

➤ Migration Policy in Southern Europe: Challenges, Constraints and Prospects

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The current economic crisis in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal has brought significant challenges to the area in terms of migration policy. This article discusses three main issues: migration and the labour market, the management of irregular migration and changes in public opinion over migration in the face of rising xenophobia and racism abetted by economic difficulties and political volatility.

Since the early 1990s, Southern Europe has changed from a migrant sending to a migrant hosting region. Greece, Italy and Spain registered positive net migration for the first time in the 1970s. After the late 1980s, Italy experienced massive migration inflows in the case of Italy. Greece and Spain did so in the early 1990s. The entry of Greece and Spain in the 1980s to the then European Community and their subsequent economic growth and political stability made them attractive destinations to migrants. These migration flows resulted mainly from the geopolitical restructuring of Europe in the post-1989 period and also from the general increase and diversification of global migration since the 1980s. In contrast to the post-WWII period, when migration from Asia and Africa was largely shaped by erstwhile colonial relations, recent migration has taken on new pathways. Southern Europe has become host to African and Asian migrants with whom the region had no special historical, geopolitical or cultural ties.

Moreover, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal are all situated at the 'soft underbelly' of the EU, which sits at the crossroads of several Mediterranean migration pathways from the global South to the European North. Italy and Greece are part of important Southern Mediterranean and Eastern European pathways from Asia and Africa to the EU (via Turkey, in the case of Greece; via Libya or Tunisia, in the case of Italy). Most importantly, the four countries all have large informal economies that have provided employment opportunities for immigrants. Originally considered stepping stones to other EU member states like France or Germany, these informal economic employment opportunities transformed Spain, Italy and Greece into becoming important destinations for migrants during the 1990s and 2000s.

Migration to Southern Europe proved to be massive. In the 1990s, the number of immigrants in Greece reached 700,000, which accounted for about seven percent of the population. During the same period, Italy took in nearly three million and Spain nearly one million migrants, accounting for 3-5 percent of their populations.¹ Inflows to Spain increased dramatically in the 2000s, reaching 5.7 million in 2012, accounting for 12 percent of the population.² In Italy, inflows reached five million, accounting for seven

1 C. Gonzalez-Enriquez, 'Spain,' M. Ambrosinni 'Italy' and R. Gropas and A. Triandafyllidou 'Greece' in *European Immigration: A Sourcebook* eds. A. Triandafyllidou and R. Gropas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Second edition forthcoming.

2 Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Cifras INE, no. 6/2012, 2013, www.ine.es.

percent of the population.³ In Greece, the immigrant population has now reached approximately 800,000 (excluding immigrants of ethnic Greek descent that entered the country under special preferential conditions), accounting for 7.5 percent of the population.

The share of intra-EU and non-EU immigration varies considerably among the three countries. In Greece, 60 percent of all migrants come from one neighbouring non-EU country, Albania. Bulgarians and Romanians come in at a distant second and third place (Albanians comprise approximately 500,000; Bulgarians and Romanians comprise approximately 40,000 each). Italy and Spain by contrast, are characterised by the diversity of nationality groups within their immigrant population. In these two countries, Romanian citizens have become, since 2010, the largest nationality group with approximately 800,000 in Spain (accounting for 12 percent of the immigrant population) and 900,000 in Italy (accounting for 20 percent of the immigrant population). The second largest ethnic group in Spain and third largest in Italy are Moroccans (800,000 in Spain and 500,000 in Italy, respectively). Other large groups in Italy include Albanians (approximately 500,000), Ukrainians and Chinese (approximately 300,000). In Spain, there is a predominance of Latin American nationalities, notably Ecuadorans (approximately 500,000) and Colombians (approximately 400,000). It also hosts British and German citizens (400,000 and 250,000, respectively). It is worth noting that in both Italy and Spain, the five largest groups mentioned above make up about 50 percent of the immigrant population.⁴

MIGRATION AND SOUTHERN EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS

Italy, Spain and Greece have important similarities and notable differences with regard to the integration of migrants into the labour market. Italy is a G8 economy and therefore much larger and more economically developed than the other two. Spain is the world's 12th largest economy. Greece is a relatively small economy with a structural trade deficit and a large public sector that accounts for about half of its GDP.

Nonetheless, the three countries share common features: their economies have structural imbalances, high unemployment rates among their own nationals – even in periods of high economic growth and large informal sectors. These features have attracted immigrants during the past two decades and have enabled both legal and undocumented immigrants to stay despite the existence of immigration controls and enforcement policies.

During the 1990s and 2000s, Greek, Italian and Spanish labour markets showed typical Southern European characteristics: relatively high levels of unemployed nationals (between 8 and 10 percent) coexisting with large numbers of economically active immigrants. The labour market in these three countries had high levels of segmentation with special employment niches occupied by migrant workers. The native population's living standards had increased in recent decades, and participation in tertiary and higher education was widespread. Young Greeks, Italians and Spaniards thus preferred to wait for employment that conformed to their skills (whilst financially supported by their families), rather than to take up what they considered to be low-prestige, low-skilled and low-paying jobs.

Several economic factors have reinforced the above dynamics: a construction boom, especially in Greece and Spain, largely financed through public projects and EU subsidies; a rise in private loans to families encouraging home ownership; the need for affordable care for the elderly and young children in all three countries; the abandonment of agricultural work by natives and the development in some areas of export-oriented labour intensive cultivation; the outsourcing of small repair work and other chores such as gardening and home care to the new and now affordable migrant labour force; the existence of family owned businesses in need of a flexible and informal labour force to work alongside family members, especially in traditional sectors where these firms could not afford local workers.

³ Caritas Dossier Statistico, 22nd edition, 2012, Rome.

⁴ A. Triandafyllidou, ed., *Addressing Cultural, Ethnic & Religious Diversity Challenges in Europe: A comparative overview of 15 European countries*, ACCEPT PLURALISM Project Report, 2012, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/19254>.

The onset of the crisis

The acute economic crisis affecting the three countries over the past few years has visibly altered the situation, particularly in Greece and Spain. This has led to significant budget cuts in welfare provisions, health and education. Unemployment has risen to spectacular heights, reaching nearly 25 percent among natives and exceeding 35 percent among immigrants in 2012. This stands in marked contrast to previous years, when the immigrant population enjoyed, up to 2008, nearly full unemployment. The crisis has hit immigrants especially hard, with heavy job losses in the rapidly shrinking construction sector compounded by natives returning to jobs that they had previously abandoned (such as low skill jobs in manufacturing, care work tourism and transport). Immigrants, who lack support networks and typically have lower qualifications than natives, have been less able to fend off the impacts of the crisis. According to the Spanish Poll on Living Conditions for 2013, 43.5 percent of immigrant families face the risk of poverty.⁵

As a consequence of the economic crisis, many immigrants have chosen to leave their host countries. The Spanish National Institute of Statistics cites that approximately 1.2 million immigrants have left the country since 2008. Yet, these have been outnumbered by new arrivals that have entered primarily through family reunification channels.⁶ Similarly in Greece, permits to stay declined by 150,000 between December 2010 and December 2012.⁷ It is unclear whether these migrants have left Greece or have remained in the country with an undocumented status. Albanian government sources estimate the number of returning Albanians as 15 to 20 percent of the Albanian population residing in Greece (approximately 75,000 people).⁸

Spain has experimented with a programme that encourages migrants to return to their countries of origin, albeit with little success. Under this scheme, migrants had the option to take their accumulated welfare payments in cash provided they did not return to Spain for at least five years. However, migrants did not consider this a particularly good option as the crisis had also hit their countries of origin. Furthermore, even long-settled migrants had accumulated few years of formal employment welfare benefits, which meant that the cash payments that they would take home were rather meagre. The Spanish programme was thus not particularly attractive and only a few thousand people registered to return to their countries of origin.

Like Spain, Greece has recently implemented programmes of voluntary assisted return managed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Unlike the Spanish programme, the Greek programme only covers aliens staying illegally. Data shows that approximately 5,000 Pakistani citizens and 4,000 Afghani citizens currently participate in this programme, which oversees their transfer to their country of origin and provides a small payment of €300 to cover reintegration expenses.⁹

Italy faces a less dire situation, even considering the fact that the recession has drastically hit two important sectors of migrant employment – construction and manufacturing. The immigrant unemployment rate rose from 8.5 percent in 2008 to 12.1 percent in 2011, compared to eight percent for Italians. The risk of poverty increased at the same time, to the point where 42.2 percent of foreign families live below the poverty threshold.¹⁰ However, between 2007 and 2011 the number of immigrants in the Italian employment market increased as a percentage, from 6.5 percent to 10 percent, and as an absolute value by over 500,000

5 Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2013, http://www.ine.es/ss/Satellite?L=es_ES&c=INEPublicacion_C&cid=1259924856416&p=1254735110672&pagename=ProductosYServicios%2FPYSLayout¶m1=PYSDetalleGratuitas.

6 C. Gonzalez Enriquez, 'Spain' in A. Triandafyllidou and R. Gropas, eds., (forthcoming).

7 Data obtained upon request by the Ministry of Interior, database on stay permits for third country nationals.

8 A. Triandafyllidou, 'Greece,' Report prepared for the OECD Network of International Migration Experts, 2012.

9 Data provided by the IOM Greece, upon request, see also A. Dimitriadi, *Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece, IRMA project report*, June 2013; K. Yousef, *The vicious circle of irregular migration from Pakistan to Greece and back to Pakistan, IRMA project report*, June 2013, <http://irma.eliamep.gr/publications/background-reports/>.

10 Fondazione Leone Moressa, *Rapporto Annuale Sull'Economia dell'Immigrazione*. Edizione 2011, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011).

persons (excluding the sectors not considered by the national statistical service such as live-in care workers and seasonal labourers).¹¹ The resilience shown by the domestic and care sectors means that immigrant women in particular have defended themselves effectively against the effects of the recession, and that male involvement in domestic and care work has increased. Italy has yet to undertake programmes that encourage or assist migrants to return to their countries of origin.

What next?

While the economic prospects for Spain, Greece and Italy are gloomy, these countries are caught in a 'Catch-22' situation: their welfare payments and tax revenues are shrinking as unemployment rises. Their unemployment and family allowance payments are rising (despite the cuts) and an increasing number of both natives and immigrants are at risk of poverty. The question of migration thus becomes particularly difficult to address as the current policy of giving short-term stay permits leads to the de-legalisation of a number of long settled migrant families with children born in these countries. This affects the integration of immigrants into each country's social fabric. In Italy, for instance, the number of migrants under 18 years of age exceeds one million. Out of a migrant population of five million, this accounts for 8.5 percent of the school population. In Greek schools, 10 percent of students have immigrant backgrounds (whether born in Greece or abroad).¹² The harsh measures taken to deal with austerity have contributed to a fading economic and social solidarity with immigrants, a rise in xenophobia, racism and even racist violence. The only policy response to this difficult situation is to keep mainstreaming all services to migrants as normal welfare and unemployment services, and to emphasise that social solidarity is based on residence and tax compliance rather than on citizenship. Indeed, labour laws and welfare systems denote that socio-economic rights are based on residence and employment status rather than on ethnic origin. The state should also assist NGOs and migrant associations in providing relief and short-term assistance to families facing extreme hardship. For instance, measures such as subsidised school lunches launched in Greece last winter, helped families cope with the crisis and complemented assistance provided by NGOs.

Targeted programmes of re-training should address the labour market sectors particularly hit by the crisis, such as construction or manufacturing. Such programmes should not target specific populations, but rather specific categories of workers. Given the explosive situation in Spain and Greece in particular, it is important that socio-economic hardship does not lead to ethnic tensions.

MANAGING IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Regularisation programmes as a migration management policy

Despite facing very similar challenges with regard to migration flows, the three Southern European countries have not joined forces to tackle the problem. They have, however, adopted similar approaches based on regularisation programmes and a securitisation of migration. For a good part of the 1990s and 2000s, the three countries adopted regularisation programmes as their main policy for admitting immigrants. In other words, immigrants initially arrived without immigration papers – either because they did not need a tourist

¹¹ M. Ambrosini, 'Italy' in A. Triandafyllidou and R. Gropas, eds., (forthcoming).

¹² M. Ambrosini, 2011, op. cit; Caritas Dossier Statistico 2012.

visa because they entered with a tourist visa (not always genuine) or because they entered illegally. Once in the country, they found accommodation and employment easily. Only later would their status go on to become legal through regularisation programmes.

The survival and even the settlement of both legal and irregular immigrants has been directly or indirectly helped by the existence of immigrant and native networks (including NGOs) that have supported immigrant workers and their families. These networks have been crucial in helping immigrants to obtain accommodation, employment and access to basic social and economic services such as registering their children at school, opening a bank account, obtaining a business license, getting a mortgage or getting a phone line. In Italy and Spain, trade unions have played a special part in quickly developing immigration branches and have taken in immigrant workers, regardless of their status. In Greece, such informal integration work has been done by immigrant associations or NGOs rather than mainstream trade unions or political parties.

Most of the immigrants who have legal status today in Greece, Italy and Spain have been at some point in the past undocumented. After an initial undocumented period, these immigrants acquired legal residence papers through one of the large amnesty programmes implemented in each of these countries. Italy implemented a series of regularisation programmes in 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006 and a special programme for domestic workers in 2009 for a total of over three million migrants – the largest programme being that of 2002 with 700,000 applicants.¹³

Greece implemented regularisation programmes in 1998, 2001 and 2005 with a total of more than 900,000 applicants. However, no new regularisation programme has been implemented since 2005. Only in 2011 did new legislation allow migrants who can prove ties with and ten years in residence in Greece (both legal and illegal) to apply for a stay permit for exceptional/humanitarian reasons. In Spain, seven extraordinary regularisations in the last 25 years have taken place that legalised more than one million people. In addition, a large (and thus far unknown) number of people has acquired legal a status through the routine process of '*arraigo*'. This process requires demonstrating that one has put down roots in the country, such as proving that one has lived in Spain for more than three years, has not committed a serious crime and has ties such as family, employment and house rental.

The abandonment of regularisation programmes as an immigration management policy was also dictated by the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, adopted by EU member states on 24 September 2008.¹⁴ While the Pact is neither a binding nor legal document, it has shaped the direction of the development of EU policy on asylum and migration. Strongly promoted by then president of France, Nicholas Sarkozy, the Pact provided a blueprint for the development of the Stockholm programme, which was adopted on 4 May 2010 and determined EU migration and asylum policy for 2010-2014.¹⁵

Following the adoption of the Pact, the three countries gradually developed a migration management policy to replace their original regularisation methods. Italy adopted the annual quota system, even though quotas were often used as mini-regularisation programmes and largely served migrants already in the country. Spain adopted the 'contingente' system, similar to the quota system, but in the early 2000s it opened up specific labour market sectors with a shortage of labour force to immigrant workers without a need for a market test.

13 M. Ambrosini, 'Italy,' in A. Triandafyllidou and R. Gropas, eds., (forthcoming).

14 European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, 24 September 2008, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/jl0038_en.htm.

15 http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/human_rights/fundamental_rights_within_european_union/jl0034_en.htm.

Since 2009, the dramatic rise of domestic unemployment has severely affected the sectors that require no prior authorisation to employ foreign workers. Greece has adopted an 'invitation' system, also very similar to the Italy's quotas system. This has proved effective only in regulating seasonal migration from neighbouring countries. In all other instances, immigrants have continued to arrive in Greece without legal documents and wait for a regularisation opportunity that has yet to arrive in the post-2005 period.

Pressing on southern Europe's borders and the securitisation of migration

Their geographical position along the Mediterranean borders of the EU means that Italy, Spain and Greece are disproportionately affected by irregular crossings at their land and sea borders compared to other major EU immigrant destinations. As a result, in the 1990s irregular frontier crossing was an important source of migration for all three countries. Spain was mainly affected by irregular entries through the Gibraltar strait, while Italy and Greece experienced massive inflows of Albanian citizens through the Otranto strait and the Epirus mountains, respectively. All three countries intensified their border controls in these 'hot' areas since the late 1990s and actively pursued the cooperation of the neighbouring source countries, albeit with varied results.

While Spain engaged in a proactive, comprehensive strategy that included intensified border controls over the Gibraltar straits and Canary islands, it also enlisted the cooperation of Morocco in managing irregular migration and signed readmission agreements with Morocco and several west African countries. This proactive 'fencing' and 'gatekeeping' strategy yielded good results. Gibraltar crossings came nearly to a halt and each year the apprehension of irregular migrants in the Canary Islands continues to lower significantly. Apprehensions at Spanish sea borders in 2010 were roughly at the same level as in 1999 (the year before the dramatic increase in inflows started), and 99 percent down from the 32,000 apprehensions registered in the crisis year of 2006.¹⁶ Yet, the success of these policies in a wider Mediterranean context remains to be determined as irregular migration flows and smuggling routes are usually not eliminated, but rather redirected.

During the 2000s, the main entry channel to Italy was the crossing from Tunisia and Libya to Sicily and Lampedusa. Sea patrols near Sicily, Lampedusa and the small island of Linosa were less effective because they detected boats carrying migrants too close to shore and had to bring them to harbour.

In 2003, Italy started to cooperate with Libya amid mounting concerns about the lawfulness of the Italian government's readmission practices. Readmissions to Libya took place in total neglect of the principle of non-refoulement, which forbids the return of a victim of persecution or torture to their persecutor, and without offering asylum to irregular migrants in need of protection should they arrive to Italy. Despite the harsh tactics of the Italian government, the path from Libya to Italy remained a preferred migrant smuggling route from sub-Saharan Africa to Italy and Europe until 2009. Nevertheless, the second phase of cooperation with Libya (which began in 2008) proved particularly effective, with unlawful border crossings from Libya to Lampedusa and Sicily between early 2009 and January 2011 nearly coming to a complete stop (less than a thousand apprehensions took place in 2010, compared to 36,000 in 2008). This new policy seriously compromised Italy's obligations with regard to asylum and was severely criticised by the UNHCR, which interrupted its operation on Italian soil during that period. Still, the Italian government considered it a success.¹⁷ In February 2012, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Italy for its 'push back' operations in 2009 in its decision in *Hirsi et al. vs Italy*.¹⁸

16 A. Triandafyllidou, 'Externalisation of EU Migration and Asylum Policies to the Islands. A Comparative Analysis between the Canary Islands, Malta, Lampedusa and the Aegean Islands,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40/2 (forthcoming, Spring 2014).

17 Ibid.

18 *Hirsi Jamaa v. Italy*, App. No. 27765/09 (Eur. Ct. H.R. Feb. 23, 2012).

In recent years, Greek-Turkish land and sea borders have been the main entry points for irregular migrants and asylum seekers from Asian and African countries. The period between 2007 and 2009 registered approximately 50,000 migrants per year. The largest nationality groups were Afghans, Iraqi Kurds, Somalis, Palestinians and Egyptians. The extensive length of the Greek islands' coastline and the proximity to Turkey have made policing extremely difficult. The points of approach from Turkey into Greece shift constantly. Arrivals are registered at almost any place along the eastern coast of Greece and most of the islands on the Eastern Aegean.

Between 2010 and 2012, Greece increased its enforcement efforts and sought the assistance of FRONTEX (the EU's agency for border management coordination) in managing irregular migration and asylum pressures on the Greek-Turkish borders. The effects of this increased effort did not become apparent until 2012, which registered a significant drop in the number of arrivals. In response to pressures from the EU for better border control,¹⁹ but also under the pressure of continuous arrivals of irregular migrants, Greece actively pursued a combination of policies at the border. It tightened border controls through Operation Shield ('Aspida') transferring 1,800 border guards in the region of Evros; it concluded the building of a border fence across the 12.5 km stretch used as the main entry point; and it increased passport controls and upgraded technologically the harbours of Patra and Igoumenitsa (the main exit points to Italy). It also pursued an aggressive internal policy of apprehension and detention. Daily police patrols known as 'sweeps' (operation 'Xenios Zeus') attempt to identify irregular migrants that are then detained for potential deportation.

While these policies reduced the arrivals from the Greek-Turkish land border, they transferred the problem to the sea borders at the Greek islands in the Aegean, leading to a new rise in apprehensions in 2012. Simultaneously, the internal 'sweeps' did not yield the expected outcome, since of the 65,767 people apprehended between August and December 2012 only 4,145 lacked legal documentation.²⁰

Irregular migration and asylum seeking pressures at southern Europe's southern borders further intensified after what has been since known as the 'Arab Spring'. Protests began in Tunisia and Algeria in December 2010, followed by protests in Lebanon, Yemen, Egypt, Syria and Morocco in early 2011. The geopolitical changes brought on by the Arab Spring led to the emergence of new 'mixed' migration flows generated by the regional crises. Economic migrants from Asian countries residing in the Maghreb and in the Gulf states, particularly Libya, became forced migrants and/or asylum seekers seeking refuge in neighbouring countries and in Europe. These mixed migration flows of forced migrants, asylum seekers and economic migrants gave rise to two issues: the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of institutional responses and mechanisms of border control already in place and the implications in terms of human rights and international law. Italy issued temporary stay permits to the 25,000 Tunisians in Lampedusa between January and April 2011 and treated the Sub-Saharan Africans fleeing Libya in subsequent months as asylum seekers. Nonetheless, Italy did not bear the brunt of the crisis as it received approximately 70,000 people – a far cry from the 700,000 Libyans that crossed to Egypt and Tunisia to seek temporary protection during the war.

While the situation in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya remains politically volatile, outflows of immigrants and asylum seekers have reduced to a trickle. Still, social and political unrest has continued. Syria has become the next focal point of the Arab Spring crisis, with one than one million Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon and Turkey, and an increasing number migrating to Greece. The slightly more remote geographical location of this crisis has thus far limited its impact on irregular border crossings and asylum seeking that would directly Southern Europe.

19 Exemplified by a series of publications by Frontex and several European NGOs such as Pro Asyl and Human Rights Watch expressing serious concerns about the inhuman treatment of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in detention at the Greek-Turkish sea and land borders, debates in the European Parliament concerning the plight of asylum seekers in Greece and the temporary interruption of returns of asylum seekers to Greece under Dublin II regulation by several countries. See A. Triandafyllidou and A. Dimitriadi, Η διαχείριση του ασύλου στην Ευρώπη. Η αναθεώρηση του Δουβλίνου II και η περίπτωση της Ελλάδας [The management of asylum in Europe. The reform of Dublin II and the case of Greece], Public Law Applications (Εφαρμογές Δημόσιου Δικαίου), vol. 24, issue 1/2011, 22-26.

20 Data from the Greek police, 1 January 2013 <http://www.skai.gr/news/greece/article/220610/pano-apo-4100-allodapoi-ehoun-sullifthei-stin-epiheirisi-xenios-zeus/>; Human Rights Watch, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/greece0613_ForUpload.pdf

What next?

While the abandonment of regularisation programmes and increased enforcement efforts at the Southern European borders seem to be working (for example, irregular migration inflows at the EU's Mediterranean borders have fallen under control), the situation continues to be problematic.

Managing irregular migration remains difficult. Irregular migrants, especially from Asian and African countries continue to arrive in Greece, making the transit via Turkey the most travelled irregular border crossing corridor in Europe. Italy hosted an estimated 700,000 irregular migrants in 2008,²¹ but this number has decreased after the 2009 special regularisation programme. Spain's '*arraigo*' system has largely shielded it from irregular migration.

Nonetheless, all three countries currently face the de-legalisation of their long-term settled migrant populations, who are losing their stay permits because of extended periods of unemployment. The problem is particularly acute in Greece, where the stay permit renewal system does not allow for any period of unemployment. Long-term permits are only issued after 10 years of continuous legal residence.

The financial crisis also has a negative impact on the management of asylum. The most acute example is Greece, which has struggled to implement a new asylum system for over two years. Despite the availability of European funds, the new system for processing asylum applications only began to operate in late June 2013 – and to date only in Athens.

A continuous tacit regularisation system such as '*arraigo*', which considers the overall integration of the migrant in the host society, needs to be put in place in all three countries. This has two advantages. On one hand, it avoids large scale and much advertised regularisation programmes. On the other hand, it ensures that migrants (and their families) who have lived and worked in these countries would not fall into an irregular status as a result of their economic situation. Since returning to the country of origin is not always an option, allowing the creation of an undocumented migrant labour force in Southern Europe is not a wise policy option.

Data suggest that Greece did not renew 150,000 permits between 2009 and 2012. Italy did not renew some 200,000 permits between 2010 and 2012. Some 1.2 million immigrants left Spain between 2008 and 2012, but they were outnumbered by new arrivals through the family reunification channel. It is worth noting that the '*arraigo*' system in Spain has brought the irregular population to an all-time low of approximately three percent among the total immigrant population.²²

This on-going tacit regularisation provision was introduced in Greece in 2011, albeit only for people who have lived in the country for 10 years or more and who have held and lost their legal status. So far 1,150 people have received stay permits for exceptional reasons under this new provision.

Irregular migrants are unlikely to disappear and they can become easy targets for unscrupulous employers and migrant smugglers, especially at times of economic crisis. It is important to register and protect these vulnerable populations. Legalising and registering them allows for better policy planning in all domains (such as employment, health and education), and at the same times safeguards the rights of citizens and legal migrants.

21 F. Fasani, 'The quest for la dolce vita? Undocumented Migration in Italy,' in *Irregular Migration in Europe. Myths and Realities*, ed. A. Triandafyllidou, 2010, 167-185.

22 R. Gropas and A. Triandafyllidou, A., eds., (forthcoming), *Caritas Dossier Statistico*, 22nd edition, Rome, 2012.

PUBLIC OPINION

While public opinion on migration has never been particularly positive, it has recently soured. Irregular migration has moved to the forefront of the media agenda and has attracted negative attention in public discourse.

In Greece, the spectacular rise in the far right's electoral force has been particularly disconcerting. The past five years has seen two far right parties emerge as influential political actors. The People's Orthodox Rally (LAOS) is an extreme right-wing formation that won 5.6 percent of the vote in the 2009 national elections and 7.1 percent of the vote in the European Parliament elections. LAOS participated in the provisional coalition government that formed to deal with the crisis in November 2011, which legitimised its position in the Greek political system. In the 2012 elections, the party lost most voters who cast ballots for the far more extremist Golden Dawn, a nationalist far-right party whose members allegedly carry out hate crimes against immigrants, political opponents and ethnic minorities. Golden Dawn, with a clear racist and neo-Nazi political position, operates in troubled urban areas and offers 'security' to native residents, which involves attacking and terrifying immigrants and refugees. Golden Dawn gained one seat in the Athens municipal council (with 5.3 percent of the local vote) in November 2010. It gathered nearly 7 percent of the national vote in June 2012, allowing for 21 of its candidates to enter Parliament for the first time. Both parties have made migration a priority issue and their electoral agenda, and both owe their rise largely to their anti-immigrant and overtly racist discourse. Since 2009, extremist right-wing social and political actors have increased their use of hate speech, and have done so without repercussions. A recent unofficial report initiated by the UNHCR in Greece registered some 63 self-reported incidents of racist violent attacks –18 of which identified police officers as perpetrators. Recent reports by journalists suggest a notable (albeit tacit) police support for Golden Dawn. The UNHCR and a number of other NGOs have started a campaign to register racist attacks in Greece with the aim of raising the awareness of authorities.²³

In Italy, criminality and violent crimes have dominated migration-related news for a good part of the 2000s, culminating with the murder of a woman in Rome by a Romanian immigrant during an attempted sexual attack. The incident provoked a public outcry and led to demands for special laws for the protection of the security of citizens and the expulsion of 'illegals'. A comparative analysis of various surveys in Europe suggested that Italy held the greatest concerns about immigration, primarily with security.²⁴

In 2011, irregular migration again made headlines with the arrival of a large number of North Africa asylum seekers. Immigration took up six percent of Italian television news broadcasts, compared with the European average of two percent. Whilst European television news broadcasts as a whole do not handle migration in anxiogenic terms—the European average of anxiogenic news is 3.2 percent of all news about immigration—in Italy news broadcasts have an 'alarmist' content in 14 percent of all migration related news reports.²⁵

These racist and xenophobic attitudes have occasionally boiled over into physical violence. Examples include the mob violence against Roma gypsies in Naples in May 2008, the attacks on seasonal migrant workers in the small town of Rosarno in January 2010 and the attack on Bengali migrants in a bar in Rome in March 2010.²⁶

23 <http://www.unhcr.gr/1againstracism/category/racist-violence-recording-network/>.

24 G. Valtolina, 'I cittadini europei e l'immigrazione: gli italiani sono i più preoccupati [European citizens and immigrations: Italians are the most worried]', *Libertàcivili* 6 (November-December 2010): 92–102.

25 G. Valtolina, 'Gli italiani e l'immigrazione [The Italians and immigration]'. In: FONDAZIONE ISMU, *Diciassettesimo rapporto sulle migrazioni 2011*, (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2012), 155–168.

26 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/03/20/everyday-intolerance-0>.

The political debate in Spain has also focused on irregular migrants, their rights and regularisation programmes. Both the Socialist party and the Partido Popular (which have alternated in leading the government since 1998) have promoted large regularisation programmes only to later undertake restrictive measures to avoid increases in irregular arrivals. The debate on the free access of irregular migrants to public health services attracted particular attention in 2012 when the ruling Partido Popular announced the withdrawal of this benefit and restricted free access to maternity, paediatric and urgent care services. The measure dominated public debate on immigration for months and provoked protests amongst immigrants associations, doctor organisations, leftist parties and some autonomous governments. The government eventually implemented the measure.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Southern Europe has developed a reactive rather than proactive framework for migration management. There is a general discrepancy between public rhetoric against illegal immigrants and repeated regularisation programmes. This discrepancy is explained by the conflicting realities that political elites face. On the one hand, political elites must respond to public opinion and electorates unprepared for immigration influxes and fearful of irregular immigrants. On the other hand, politicians face the reality of an economy that has a general culture tolerant of informal employment and where SMEs, family businesses and families employ illegal migrants (or informally employ legal migrants). These tensions have affected the way that migration policies have developed and the ways in which migrants have integrated in the labour market and within the social fabric of Southern European societies.

Border controls and pressures from asylum seekers have attracted media attention and have prompted increased policy efforts in recent years. Nonetheless, external factors, including global socio-economic disparities between the global North and the global South, as well as the recent political instability in North Africa and the Middle East, have made the management of irregular migration flows particularly challenging.

Increasing the securitisation of the external borders must go hand in hand with a pragmatic solution for the illegal migrants who live in these countries. Registering and legalising these migrants reinforces socio-economic stability. Keeping illegal migrants in the country without legalising their status creates dangerous illegitimate competition in the labour market and threatens the socio-economic rights of the native population and of legal migrants. Implementing expulsion is also a costly alternative and, as the analysis of the past experience of Spain, Italy and Greece shows, it cannot be effective as a stand-alone measure. Expulsions are an effective means for controlling irregular migration for migrants from neighbouring countries that have readmission agreements (such as Albania in the case of Italy or Greece, or Morocco in the case of Spain). They also work well when implemented towards more distant countries that have readmission agreements (such as West African countries for Spain, or Pakistan for Greece).²⁸ Forced or 'voluntary' repatriation is an important complement to migration control policies, but it cannot be the main or only measure, especially when it comes to populations who have lived in a country for a number of years. ■

27 The government declared that autonomous governments who wanted to continue offering free access to all medical services to irregular migrants could do so. Most (but not all) regions governed by the Popular Party restricted the offer of medical services to this group.

28 There is unfortunately no comprehensive study as yet of the cost of expulsions of irregular migrants in general, and particularly of those coming from Asian and African countries. Available data go back to 2004, when the repatriation of a Chinese citizen from Spain costed 6,750 euro, of an Ecuadorian 3,834 euro, and of a Senegalese 2,000 euro. C. Gonzalez Enriquez, 'Spain: Irregularity as a Rule,' in *Irregular Migration in Europe. Myths and Realities*, ed. A. Triandafyllidou (2010), 262.