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning utilised in these schools have a positive knock-on effect on the Greek educational system as a whole” (http://www.ypepth.gr/en_ec_page1547.htm). Of the 26 schools, 13 are primary schools, while there are 9 junior high schools and 4 senior high schools. A school can only be described as intercultural when students with a migrant background account for at least 45% of the total student population. The educators at these schools receive special training, and are selected on the basis of their knowledge on the subject of cross-cultural education and teaching Greek as a second or foreign language.

Some immigrant associations are important stakeholders in minors’ education, having created schools in order to provide additional education in the language of the country

¹⁹ Skourtou *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

of origin. The most successful example is that of KASAPI HELLAS – Union of Filipino Migrant Workers. At its premises in one of the most densely migrant-populated areas of central Athens (Kypseli), Munting Nayon (Little Village) school, which opened its doors in 1994, welcomes more than 100 pupils every year. The vast majority of the children – toddlers to age 9 – are Filipinos, but there are also a number of children of other ethnic minority groups, and even Greeks.

Adults

While for children born or raised in Greece, the Greek language becomes their mother tongue, the same is not true for adult migrants. Language courses are not only useful for a better insertion into the labour market, but also necessary for full integration into the society. Besides, certified good knowledge of the Greek language, as well as history and culture, is required in applying for the long-term residence permit.

For this purpose, the Institute for Continuous Adult Education (IDEKE), established in 1995 and affiliated to the General Secretariat for Adult Education (GGEE) of the Ministry of Education, is implementing the programme “Learning Greek as second language for Migrant Workers”. Apart from language learning at different levels, these courses introduce adult migrants to Greek culture and social realities. They take place in Centres for Adult Education in 49 (out of 51) geographical departments of the country (<http://www.ideke.edu.gr/programs.asp?cat=2&pr=40>). Nevertheless, a number of practical problems, such as lack of premises for the holding of courses or excessive demand, are yet to be solved.²⁰

Municipalities have also started to provide language courses as part of their social policy addressed to migrants. In Athens, the *Intercultural Centre of the City of Athens* provides special courses to migrants in Greek language, computers, etc. The municipality of Ymittos in Athens with the cooperation of the local Committee of Solidarity to Migrants has recently set up language courses for adult migrants. The large

²⁰ Such problems are faced in the region of Piraeus, where 300 migrants were waiting until the end of 2007, because no premises could be found; see *diavotirio*, No 3, November 2007.

participation of migrants of different ethnic origin has been a rather pleasant surprise (<http://www.ymittos.gr/paideia/sxoleio-metanaston>).

Serious efforts have also been undertaken by civil society actors with fruitful results. Such an example is the ‘Migrants Sunday School’, created in 2004 in Athens. The school functions on a voluntary basis with a multiethnic coordination group and the courses are free. In three-and-a-half years, more than 1,100 migrant workers have attended its five-tier courses, while more than a hundred Greek citizens have offered their voluntary work (<http://www.ksm.gr/>).

Language courses for adult migrants are held also at the premises of the Greek Forum of Migrants, an umbrella organisation of more than 20 immigrant communities (<http://www.migrant.gr/>), as well as at the Network of Social Solidarity for Refugees and Migrants in Athens, and the Social Centre – Migrants’ Place in Thessaloniki (<http://www.socialcenter.gr/>). Similar efforts, such as the Open Schools for Migrants, exist in Athens, Piraeus and several other cities of the country.

Employment

One could argue that employment is the main reason for immigration. It plays a major role in the lives of migrants: from the everyday material conditions for them and their families to their legal status, as the migration regime is strictly linked to employment and social insurance status. Migrants who legally reside and work in Greece are subject to the same conditions as Greek employees as far as benefits and services are concerned.

The Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), which is the competent public institution for (re)insertion into the labour market, does not provide specific services to migrants in terms of its general policy. There is however a *Service of Special Social Groups*, where all vulnerable social groups are included, which is responsible, among other services, for the organisation of the implementation of several programmes for supporting employment.²¹ It is important to note here that from January to October

²¹ For more details see http://www.oaed.gr/Pages/SN_59.pg.

2007, 8,525 foreign workers were beneficiaries of OAED's programmes, a number that constitutes the 7.28% of the total beneficiaries.

The main supporting actors for the integration of migrants into the labour market are the trade unions. In several Labour Centres and Institutes for Employment of the General Confederation of Greek Workers throughout the country, there are Support Offices for Migrants and Refugees. Such structures exist in almost all major cities: Athens, Thessaloniki, Piraeus, Patras and Volos. They provide services mainly with regards to working rights, but also on other issues:

- Information on working rights, labour contracts, social insurance, relevant institutions, etc.
- Contact with relevant trade unions and migrant associations
- Help with regards to the procedure for issuing and renewal of residence permits
- Referral and accompaniment to relevant institutions
- Information on relevant stakeholders regarding legal, health and education issues

Most of these initiatives were created within the context of European Union funded projects, such as the EQUAL initiative. Some of them, for example that of the Athens Labour Centre, will probably continue to exist after the completion of the project since it has hosted more than 3,000 migrants in three years.

Health

Migrants who reside legally in the country are guaranteed equal access to public health institutions on the same basis as Greek citizens.²² In public hospitals and municipal health centres however, there are no specialised structures for migrant patients. Specialised services are offered essentially by non-governmental organisations. As

²² For undocumented migrants, access is limited to emergency cases, according to a Circular published by the Ministry of Health in 2000; for more see: Apostolos Kapsalis, *Migrants – Health and Social Exclusion*, National Report for the “European Network for cooperation and exchange about issues of social exclusion and migrants’ health”, 2003 (in Greek).

such, one can distinguish international and national NGOs that are active at national or at local level.

Médecins du Monde has been running an ‘Open Polyclinic’ in central Athens and Thessaloniki since 1997 and 2001 respectively, where volunteer doctors, nurses, social workers and psychologists provide medical care and psychosocial support for free, to people with no access to the national health care system, to people without insurance, to the homeless, to Roma, refugees and immigrants (http://www.mdmgreece.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=817&Itemid=78). Similarly, health services addressed to migrants are also provided by other NGOs such as PRAKSIS (<http://www.praksis.gr/>) mainly in Athens and Thessaloniki.

Socio-psychological support is also provided by numerous NGOs and local networks. In the area of Kypseli in central Athens, for example, there are two relevant centres:

- KETHEA MOSAIC, working with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, who face “crisis situations” in order to facilitate their social integration and
- the day centre “BABEL”, for migrants with psychological health problems.

Housing

Benefits with regards to housing are similar for Greek citizens and legal migrants. Therefore, migrants who possess legal documents and pay social contributions for the Organisation for the Housing of Workers can enjoy benefits such as rent allowances, privileged loans and acquisition of a house or apartment delivered by the organisation.

Political Participation and the Media

One important indicator of integration is access to the public sphere. We have already referred to official policy regarding political participation. Obviously under these circumstances, political and civic participation remains at the level of some local initiatives. The municipality of Sykies in western Thessaloniki has been a pioneer from this point of view. It was the first municipality in the country to create a local council of migrants to propose recommendations on migrants’ issues to the city council. This

strategy adopted by the municipality of Sykies seems to have gained ground in other cities as well, for example, Kozani in Western Macedonia.

At the same time, the voice of migrants can also be heard through the media. Apart from the numerous migrant newspapers, public radio has for some years now opened its doors to migrants. The National Radio Broadcast (ERA) hosts a multiethnic radio station (Philia, “Friendship”) with programmes in several languages presented by Greek and migrant broadcasters (<http://tvradio.ert.gr/radio/index.asp?id=18>). A similar example is that of the *Athens International Radio* (AIR radio) sponsored and hosted by the City of Athens Broadcast:

(http://www.athina984fm.gr/mod.php?mod=userpage&menu=82&page_id=1000).

Social welfare

All the social welfare benefits accorded to Greek workers are also accorded to legal foreign workers who pay their social contributions. It is indicative that 40,000 foreign workers have access to the family allowance provided by the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED). This number represents 11.11% of the total beneficiaries.

2.3 Joined-up Government and partnerships

Cooperation among different Ministries, departments and agencies is a central element of the newly outlined integration policy. The Inter-ministerial Committee for the Monitoring of Migration Policy as well as the National Committee for the Social Integration of Migrants, which are entitled to monitor the implementation of the *Integrated Action Plan* in relation to migrant integration, are indicative examples in this direction.

In practice also, many of the initiatives undertaken with the purpose of supporting migrant integration are in fact examples of partnership between Governmental and non-Governmental actors. A brief examination of the partnerships that run the bulk of

European projects is enough to ascertain this reality. Limiting ourselves to the EQUAL initiative (<http://www.equal-greece.gr/>), under the auspices of which some of the most important integration structures have been created, we can see that each one of these project partnerships contains actors from Governmental organisations, local authorities, non-governmental organisations as well as private institutions and enterprises.

Therefore, networking is a common practice when it comes to specific areas of intervention. The problem, as it is almost unanimously accepted, is the viability and sustainability of these networks after the end of the projects. Local authorities are to a certain degree the exception to this. Just to mention two examples: the network of municipalities called “Efxeini Poli” (Hospitable City) comprising seven municipalities in the regions of Attica, the Peloponnese and Central Greece (http://www.xeniosdias.gr/cat2_2main.php); and the Developmental Society of North-western Thessaloniki, comprising fourteen municipalities in the so-called “Western Arc” of the city (<http://www.anae.gr/>).

These networks coordinate their actions in a permanent and systematic way on a series of issues, including migration. Particularly “Efxeini Poli” constitutes in fact an Information and Support Centre for Socially Excluded Groups. From 1995, its foundation date, it has, through its eleven branches in several cities and towns throughout the country, provided information and advice on education, employment, health, legal issues, as well as socio-psychological support, Greek language courses, etc. Therefore they could serve as a model of sustainable partnership for all the actors involved in the issue of integration.

2.4 One Stop Shop models

As the brief mapping of the situation presented above has shown, Greece is far from having something equivalent or similar to the One-Stop-Shop model. Government services are dispersed and limited to the Ministry and the department they are affiliated with, while structures held by other social partners focus on specific areas.

One of the most successful steps towards a more efficient administration has been the creation of Citizen Service Centres. In few years of functioning, they have gained the trust of citizens by serving thousands of people throughout the country. In these centres one can carry out a series of transactions with public authorities, from obtaining necessary documents concerning civil status, birth certificates, tax, social insurance etc. to filling in applications for a wide range of cases.

The City of Athens has already established a Foreigners Service Centre, located near the city centre, where migrants can get support in relation to several different administrative issues, such as information for the issuing and renewal of residence permits. If this Centre were underpinned and expanded to even more areas of intervention, it could potentially constitute a One-Stop-Shop model. Besides, through several European projects, local authorities have developed structures that could potentially serve as models for the implementation of a One-Stop-Shop. Such examples have been developed within certain municipalities (Acharnes, Elefsina, Lykovrysi, Ano Liosia, Nea Ionia in the region of Attica, Thessaloniki and Veria in the region of Central Macedonia, Messolonghi in the region of Western Greece, Xanthi in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, etc.).

Apart from public institutions and local authorities, examples of potential One-Stop Shops exist in the domain of civil society. We have already mentioned relevant structures within several Labour Centres throughout the country. Another structure that provides integrated support services mainly to refugees and asylum seekers is the Greek Council for Refugees. GCR has, since its foundation in 1989, supported more than 40,000 individual in the following areas:

1. Dealing with the initial needs of newly arrived asylum seekers (clothing, food and shelter)
2. Fact-finding missions by GCR lawyers to refugee entry points, who with the help of interpreters and sometimes with the collaboration of United Nations High Commission for Refugees staff, help the Greek Authorities during the initial registration of asylum seekers and inform asylum seekers about their rights and responsibilities in Greece.

3. Provision of legal advice and legal aid to asylum seekers.
4. Participation of GCR representative in the Appeals Board to support genuine requests for asylum.
5. Appeals to the Council of State when necessary.
6. Social support and help to asylum seekers/ refugees, with the services it offers for welcoming, psychosocial advice and aid, job orientation and integration in the work environment.
7. Support for refugees in their effort to integrate into Greek society. Specialised personnel and volunteer support, orientating and educating refugees in a way that helps them develop their own skills to seek and secure employment in order to become self sufficient as soon as possible.

Socio-cultural mediators

Much of the information about legal, employment and other issues has been published and is available in several languages by the Ministry of Interior, trade unions and other stakeholders. However, it is widely accepted at a European level that the physical presence of socio-cultural mediators is a much more effective source of information, as they can increase significantly the access of migrants to support services and structures.

In Greece, socio-cultural mediators are not a very widespread tool of integration. Translators are occasionally used in the Citizen Service Centres in order to better serve migrant users. Nevertheless, the public administration is not yet eager to generalise the employment of mediators on a more permanent basis.

Socio-cultural mediators have been employed mainly, if not exclusively, within projects carried out by NGOs or private institutions. Such an example is the EQUAL project IFESTOS, the coordinator of which was the Greek mission of the International Organization for Migration, where Pakistani socio-cultural mediators were employed, since one part of the project was implemented in an Athenian suburb with a large concentration of Pakistani migrants.

The same method is also followed by trade unions. The Support Office for Migrants and Refugees operating at the Athens Labour Centre employs a woman from Bulgaria who can communicate with migrants from Eastern European countries in their language. Additionally, in many trade unions that represent branches where migrant workers are numerous (construction, cleaners, agricultural workers, etc.), migrants have been elected onto the boards, and the main purpose is to facilitate contact between unions and migrants.

3. Immigrants' Experiences of Government Services

First of all, we should distinguish two broad categories of Government services that deal with migrants:

1. Services specialised in migrant issues
2. General services addressed, amongst others, to migrants

In the first category, the principal stakeholders are the departments responsible for issuing residence permits. The second category includes all the departments, public organisations and agencies that deal with social welfare issues (education, employment, health, housing etc.) and have a broader scope than migrants.

Based on some findings of recent empirical research conducted for the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute,²³ we can outline the main issues that arise in relation to migrants accessing Government services.

Firstly, we shall refer to the procedure for the issuing or renewal of residence permits. The competent authorities for the issuing of residence permits are the Regional Administrative Divisions (thirteen in the whole of the country). Migrants however can also deposit their applications and required documents at the Immigration Bureaus of the municipality where they live. Another option is the Citizens Service Centres and in the case of Athens the Foreigners Service Centre, and even the Department of Residence Permits of the Ministry of Interior.

Therefore easy accessibility is guaranteed, since there are numerous locations where migrants can apply in order to issue or renew their permits. Nevertheless, the opening hours – with the exception of *Citizens Service Centres* that operate from 09:00 to 20:00 – coincide with the working hours of the vast majority of migrants (09:00-14:00) rendering their access difficult. In addition, the fact that many required documents

²³ Dimitris Parsanoglou, Kyriaki Michelioudaki, Electra Petrakou & Anastasia Pantazi, *The socio-psychological profile of the migrant and his integration*, Athens: Migration Policy Institute – European Profiles S.A., 2007.

should be obtained from a number of dispersed authorities and organisations (especially in the case of someone who applies for the first time) can lead to missing a whole working day.

Another problem reported very often by migrants is the difficulty in communication with staff. Some migrants are not competent enough in the Greek language, so the lack of translators hinders their access to necessary information, even if the application form is translated in nine languages. For that reason a common and rather costly practice is the use of lawyers. In order to avoid time-consuming procedures and queues they hire lawyers who help them in relation to the whole procedure of issuance or renewal of residence permits. If we add the fees (€150 per year), we can conclude that the whole procedure is rather costly for migrants.

Language is also a problem in other public services, such as health institutions. In the research mentioned above many migrants reported that they had serious problems in understanding the doctors and nurses whenever they visited a hospital. Although they did not report any incidents of racist behaviour, they were accompanied by friends or family members with better knowledge of Greek in order to facilitate communication. All of them agreed that the presence of translators would be rather helpful.

Lack of knowledge is also observed regarding social welfare institutions. Almost none of approximately 100 interviewees knew of the existence of the Organismos Ergatikis Estias (Organisation awarding benefits to workers). The same applies for the Organisation for the Housing of Workers, which provides houses with privileged loans. Some migrants are aware of its existence, but they do not know that they are eligible, since they make their social security contributions. An exception, of course, was the case of the houses in the Olympic Village delivered by the Organisation for the Housing of Workers after the 2004 Olympic Games, where 10% of beneficiaries were migrant workers.

Overall, we could say that the situation in services provided by Government agencies has ameliorated through time. Relative stabilisation of the legislative framework²⁴ has played an important role in the simplification of procedures and the coherence of information. We must also note the important role that an independent authority has played in this area. The Greek Ombudsman in its almost ten years of existence has contributed by its continuous consulting through successive reports on the authorities for the improvement of the legislative framework as well as by processing migrants' complaints: from the beginning of its operations in 1998 until 2004, more than 3,300 complaints have been filed by foreign citizens with the Greek Ombudsman, 91.9% of which were to the Department of Human Rights. It is indicative to note that in 2004 7.7% of the complaints to the Greek Ombudsman and 53.1% of the complaints addressed to the Department of Human Rights came from foreign citizens. This tendency continues to rise (<http://www.synigoros.gr/allodapoi/profile.htm>).

Nevertheless, despite the ameliorations and the Greek Ombudsman's interventions there are still important margins for improvement, especially with regards to the facilitation of migrant integration and coordination among different relevant Government agencies.

²⁴ It is indicative that the previous Aliens Law (2910/2001) has undergone 66 amendments, having been in force for just four years.

4. Discussion

We have described the main agencies and collective actors that provide integration services to migrants in Greece. It is obvious that these services are in general dispersed and run by several public authorities and by NGOs. The cost of integration services in terms of human resources and capital to Government agencies as well as to civil society organisations is in fact impossible to estimate. A rough indicator of the total cost in terms of capital is provided by the budget foreseen for the implementation of the *National Integration Plan HESTIA*:

Table 8: Cost of implementation of actions to be undertaken within the *Integrated Action Plan* for the social integration of third country nationals, 2007-2013

Year	Amount in €
2007	1,527,626
2008	2,063,575
2009	2,371,000
2010	2,550,000
2011	3,132,000
2012	3,827,000
2013	4,275,000
Total	€19,746,202

Source: Common Ministerial Decision “*Integrated Action Plan for the regular adjustment and social integration of third country nationals who reside legally in the Greek territory: Programme ‘Hestia’*”

The above figures provide proof that integration services – already existing as well as those that are about to be set up – are without a doubt costly. We can assume that this cost increases if we take into account all the dispersed services provided occasionally or permanently by civil society organisations that operate through national and European funding.

The establishment of a One-Stop Shop model, apart from the significant amelioration of the quality of services, would have a potential impact on the cost of these services. On the one hand, it is true that bureaucracy, which in the Greek case is reinforced by the fact that coordination among diverse stakeholders is very difficult if not impossible, is inefficient and expensive. Many people and a lot of capital are ‘wasted’ in different and sometimes contradictory services with dubious outcomes: contradictory and insufficient information, limited possibilities for intervention (since integration is a multi-faceted

issue), and limited results in terms of duration because of non-sustainable structures. On the other hand, migrants' negative experiences of Government services hinder their integration into the overall society and increase their mistrust towards the receiving State and society. As a result, many ambitious initiatives, launched either by central or local Government agencies either by NGOs, come up against the distrust or the unresponsiveness of migrants.

Some agencies (especially local Government agencies) are an indispensable part of migrants' lives regarding their legal status and residence in the country. These agencies that a migrant cannot 'avoid' no matter how many years he/she lives in the country could in fact gradually develop into a One-Stop-Shop. We have already described the example of the Foreigners Service Centre run by the City of Athens. The generalisation of this model and the expansion of its competencies on the basis of a holistic approach to migrants' integration would have a positive impact in terms of quality, sufficiency, promptness and sustainability of integration services.

Besides, this was the main conclusion shared by all the participants in the Advisory Committee set up during this project. Migrant association representatives as well as public administration executives and members of NGOs agreed upon the necessity for stronger cooperation and coordination among the existing integration services providers. The creation of a One-Stop-Shop was welcomed by all not only as an original idea but as a necessity.

5. Recommendations

Throughout this report we presented and analysed the main aspects of official integration policy as well as the specific integration services provided by several stakeholders to migrants. In general terms, one could argue that some steps have been made towards the implementation of measures and practices aiming at the integration of migrants regarding several specific areas. Nevertheless, a lot remains to be done.

Simplification and acceleration of administrative procedures remains the first claim of migrants. Whether it has to do with the issuance and renewal of residence permits or with other administrative issues, migrants are very often tormented by time-consuming and expensive procedures. A very important factor that could contribute to the improvement of administration services is the generalisation of the use of Information Technology in public administration; besides, this is the main aim of the *Digital Strategy 2006-2013* developed and launched by the Information Technology Committee²⁵ in 2005. In addition, better coordination among Government services is absolutely necessary, while the role of civil society organisations and migrant associations should be recognised and reinforced.

This task could be undertaken by a One-Stop-Shop that could gather and provide all the services addressed to migrants. This kind of institution does not exist in Greece. Types of agencies though that could evolve to a One-Stop-Shop exist in some cases within local Governments. In fact, municipalities could play a key role in concretising integration policy and in implementing the best practices of other European countries.

In Greece, the example of the Citizens Service Centres is considered by all citizens as an unquestionable success story of a public agency. Dispersed throughout the country,

²⁵ Comprising the Special Digital Planning Secretary of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Secretary General for Public Administration and E-Governance of the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, the Secretary General for the Information Technology Systems of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Secretary General for Research and Technology of the Ministry of Development, and the president of the limited liability company “Information Society Ltd” (ISLtd).

Citizens Service Centres provide a whole range of administrative procedures by intermediating between citizens and authorities. This model seems to be the more plausible way to provide more efficient services to migrants. In addition, there is already the example of the Foreigners Service Centre in Athens which could gradually develop into a One-Stop-Shop.

Undoubtedly, in order to achieve this goal, a series of steps must be taken. Some of them could be summarised as follows:

- ⇒ Economic support to local authorities in order to acquire the necessary infrastructure in material and human terms.
- ⇒ Hiring of new skilled and trained personnel where necessary. It is important to note here that there are already graduates from the Department of Migration Policy of the National School of Local Government (NSLG), who are specialised in migration issues and could offer their expertise.
- ⇒ Generalisation of the use of cultural mediators or translators, at least on a part-time basis.
- ⇒ Coordination and rapid exchange of information among the different departments of the One-Stop-Shop that ensures a holistic approach to services provided to migrants.
- ⇒ Coordination and rapid exchange of information among municipalities in order to enhance experience and ideas for implementing new best practices.
- ⇒ Constant cooperation with NGOs and migrant associations that provide integration services in specific areas.
- ⇒ Common database and continuous establishment of common principles regarding integration services in order to serve as tools for redesigning and renewing integration policy.

Given the lack of flexibility among public institutions (concerning ministries as well as other authorities) all the above seem to be a little unrealistic. Nevertheless, what could be realistic is the initial implementation on a pilot basis of integrated consulting services. More precisely, the Foreigners Service Centre that exists in Athens could progressively include more and more services to migrants for a broadening range of

issues. Furthermore, in the future, similar centres could be created in some major cities, i.e. the capitals of the 13 Regional Administrative Divisions, where large numbers of migrants reside.

The integration of migrants is a continuous challenge for host societies. It is a dynamic question that keeps transforming and shifting. No unique and permanent solutions can be invented, since immigration is a phenomenon that always raises new questions to be tackled. Nevertheless, the One-Stop Shop model can serve as a flexible method in order to deal with the multiple aspects of integration in a holistic and efficient way.