

CONFERENCE ON MIGRANTS

1. How many migrants are there in Greece?

In my country, Greece, the percentage of foreign population is as high as 10 % in proportion to the total population of the country. Albanian migrants constitute some 55-60% or more of the immigrant population. Also, there are Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, Somali, Bulgarians, Georgians, Romanians, Russians and Ukrainians. Immigrants are employed in construction, industrial manufacturing and agriculture. A high number of Filipino housekeepers also migrate to Greece.

In 2015, arrivals of refugees by sea have increased dramatically in Greece mainly due to the ongoing Syrian Civil War. There were 856,723 arrivals by sea in Greece, an almost fivefold increase to the same period of 2014. An estimated 8% of the arrivals applied for asylum in Greece.

2. What is the country's policy about migrants?

There are large numbers of undocumented immigrants in Greece today. The Greek government and immigration policy was overwhelmed by the large numbers of migrants who began flooding in during the 1990s, and lacked the control and legal framework to manage the situation. While the Greek government has made some strides in creating better immigration policy, immigration reform remains a low priority.

Once immigrants are in Greece, most of them are intercepted by the Coast Guard or Police border guards. The present law requires all of them to be identified, and then to be given a 30-day temporary permit before they are obliged to leave the country.

Almost none of them abide by this clause, however, having already been well informed about how to get to the major urban centers and especially Athens. In many instances smuggling networks have already placed their own correspondents in the Greek islands or near the borders, who take them in the 'right direction.'

The immigrant flow to Greece is beyond of what our state infrastructure can handle," Tsipras said. "We have significant problems and that's why we have asked for help from EU."

3. What problems does taking in migrants create?

Greece receives hundreds of thousands immigrants (both legal and illegal) and asylum seekers per year. A small debt ridden country, with borders that are mostly vast sea areas and hence difficult to guard, is forced to provide help for all the immigrants while filtering them before they reach the richer countries.

Athens has been transformed by its immigrant population and not always for the better. Immigrant gang groups are roaming the city, sometimes turning against each other and so knife crimes are not unusual. Prostitution is everywhere in the city center and with it, all the unwelcome issues of human trafficking, exploitation, violence and corruption.

For a small and (until recently) conservative country like Greece, this problem, combined with an economic crisis and depression, is enough to trigger a rise in nationalism and xenophobia. Violence turned from between the immigrant groups to local people against all the immigrants in general, either legal or illegal.

What help is given (or not) by the population or the NGOs

There are many well-established charity organizations helping the thousands of migrants flooding into Europe, most of whom are fleeing violence in Syria and Afghanistan or the brutal oppression of Eritrea's dictatorship.

The big charity groups are well-known: UNHCR, Unicef, Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, the International Red Cross and Save the Children

As you know, Lesbos is undeniably experiencing a humanitarian crisis. Fortunately, several large international NGOs are present and they obviously perform a work of great importance to manage the current "crisis". However, the needs far exceed the capacity of their staff.

On Lesbos, several local teams of volunteers are at work : you will find a presentation of each team on the "About us" page. The latest news of this network of solidarity are on the "What's up" page.

If you wish to help the refugees in Lesbos, you can send us some money or some very useful items. You also can come and join one of the local volunteers teams.

OTHER QUESTIONS

1. WHERE ARE THE MIGRANTS IN YOUR COUNTRY FROM?
2. IS THERE ANY CRIMINALITY DUE TO MIGRATION?
3. WHAT KIND OF DIFFICULTIES DO MIGRANTS FACE IN YOUR COUNTRIES?
4. IS THERE XENOPHOBIA DUE TO REFUGEES FLOW?