
Semi-Reluctant Hosts: Southern Europe's Ambivalent Response to Immigration

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The human tragedy of migration has become a regular feature of southern European countries with accessible coastlines—Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus, inhospitable illegal border crossings—Italy and Greece, or even borders set with landmines—Greece and Turkey. Though a large number of immigrants die from drowning, freezing, and explosions, it is the dramatic arrival of shiploads of starving emigrants that captures public attention and frequently draws a humane and compassionate response. Public policy, however, generally approaches such matters from a purely legal standpoint. The typical initial state response has been to characterize the migrants as “illegal,” and later to concede that some might be candidates for political asylum. This status, in southern Europe, is scarcely better than being an illegal immigrant.¹

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In this paper, I hope to convey an impression of the extremely complex, rapidly changing and frequently misunderstood nature of international migration to southern Europe, its relationship with the economy and society, and the role of the state in managing the phenomenon. I conclude with a short appraisal of public policy, along with some personal thoughts on how progress might be made.

Migration to Southern Europe

Over the last two decades, immigration into southern Europe has continuously

increased, though it has particularly increased into Italy and Greece, with floods of emigrants arriving from collapsing Albania in the early 1990s. A consistent pattern has been highly restricted access to the formal labor market; only very recently have southern European governments tried to amend this problem. The resultant burgeoning of the informal sector and its immigrant population has been met since 1985 by frequent legalization programs across southern Europe, typically followed by lapses back into illegality along with more illegal workers and immigrants.²

The immigrants themselves exhibit a remarkable diversity of nationalities, educational levels, professions, and entry routes into southern Europe. Furthermore, there is doubt about the types of migration—whether the migrants consider themselves to be temporary guestworkers, seasonal cross-border labor, semi-permanent immigrants, long-term immigrants, refugees, etc. One thing should be learned from the northern European experience: that even “temporary” migrants frequently become permanent residents.³ However, this should not preclude states from facilitating migrants’ return, most notably through provisions for minority language instruction (IMLI) for migrant children, and legal arrangements for co-ordination or exportability of acquired pension rights. Both of these issues are largely ignored in southern Europe, thus providing structural encouragement of permanent immigration.

Due to the great extent of illegal immigration and residence, official statistics give limited information about the resident immigrant population across southern Europe—especially in Greece. Using the latest available official data along with estimates for illegal residents, Table 1 gives a rough picture.

Table 1
Total population, estimated non-EU immigrant stocks and work permits, 1998
[000s]

	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Total immigrant population (est.)</u>	<u>Immigrants/ total pop.</u>	<u>Work authorizations</u>
Greece	10,300	800–1,000	9-10%	???
Italy	57,000	1,500	2.6%	614.6
Spain	39,100	*900	2.3%	190.6
Portugal	10,000	279	2.8%	88.6

SOURCE: Baldwin-Edwards, 2002: calculated from OECD, CEC, Eurostat/NIDI data

Note: *of which, some 400.000 are EU nationals, mostly retired

Typically, the immigrant/population ratio in EU countries is within 3-9 percent, although these figures include only legal immigrants.⁴ Table 1 shows that across southern Europe, only Greece has a remarkable proportion of immigrant

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stocks. However, a reservation should be made about whether they are stocks or complex flow patterns. Across southern Europe, the main nationalities are thought to be the following (ranked according to approximate numerical importance):

Figure 1

Principal third country nationalities in southern Europe, ranked

GREECE: Albanian, Bulgarian, Egyptian, Romanian, Pakistani, Ukrainian, Polish, Georgian, Indian, Filipino, Bangladeshi, Syrian, Nigerian

ITALY: Moroccan, Albanian, Filipino, Tunisian, Yugoslav, Romanian, Chinese, Senegalese, Polish, Sri Lankan, Egyptian, Peruvian, Brazilian, Indian

SPAIN: Moroccan, Chinese, Ecuadorean, Colombian, Argentine, Algerian, Senegalese, Romanians, Brazilian, Polish, Pakistani, Nigerian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian

PORTUGAL: Cape Verdean, Angolan, Brazilian, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Principe, Senegalese, Moroccan, Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi

SOURCE: own compilation from national statistics and various regularization data.

Note: dominant nationalities in bold

With the notable exception of Portugal, which has historically important connections with Brazil and its former African colonies, the dominant nationalities are Moroccan in Italy and Spain, and Albanian in Greece. However, the very wide range of nationalities in all southern European countries indicates the complexity and diversity of migration patterns into the region.

Migration Routes and Modes of Travel

There are three main routes of migration in the Mediterranean basin. The first consists of South–North movements, largely from Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Turkey, and arriving in the northern Mediterranean countries of Greece, Italy, Spain and France. The second is Southeast–North—from Senegal and Iraq or even from remote Asian areas such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, and Africa, like Nigeria, Congo and Somalia. Migrants using these routes may either remain in the southern European countries, or attempt to use them as transit countries to gain access to other parts of Europe.⁵ The third main movement is Northeast–West, namely from Albania to Italy and Greece, and from Bulgaria, Romania and Poland—along with other USSR satellite states—to all of southern Europe. This route exhibits more diversity in types of migration. Some of it is

pendle migration, possibly due to geographical proximity; some appears to have started as temporary migration, but now looks more permanent; and much of the migration from the Baltic countries, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, consists of trafficked women and children forced into prostitution.⁶

For the first two routes, travel by sea is the most common pattern, although increasingly complex stepwise movements have been noted for long distance migration.⁷ The number of “illegal immigrants,” as they are typically called, is not actually so large in quantity—although increasing markedly over the last two years. One of the problems besetting serious analysis of all aspects of immigration into southern Europe is the extraordinarily disorganized compilation of statistics, most notably in Greece and Italy. However, the latest report by the Greek coastguard gives the number of immigrants intercepted during the first 10 months of 2001 as being 5,242.⁸ The vast majority have until recently been Iraqi Kurds and are now Afghans and Iraqis, usually leaving from Turkey which they have reached by land. Italy estimates that over the 2-year period 1999-2001, some 77,000 immigrants disembarked.⁹ Spain arrested some 3,500 immigrants arriving by boat in 1999, but this figure had increased to nearly 15,000 for 2000;¹⁰ for 2001, the figure has dropped to 4,500 for the first 9 months, partly reflecting cooperation between Morocco and Spain, and also a cessation of such traffic immediately after the 11 September events.¹¹ Three quarters of migrants arriving in Spanish waters are North African, mainly Moroccan with the remainder from sub-Saharan Africa. Although these numbers are not small, and the Spanish and Greek figures are of actual arrests—which may be a small proportion of successful illegal immigration—they are nevertheless just a small fraction of total non-EU immigration into southern Europe. Research in Spain in 2000, commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior, revealed that only 10 percent of immigrants had arrived illegally by sea, across the Strait of Gibraltar.¹²

Land border difficulties exist primarily for Greece and to a lesser extent, Italy. The Greek-Albanian border is porous and it seems that most of the estimated 400-500,000 Albanians in Greece crossed it illegally. The Greek-Turkish border is passable, but filled with landmines which have not yet been removed in accordance with treaty obligations. There do not seem to be any data available on illegal immigrants caught crossing the Greek borders. Italy has released the figure of 14,000 caught at land borders over the 2-year period 1999-2000, but there is no known estimate of the number who may have crossed successfully.¹³

Asylum Seekers

Asylum-seeking into southern Europe has never been a major issue, mainly because of the ease of illegal immigration, the historical difficulty of gaining asylum, and the minimal rewards for achieving such a status. The situation has improved slightly in recent years, but despite generally low application numbers—

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partly through active discouragement—the recognition rates are very low.

Table 2 shows asylum data for southern Europe. As can be seen, all except Italy have had very small numbers of asylum claims; the Italian figure is skewed by the 1991 arrival of Albanians en masse and a large influx in 1999. There is also extreme doubt surrounding the Italian statistics.¹⁴ For all of southern Europe, it can be seen that the recognition rates are well below those of northern European countries, despite both the small number of applicants and the apparent strength of their claims, judging by country of origin.

Table 2
Asylum applications, recognition rates and principal nationalities, 1990-99

	1999 figure	Total 1990-99	Geneva Conv. Recognition	Total Recognitions	<u>Principal nationalities (1990-1999)</u>			
Greece	1,530	24,610	8.6%	11.5%	Iraq	Turkey	Albania	Iran
Italy	33,360	89,530	13.4%	15.6%	Albania	Yugo.	Iran	Romania
Portugal	310	5,590	4.9%	12.3%	Romania	N/A	N/A	N/A
Spain	8,410	83,560	5.8%	8.1%	Romania	Poland	Algeria	Liberia
EU	367,400	3,746,410	11.1%	21.4%	Yugo.	Romania	Turkey	Iraq

SOURCE: UNHCR (2000)

Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants

Organized crime has greatly benefited from European restrictions on immigration, originally by merely facilitating the illegal entry of immigrants as a short-term commercial arrangement—smuggling. The organizations providing this service are usually specialized in human smuggling, and not necessarily involved in other forms of organized crime, although Europol believes that drug smuggling is often linked.¹⁵ Research conducted in 1993 by ICMPD in Vienna suggests that 15-30 percent of illegal immigration into Europe was arranged by smugglers, and that the profits for that year must have been a minimum of U.S.\$100 million up to as much as U.S.\$1.2 billion, with world profits of the order of U.S.\$6 billion in this criminal sector.¹⁶ The ICMPD estimate for 1999 was that 400-500,000 people were smuggled into western Europe in that year, more than double the figure they estimated for 1993.¹⁷

Since the early 1990s, the criminal activities in this area have not only multiplied, but changed dramatically in both character and organization. Thus the distinction between 'smuggling' and 'trafficking' has been made, by all professional analysts, including Interpol and Europol.¹⁸ Trafficking involves a form of exploitation over an extended time period. The enforced prostitution of women and children is the most horrendous form of this exploitation, and it has great commercial attraction for organized criminal groups. The profits are as high as drug smuggling, and until recently the penalties if caught were lower.¹⁹

In southern Europe, there are two main areas of concern. The first, and less troubling, is the use of smugglers for transit migration through Turkey: it was reported for 1995 that 45 percent of such migrants had used smugglers, although the proportion was 66 percent for Iraqis.²⁰ Twenty percent of the sample in the same study intended to enter either Bulgaria or Greece illegally, with the aid of smugglers, with either Greece or Italy as final destination. There are also reports of professional smugglers being used for illegal migration from North Africa to Spain, although there is little evidence that they are so commonly used.²¹ The second area of concern is the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children from Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries, which appears to be operating extensively in Greece and Italy.²² Furthermore, Interpol has reported this sort of exploitation is becoming “increasingly violent” and includes beatings and rape.²²

Some observations on immigration patterns into southern Europe

The evidence presented above shows that, through their geo-political situation, Greece and to a lesser extent Italy, are the recipients of three sorts of illegal immigration:

- Spontaneous emigration from Albania and other Balkan countries
- Organized smuggling from the East
- Trafficking and sexual exploitation from the northeastern Europe

Spain and Italy have experienced the phenomenon of illegal boat migration from North Africa. However, the majority of illegal immigrants in both Spain and Italy initially arrived legally. Recent research carried out by Eurostat/NIDI on illegal immigrants in Spain and Italy, along with sending and transit countries, seems to show that 15-36 percent overstayed their permit, whilst only 7-17 percent entered illegally. Apart from refusals to answer, the remainder—some 35-60 percent—claimed to have complied with the immigration rules. The exception seems to lie with Moroccans, who showed a greater tendency to travel without a visa or permit—roughly 42 percent of those sampled in Spain.²³ Other recent research in Spain by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Madrid suggests that 67 percent of illegal immigrants entered with valid documents—mostly a tourist visa—and over 75 percent did not rely on help from others, meaning that smuggling or trafficking of migrants has not been the major mechanism of migration into Spain.²⁴

Thus, Greece stands out as unique in southern Europe in the extent of its illegal immigration. It is also unique in the proportion of immigrants to population, and especially in the ratio of non-EU to native population. The latter can perhaps be attributed mainly to geography; however, the extent of illegality, it has

been argued, is the direct result of its government policy.²⁵

Immigrants' Location in Economy and Society

The Economy

Job competition with immigrant populations in southern Europe is not a major issue, despite the fact that the region—with the exception of Portugal—has the highest unemployment rates and lowest participation rates—especially among women and young people—in the EU.²⁶ Piore's 1979 dual labor market hypothesis is evidenced throughout the region: even with quite high immigrant stocks, as shown in Table 1, certain sectors are begging governments to increase legal labor immigration. In all four southern EU countries, the economic sector most obviously in need of labor is agriculture. Over the last year, with a new immigration law in Spain, substantial fines were imposed on farmers for employment of illegal workers, but their requests for several hundred work permits were met by allocations of one per farm, leaving the choice of a destroyed harvest or employment of illegal workers. Strawberry producers in Andalucia demanded in June 2000, through their 10 local mayors, that the state legalize about 3000 illegal workers.²⁷ In January, some 50 percent of the broccoli harvest in Spain was reported as having been sacrificed, for lack of legal workers.²⁸ Greek agriculture has suffered labor shortages throughout the 1990s, along with Italy, which also has difficulty recruiting factory workers in the North.²⁹ Portugal reportedly needs some 20,000 more workers in agriculture and construction, in addition to 100,000 legalized, by the end of 2001.³⁰

Society

In all four countries, the social reception of immigrants is shaped by factors other than their economic role. Media coverage of immigration-related events has varied greatly, both across southern Europe and over time. Thus the most negative presentations were seen in both Greece and Italy in 1991 with the mass influxes of Albanians. Although the stereotyping of Albanians as criminals has abated somewhat, its long-term effects are still evident. Spain and Portugal show more tolerance of immigration than Italy and Greece, which consistently appear as xenophobic societies according to the European Commission's Eurobarometer surveys. There is, however, great doubt about the cross-national comparability of these surveys and, consequently, the value of the results.

Several major social issues regarding the social integration of immigrants stand out, and deserve some discussion. These are: undocumented status, the criminality of immigrants, local immigrant-to-population ratios, and access to healthcare services.

Undocumented status

This is the greatest stumbling block to immigrant integration in southern Europe. Despite frequent amnesty programs, and an increasing use of longer-term work permits, there remain substantial illegal immigrant populations across southern Europe. Their sizes vary, with the largest illegal proportion clearly in Greece. As has been acutely noted by Suarez-Navaz in her ethnographic study of immigrants in Andalusia, Spain, “the distinction between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ immigrants ... pervades daily life as well as institutional programs for immigrants’ integration.” She notes the real-life ambiguity—the gray areas of semi-legality—such as legal immigrants who work illegally, or who have a work permit to work in a different sector. Many simply go in and out of legality, through their vulnerable and changing employment situation. The differentiation between legal and ‘illegal’ is frequently used as a justification for discriminatory practices, although it also reflects the marginality of natives employed in the informal economy who are without a stable social location. A “restricted notion of citizenship [exists] that indirectly requires potential citizens to have a high economic level. The group of immigrants that do not have the ideal level are condemned to join the ranks of the informal economy and to be subject to permanent persecution...”³¹

This account, focused on a region of Spain, seems applicable to almost any part of Mediterranean Europe. Research in Greece has suggested that increased personal contact with immigrants leads to more positive evaluations, which can empirically undermine the social stereotyping of immigrants. At the same time, a genuine dislike—even fear—of the illegal status of immigrants has been noted.³² We should also be aware of a general public concern about single male immigrants, as opposed to families. This raises the issue of whether the migration is temporary, seasonal, variable or permanent. Without generous family reunification policies, male Gastarbeiter have little possibility of being joined by wives and children.

The Criminality of Immigrants

Statistics are frequently cited by European governments to “prove” that there is a problem with the criminality of immigrants. Generally, the proportion of immigrants among prison populations has been increasing across Europe, and most dramatically in Greece. Table 3 gives the latest available data.

Table 3
Immigrants as proportion of total prison populations, selected European countries
[percent]

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	1983	1988	1991	1997
Austria	7	9	22	27
Belgium	22	30	34	38
France	25	26	30	26
Germany	-	15	15	34
Greece	12	19	22	39
Italy	8	9	15	22
Netherlands	23	20	25	32
Spain	8	12	16	18
Sweden	17	22	20	26
Switzerland	32	40	44	n.d.

SOURCE: Council of Europe data, cited in Baldwin-Edwards, 2001 (Table 1)

From Table 3, it can be seen that across Europe there have been large increases of immigrants in the prison system over the last two decades. The largest proportion is now in Greece, at roughly 50 percent. There has been no systematic research across Europe to explain these figures, although it is clear that many are imprisoned for breach of the immigration rules. A study of the Greek situation has shown that there are highly discriminatory practices that lead to imprisonment of immigrants for crimes unrelated to immigration offenses.³³ These include automatic pre-trial detention—where a native would not be detained, concentration on arrests of immigrants by the police, the assumption by judges of guilt in other crimes because of an immigrant's illegal status, inadequate legal representation, and even imprisonment beyond the actual sentence length through inability to deport the alien. Although there is some evidence to suggest that immigrants have contributed to certain specific petty crimes, such as document forgery and theft, generally the native population seems to be more involved with serious crimes such as murder. A notable exception to this statistical generalization is the behavior of foreign and indigenous mafia. Media coverage and government publicity—both of which seem to have improved across southern Europe in the past 5 years—shape public perception of the crime phenomenon.

Local immigrant/population ratios

Localized immigrant population density is an increasingly accepted analytical tool in immigration literature. Empirical data for Greece shows that it influences relative wage levels of illegal immigrants and also public perception of immigrants.³⁴ Of course, Greece is particularly vulnerable with its northern borders—especially with Albania—and the large number of illegal immigrants in the border regions providing mainly agricultural labor in depopulated zones.

Both Money and Karapi have presented more general theoretical positions emphasising the local dimension of the politics of immigration. Their starting point is that the national geographic location of immigrants is uneven, with concentrations in certain local areas: for Money, the crux lies in local economic conditions to which local politicians respond; for Karapin, the mechanism is, rather, anti-immigrant social movements and the local political opportunity structure.³⁵

Across southern Europe, regional concentrations of immigrants have been noted. In Spain, some 50 percent of non-EU immigrants are thought to live in Catalonia (179,000) and Madrid (149,000), of which 162,000 are Moroccan.³⁶ The total non-EU immigrant population of Spain in 2000 was estimated—by combining residence permit data with application data for legalization—at 516,000, plus another 418,000 EU nationals. In Italy, ISTAT data for 1993-99 show the highest concentrations of immigrants as being in central Italy (3.3 percent in 1999), northwest (2.8 percent) and northeast (2.6 percent).³⁷ These are actually the most populous areas of Italy, reflecting the internal migration of Italians for work as well as immigrant location. In Greece, the distribution of immigrants is complex, owing to the border with Albania, the available work in rural regions, as well as the more usual urban employment in Athens and Thessaloniki.

There is a serious lack of research on the impact of immigrants on local communities in southern Europe. We can hypothesize, on the basis of limited data, a fourfold typology of such interactions. Figure 2 shows this:

Figure 2
Typology of immigrant relationship to local communities

	Immigrant/ population ratio	High Level of Integration	Marginality
RURAL	Low	Stable, few problems	Transient but accepted
CONTEXT	High	Affects social structure	Potentially threatening
URBAN	Low	Stable, few problems	Ignored
CONTEXT	High	Changes city patterns	Can form minority ghettos

According to my schema, although rural and urban settings accommodate small numbers of immigrants in different ways, there should be few problems. With larger numbers, there are different implications. A large concentration of well-integrated immigrants in a rural area can completely shift demographic and social structure, repopulating schools which would otherwise have closed, for example; other possible effects are on the housing market, hospital services, et al. A large number of marginalized immigrants is likely to be unnoticed or of little consequence. With increasingly larger numbers, there will be an impact on urban

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structures. For example, populating declining inner-city areas would impact the housing market. In the case of weak social integration, there is the danger of ethnic ghettos emerging— which may not be acceptable to the host community.

All of these effects have been observed across southern Europe, although it is unclear without rigorous empirical evidence that they are valid as general propositions.

Access to healthcare services

This varies greatly across the EU, and national governments seem to deliberately suppress information. Generally, it seems that state facilities are available to undocumented and uninsured immigrants—even if only for emergency treatment. Across southern Europe, there continue to be *contra legem* practices—although these often vary substantially by local region.³⁸ In Italy, a 1995 decree law permits not only free emergency medical care for undocumented immigrants, but also for serious illnesses and some preventative prescriptions; the 1998 Immigration Law extended all state medical services to undocumented children.³⁹ Thus, since 1998, Italy has given free access to healthcare services to both illegal and legal migrants, with specialized services for immigrants including interpreters and support counselling. In the matter of health research, 2.4 percent of the Italian Ministry of Health budget is devoted to projects covering migrants.⁴⁰ In Greece, the new Immigration Law of 2001 stipulates that state hospital care is provided for undocumented immigrants only in emergency cases and until the condition is stable, and requires state employees to notify the police. There is no special provision for undocumented children.

Across southern Europe, the voluntary sector plays a major role in healthcare for immigrants. Organizations such as Médecins sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde, and CARITAS—along with many other less well-known or individual NGO clinics—constitute the only medical support that a majority of immigrants can receive.

Research on the health of immigrants in southern Europe suggests that there are serious health problems in the following categories: communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, AIDS, meningitis and diphtheria; and non-communicable illnesses, including organic disorders such as cardiovascular risk, diabetes, dental diseases; occupational illnesses, to which illegal migrants are particularly vulnerable; sexual abuse, noted in the extensive trafficking of women for prostitution; psychosocial illnesses, which illegal migrants seem vulnerable to;⁴² and finally, poverty and living conditions as themselves a cause of illness.⁴³

The Two Faces of Janus

The response of most southern European governments has been bifurcated. On

one hand, they close borders with increasing efficacy and varieties of techniques. On the other hand, they have felt compelled to attempt some social integration of immigrants into the society, notwithstanding the large numbers of undocumented migrants in the territory. The major exception to this double-faced approach has been Greece, which offers virtually nothing in terms of social integration, with the state exhibiting a consistently hostile approach to its large number of illegal and semi-legal immigrants.

At this point, it is important to recognize some essential differences in the migration problems facing the four southern European states. Portugal experienced few, most of which relate to its colonial past. Spain has, by virtue of its geographical position, the difficulty of illegal immigration by Moroccans and others leaving North African shores, along with its historical ties with some South American states. Italy experiences illegal coastal immigration, with frequent use of Turkey and Greece as transit countries, along with some illegal border crossings. However, it is Greece which is the recipient of mass illegal immigration, primarily through its border with Albania, but also from Turkey as a transit country, and also through the other Balkan countries bordering Greece.

Turning to non-EU immigrant ratios, again it is Greece which has a massive proportion of around 10 percent, Portugal and Italy just under 3 percent, while Spain with 45 percent of its immigrants as EU nationals, has only 1.3 percent. Although regional concentrations are also important in evaluating the effects of these numbers, clearly the strain is likely to be greatest on Greek policymakers. Furthermore, of all these countries it is Greece which has historically had the highest ethnic and cultural homogeneity – placing additional pressures on the state for policy solutions.

Policy Responses

Controlling the borders

Following the requirements of both the EU and the Schengen Treaty, over the last decade all four countries have adopted mechanisms for increased border control. These include:

- Visa requirements for certain countries' nationals
- More effective policing of land borders
- More coastguard patrols
- Expedited asylum applications
- Principle of 'safe country of origin' of asylum seekers
- Expulsion of undocumented immigrants
- Exchange of information within Schengen on undesirable aliens and asylum seekers

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In addition to these general principles, all four countries have passed new legislation on immigration. Much of this legislation is concerned with trying to legalize the position of large numbers of irregular immigrants, the great majority of whom were in fact once legally present on the territory—with the exception of immigrants in Greece. The many legalization programs carried out across southern Europe over the last 15 years constitute a major study in their own right, and will not be dealt with here. The principal problem with them has always been that they awarded short-term residence/work permits, requiring the immigrants to renew them with continuous work records. More recently, Spain and Italy have been awarding longer term permits, in an attempt to solve that problem.

The European Union has played a virtually nonexistent role in international agreements for the return of illegal migrants, despite the Association Agreements with Morocco and Tunisia, and the stronger Customs Union with Turkey. It was determined in principle in 1995 that the European Union should have readmission clauses inserted in all future agreements with third countries;⁴³ this has been achieved so far, only with the Ukraine, and is planned for Morocco, Pakistan, Russia and Sri Lanka.⁴⁴ In fact, it has been left to individual states to negotiate bilateral treaty arrangements for return of illegal migrants, and in some cases for labor recruitment; there are also ad hoc regional groupings, attempting to secure the borders of southern and southeastern Europe.

Apart from the readmission provisions negotiated with third states under the Schengen arrangements, the known bilateral agreements for readmission are actually rather few. Greece has arrangements with Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Albania—although the extent of their utilization is not known. Recently concluded agreements consist of a Spain-Nigeria agreement signed in June 2001,⁴⁵ a Greece-Turkey agreement signed in November 2001,⁴⁶ and discussions between Italy and Turkey on cooperation against human smuggling early in 2001. Spain has been pushing for some time for Morocco to include repatriation in a renegotiated agreement, but has not been successful.⁴⁷

Only two out of the four southern European countries—Italy and Greece—carry out mass expulsions of illegal immigrants. Italy has made it public information that over the period 1998-2000, some 193,000 illegal immigrants were 'repatriated' and 149,000 were expelled.⁴⁸

Greece has had a much longer history of police "broom" searches and mass expulsions of all those not in possession of valid residence documents. From 1992-95, these expulsions have numbered over 225,000 a year⁴⁹ and for 2001 the figure is expected to remain high at 270,000.⁵⁰ Spain has adopted a rather inclusive approach to its illegal residents, and repatriates relatively small numbers—mainly Moroccans and a few Nigerians.

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Labor recruitment agreements were signed in 2001 between Spain and Morocco, Ecuador and Colombia. Spain is planning further labor recruitment agreements with Poland and other East European countries, with the objective of matching specific nationalities with occupational skills. Greece supposedly has plans, outlined in its 2001 Immigration Law, for recruitment from neighboring countries, but no progress has been made. Italy has adopted a more far-reaching system, which allows sponsored immigration rather than confinement to bilateral agreements.

Integrating Immigrants

With the massive extent of illegal immigration and/or residence, southern European countries have had to tackle the problem of illegality before considering longer term issues of integration. Increasingly, states have had to find pretexts to include as many as possible in the legalizations, otherwise their purpose would not be achieved. In Spain, a legalization program with the cut-off date of July 2000 approved only 60 percent of the 227,000 applications; protests and demonstrations in early 2001 led to another legalization in 2001 with 323,000 applicants.⁵¹ Preliminary processing of the applications shows an approval rate of 94 percent.⁵² Greece's second ever legalization was also conducted in 2001, with 351,000 applications;⁵³ some applications from the first legalization in 1998 were still pending, and the total number of legal immigrants in Greece has been an unknown figure since 1997.⁵⁴ However, given that the total number of immigrants in the last few years had generally been estimated as being at least 800,000, the number of applications is very low. It can safely be assumed that Greece will continue with several hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants for many years to come, even if they are regularly arrested and expelled from the country. Portugal has conducted a low-key continuous amnesty in 2001, which has legalized some 90,000 workers.⁵⁵ Italy has avoided using legalizations recently, in order to avoid the cycle of legalization-new illegal immigration-new legalization.

Spain and Italy have undertaken extensive family reunification programs, with such measures constituting a large proportion of legal immigration and taking these countries into the mainstream of European immigration patterns. Greece discourages family immigration, and has only in 2001 relaxed slightly its rules on the matter.

Permanent residence is granted in Spain and Italy after 5 years of legal residence, but requires 10 years in Greece and Portugal; the average period required in the European Union is about 4.9 years.⁵⁶

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Increasingly, Spain, Italy and Portugal have been attempting to stabilize the position of immigrants by awarding longer term residence permits, and also attempting to minimize the traditional requirement of continuous employment for their renewal. This policy, if continued, will lead to a replication of northern European immigration countries' experience of permanent alien residents or "denizens," frequently with unemployment rates higher than the indigenous populations. This latter has already started to occur in Italy. Greece has no such problem, as the vast proportion of its immigrants are either illegal or in some gray area of semi-legality.

Since access to the welfare state is determined mostly by social insurance coverage in these less developed welfare systems, only those immigrants who are insured, legal residents are easily included. Italy, as was noted above, has been more inclusive in this regard. Greece, departing from a previous situation of tolerance, has tried to prevent use of state services by illegal immigrants. Thus, in all four countries, the voluntary sector remains crucial for both legal and illegal immigrants.

Policy Failure

Probably the biggest policy failure across southern Europe has been the inability of the state to adapt to changing global patterns, to accept migration as a reality of the late twentieth century, and to manage it in economic, social and political terms. By persisting with exclusionary patterns of immigration control—notably issuing very few work permits, setting absurd conditions for employers to recruit illegal labor, horrendous bureaucracy in the application process—southern European governments closed off legal labor recruitment. At the same time, they made no effort to control their borders. Thus the phenomenon of an expanding informal sector began, staffed principally by illegal immigrants who accepted the terms of their host country.

The informal employment of immigrants has done much for economic growth, and in particular has propped up entire ailing industries—but at a cost. That cost has been borne by the illegal immigrants themselves, who are socially excluded, and by the indigenous population, which feels somehow threatened by all this illegality. It has also set back the normal process of social integration of immigrants, although this is now proceeding at a reasonable pace in Spain and Italy, despite governments which are broadly anti-immigrant. Greece has yet to initiate any such process, given its failure to provide legal status to even a majority of its immigrant population.

Another consequence of over-restrictive immigration structures—the term “policy” hardly seems applicable—has been the involvement of organized crime. Originally starting with exclusive involvement in people smuggling, organized crime has now accelerated into a multi-billion dollar business, exploiting its victims, and forcing women and children into prostitution across Europe. The activities are also linked, in parallel form, with drug trafficking, money laundering, and other mafia-style activities. European governments are desperately trying to repair the damage which their own policies have actually caused.

Finally, what are the policy options that might effect some improvements? First, a recognition by all of southern Europe that it desperately needs more immigrant workers: in no southern country is there an issue of too many immigrant

Illegal immigrants have human rights, and should be treated with dignity; this reflects as much upon us, the host society, as on their presence within it.

workers for the economy, although Greece possibly has some sort of equilibrium of supply and demand. Thus, the legal employment of workers from both within and without the territory must be expedited, preferably without the usual Mediterranean bureaucratic horrors.


Second, a recognition of the sad fact that police hounding and searching for illegal migrants within the society sends

a message of “unwanted” to the entire population; it is inconsistent with the social integration of immigrant communities, and likely to promote racist tendencies. Illegal immigrants have human rights, and should be treated with dignity; this reflects as much upon us, the host society, as on their presence within it. One step would be for all the countries to sign the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers And Their Families, as suggested by the European Commission. Also, Greece might think to sign the two ILO Migration Conventions which protect legal and illegal migrant workers’ rights.

Third, there has to be some consideration given to the structural factors surrounding the informal economy. It is not enough simply to harass employers of illegal labor: it may be necessary to change social insurance provisions, requirements by the state for the employer to provide ‘bonds,’ and avoidance of all the impediments to employment of foreign labor which encouraged employers to hire illegal labor. There should also be special consideration given to small businesses, which might need extra workers but not under the conditions currently offered by the state.

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Fourth, a more constructive approach to dealing with refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, and the like would be desirable, rather than grudgingly accepting very small proportions of small numbers of asylum-seekers. Southern Europe is now part of the First World, and as such has obligations as well as benefits; however, refugees can be integrated into society, taught the language, and trained in semi-skilled jobs that southern European refuse to do. These elements require management and investment by the state, for the future of the society. It seems doubtful that any politicians have enough vision to promote such schemes, at least at this time.

Finally, the most demanding of all measures: a plea for some planning and effective management of immigration and immigrants' integration. By planning, I do not mean the sort of 'command economy' approach which has tended to prevail in parts of southern Europe. Rather, I am thinking of some research agendas, and recognition of likely problems, in order that possible measures be considered. We might mention several things here: healthcare and immigrants' communicable diseases, minority language teaching for immigrant children, local housing markets and immigrant communities, immigrant concentrations in certain schools, the criminal justice system and immigrants. The list is almost endless. Yet, all these problems and more already exist: would it not be wise to address them? 

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