



Asia Unit
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Asian Migrants in Greece
Origins, Status and Prospects

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Key Findings

- Europe is one of the principal destinations for migrants worldwide and Greece could not have remained out of the fray. Over the last decade or so, Asia has emerged as an increasingly dynamic source of migration, primarily because of its demographic size but also for a host of other reasons (e.g. low levels of socio-economic development in labour-exporting countries, hostilities and natural disasters triggering humanitarian crises, environmental degradation, political persecutions, etc.). Among the pull-factors for Asian migrants in Greece are the comparative wealth and stability in Europe, and the specific macroeconomic characteristics of South European countries, but above all the geographical position of Greece as a gateway to Europe. This last parameter explains to a large extent **the role of Greece as a ‘stopover junction’ for many Asian migrants on their way to Europe**. At the same time, one should not miss the trend for emerging Asian communities in Greece to further facilitate the arrival of other migrants from their respective countries.

- **In travelling to Greece, most Asian migrants use land routes or a combination of land and sea routes** (particularly those coming from South-Central Asia stretching from Iran to Bangladesh), whereas East Asians seem to arrive in Europe by air and then in Greece via other European countries. One should also distinguish between ‘individual’ and ‘organised’ travel, which would explain the widely varying evidence of travel cost. It appears that the overall travel cost depends on distance, the duration of the trip, job prospects of the migrants, charge modalities, etc. As for entry into Greece, there are **serious concerns over the capacity and political will of Greek authorities to handle the flows of Asian migrants properly and on the basis of a coherent long-term strategy**.

- Asian communities in Greece have been taking shape over the last three decades, since the first Pakistanis and Filipinos appeared in the 1970s, to be followed by Indians, Chinese, Bangladeshis, etc. The spurious regularisation campaigns held in Greece in 1997 and 2001 left large numbers of Asian migrants in a state of uncertainty, which is still very much the case today. Since 2003, the influx of Asians has risen sharply, whereas some new communities (e.g. Afghans) have started emerging. It is estimated that **at present the total number of Asians in Greece amounts to no less than 130,000**.

- **In their large majority, Asian migrants are low-qualified and low-cost workers** in various sectors of the Greek economy: agriculture, construction, industry, trade and services. Very few Asian workers enjoy an insurance coverage and even then they are only partly insured. Pakistanis and Indians seem to be the most active or regular remittance-senders back to their countries of origin. However, it should be noted that there are many informal channels of capital transfer which are not easy to record.

- As regards the social profile of Asians in Greece, the majority are men with **very low levels of family reunification** which is a cause for concern. In a number of occasions, there

appear to be insurmountable impediments for family reunification, arguably due to administrative and political reasons. The educational level of Asians is by and large lower than the average for the total of migrants in Greece. **Learning the Greek language proves to be one of the biggest challenges for Asians** in their efforts to integrate into Greece society. Many Asian migrants suffer from serious health problems, with tuberculosis and sexual diseases displaying a worryingly high rate of occurrence.

- The Asian migrants arriving or residing in Greece tend to come from specific regions in their countries of origin, thus bringing in **specific social and cultural features, which remain largely unknown in Greece**. No doubt, languages are a factor to be reckoned with and in many cases they appear to facilitate closer relations between certain Asian communities. Furthermore, Asians belong to various religions, about which Greek society is not sufficiently informed. Being highly ‘visible’ in physical and cultural terms, Asians are at a particularly disadvantageous position in Greece and their social integration is a truly daunting task. As regards the increasing mistrust for Muslims, including those coming from Asia, the Greek state has yet to live up to certain commitments, such as the construction of a mosque in Athens, whereas no attention seems to have been paid to differences among Muslims themselves (e.g. between Sunni and Shia). Overall, **Asian migrants remain aliens to Greek society**, among numerous grievances about the attitude of Greek public authorities, notably of the police. As a result, at this stage the social integration prospects of Asian migrants in Greece appear to be extremely limited.

- **The highest possible levels of protection are provided to Asian migrants by their own communities**. The spectrum of activities undertaken includes the creation of kindergartens and schools for Asian children, cultural shows, the provision of practical advice on daily matters, etc. While the flow of information to Asians certainly could be better structured and more useful, one should stress the role of newspapers and radio talks in the mother tongues of some of their communities.

- The main issues raised by Asian migrants in Greece relate to the legal framework and its enforcement (e.g. as regards regularisation and family reunification), the feeling of being exploited by Greek employers (e.g. the lack of social insurance coverage), difficulties in learning the Greek language, the attitude of the Greek police, etc. Unless there is a tangible improvement in these areas over the next years, it appears that most Asians desire to either return to their countries of origin in due course or eventually emigrate to other European countries, if not other continents. **In the current context of ‘ghettoisation’, very few Asians have meaningful and long-term professional or family incentives to pursue their integration into Greek society**. Of course, this is not to say that the number of Asian migrants in Greece is likely to diminish in the long run. Their number is expected to continue to rise, even if under a Damocleus’ sword of uncertainty and with a host of remaining obstacles on the road to their adaptation to the social and economic structures of Greece.

1.2. Key Recommendations

Clearly, many of the recommendations set out here do not refer exclusively to Asian migrants, but to all the migrants in Greece. As regards **general matters pertaining to migration to Greece**, relevant authorities could well consider the following course of action:

- Improving procedures envisaged for the regularisation of migrants, through the reduction of the bureaucratic burden, but also through the recruitment of staff properly trained to deal

with migrants (e.g. on the basis of the revenue raised through regularisation taxes paid by migrants themselves). While the new Bill that is currently being finalised by the Ministry of the Interior does envisage some improvements compared to Act 3386/2005 on migrant regularisation, the biggest challenge of all remains the enforcement of relevant dispositions in practice.

- Examining the expediency of assigning the ‘migration portfolio’ exclusively to one of the Greek Deputy Ministers of the Interior. Furthermore, instead of creating a large National Commission (as the one envisaged in the new Bill), setting up a small and efficient Consultative Panel which will bring together independent and widely accepted personalities from the entire spectrum of social partners, including migrant communities. The principal mission of this panel could be the production of a report and a comprehensive list of recommendations for the social integration of Asian migrants.
- Making the best of opportunities under the new EU Framework Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows for the period 2007-2013, implemented through four target-specific funds: the External Frontiers Fund, the European Refugee Fund, the European Return Fund and the European Integration Fund. One may also consider the creation of a specialised Task Force for the provision of technical assistance to all the authorities and NGOs working on migration in Greece.
- Improving the performance of Greece vis-à-vis asylum-seekers, by considerably raising the levels of due acknowledgement and processing of their applications.

As regards specific issues pertaining to Asian migrants in Greece, one could consider:

- Negotiating bilateral agreements between Greece and Asian labour-export countries on the legal occupation of workers for a set period of time in areas, which are not covered by the local labour force.
- Examining possible legal modalities for bilateral agreements between Greece and the countries of origin of Asian migrants on guaranteeing their accumulated social benefits, so that they acquire a meaningful incentive to integrate into Greek health and pension programmes.
- Taking additional steps, both at central and local level, towards the facilitation of Greek language courses for Asian migrants. For instance, providing economic incentives to local authorities that host relevant educational activities.
- Substantially improving the mechanisms for information provision to Asian migrants in their mother tongues by public authorities and state mass media.
- Setting up separate and properly staffed services (Desks) in the Ministry of the Interior for all the sizeable Asian communities in Greece.
- Carrying out training programmes for Greek policemen and port authority officials in handling captured Asian migrants as well as the systematic use of interpreters, medical staff and social workers.

- Creating more openings for teaching staff in higher educational institutions on the history and culture of the countries of origin of Asian migrants in Greece.
- An initiative promoted by the Greek government at EU level, so that the increasing flows of Asian migrants (to which Greece is particularly exposed) are duly highlighted. The issue could be raised at the Council for General Affairs as well as at the Council of Ministers of the Interior and Justice. Another option would be the creation of an EU-wide Working Group on Migration from Asia to Europe.

Given Greece's EU membership, it goes without saying that most national initiatives will have to be harmonised with broader EU policies (e.g. under the Schengen convention). **It would therefore be beneficial for the EU member states to engage in:**

- The development of a long-term strategy aimed at addressing the push-factors for migration from Asia. The somewhat generic political discussion on illegal migration held during the European Council in Finland in December 2006 is a good starting point which will, however, have to be followed up on.
- The development of closer linkages between the Framework Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows for the period 2007-2013 and push-factors for migration in Asia, such as economic inequality. Mere border management and the provision of short-term incentives for the return of migrants to their countries of origin do not constitute a sustainable long-term EU policy.

8. ANNEXES

Annex 8.1.: World population and the share of Asia

Table 8.1.1.
World population and increase in real figures by major regions, 1990-2005
(in 000)

Region	1990	1995	2000	2005	Increase 1990-2005
Worldwide scale	5,279,521	5,692,354	6,085,573	6,464,747	1,185,226
Sub-Saharan Africa	491,187	562,774	637,414	715,039	223,852
East Africa	197,630	224,430	255,681	287,707	90,077
Central Africa	72,913	85,589	96,040	109,641	36,728
South Africa	42,161	47,806	52,069	54,055	11,894
West Africa	178 483	204 949	233 624	263 636	85,153
Mideast – Mediterranean	297,996	332,451	368,126	405,218	72,719
North Africa	144,498	159,895	175,051	190,895	46,397
West Asia	153,498	172,556	193,075	214,323	60,825
Asia*	3,015,119	3,257,767	3,482,724	3,691,091	675,972
East Asia	1,349,695	1,419,717	1,479,233	1,524,380	174,685
Southeast Asia	439,846	481,081	518,867	555,815	115,969
South-central Asia	1,225,578	1,356,969	1,484,624	1,610,896	385,318
Europe	721,390	727,885	728,463	728,389	6,999
South-central America	443,747	483,615	522,929	561,346	117,599
North America	283,361	299,028	314,968	330,608	47,247
Oceania	26,721	28,834	30,949	33,056	6,335

Source: United Nations (2005), 'Population, Resources, Environment and Development'

* Without counting West Asia, which is hereby included in the wider Mideast-Mediterranean region.

Table 8.1.2.
Density of world population by major source of migration*, 1990-2005

Region	1990	1995	2000	2005
Worldwide scale	39	42	45	48
Sub-Saharan Africa	22	25	28	31
East Africa	31	35	40	45
Central Africa	11	13	15	17
South Africa	16	18	19	20
West Africa	29	33	38	43
Mideast – Mediterranean	25	28	31	34
North Africa	17	19	21	22
West Asia	32	36	41	45
Asia	109	118	126	134
East Asia	115	121	126	130
South-central Asia	114	126	138	149
Southeast Asia	98	107	115	124
Europe	31	32	32	32
South-central America	22	24	25	27
North America	13	14	15	15
Oceania	3	3	4	4

Source: United Nations (2005), 'Population, Resources, Environment and Development'

* Residents per square kilometer.

Annex 8.2.: Entry of Asian migrants into Greece

Table 8.2.1.
Total of migrants captured at Greek maritime sea borders, 1997-2006

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*
Number	4,545	3,657	1,183	3,664	6,864	3,926	2,439	3,047	3,371	3,414

Source: Security Directorate of the Ministry of Shipping.

* Estimate.

Table 8.2.2.
Share of Asians in the total of migrants captured at Greek maritime borders, 2004-2006

Country of origin	2004	2005	2006
Afghanistan	30.5%	18.8%	36.1%
Iran	3.1%	1.7%	4.8%
India	1.1%	2.5%	4.2%
Pakistan	1.0%	1.0%	3.7%
Bangladesh	1.3%	1.6%	3.1%
Sri Lanka	0.2%	0.5%	0.3%
Myanmar	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Share of Asians	37.3%	26.2%	52.3%

Source: Security Directorate of the Ministry of Shipping.

Annex 8.3.: Status of Asian asylum-seekers in Greece

Table 8.3.1.
Refugee and humanitarian status granted to asylum-seekers in Greece, 1997-2006

Year	Applications	Acceptance Rate
1997	4,376	9.55%
1998	2,953	11.35%
1999	1,528	32.23%
2000	3,083	20.15%
2001	5,499	22.48%
2002	5,664	1.07%
2003	8,178	0.62%
2004	4,469	0.88%
2005	9,050	1.90%
2006*	5,413	1.78%

Sources: Ministry of Public Order, UN High Commission for the Refugees (UNHCR).

* Till end of September.

Table 8.3.2.
Refugee and humanitarian status granted to asylum-seekers
in Greece by country of origin, 2003-2006

Country of origin	2003	2004	2005	2006*
Bangladesh	3.07%	4.65%	6.08%	24.67%
Pakistan	8.60%	5.53%	12.75%	15.48%
Iraq	35.20%	20.94%	10.73%	14.38%
Afghanistan	7.25%	8.55%	5.06%	8.86%
Iran	7.73%	5.10%	2.24%	5.10%
Georgia	-	7.23%	20.96%	4.68%
Nigeria	5.72%	7.27%	4.49%	3.86%
Sudan	2.71%	2.02%	1.33%	1.83%
Somalia	5.21%	3.13%	1.21%	1.52%
Turkey	2.67%	2.69%	1.39%	0.99%
Myanmar	6.07%	3.16%	0.75%	0.28%
Palestine	2.53%	1.68%	0%	0%

Sources: Ministry of Public Order, UN High Commission for the Refugees (UNHCR).

* Till end of September.

Table 8.3.3.
Largest numbers of applications submitted by asylum-seekers as a share of total, 2005

Country of origin	Number	Share
Pakistan	1,154	12.7%
Iraq	971	10.7%
Bangladesh	550	6.1%
Afghanistan	458	5.1%
Nigeria	406	4.5%
Iran	203	2.3%
Turkey	126	1.4%
Sudan	121	1.3%
Somalia	110	1.2%
Myanmar	68	0.8%
Others	4,883	53.9%
TOTAL	9,050	100.0%

Source: Kanellopoulos. C. & M. Gregou (2006): Policy Report on Migration, Asylum and Return in Greece, Athens, March 2006. KEPE, European Migration Network.

Table 8.3.4.
Asians granted an asylum status in Greece
January-October 2006

Country of Origin	Subtotal	Share (%)*
Pakistan	184	15.70%
Bangladesh	178	15.19%
China	76	6.48%
Afghanistan	48	4.10%
India	30	2.56%
Iran	21	1.79%
Sri Lanka	16	1.37%
Myanmar	12	1.02%
Philippines	5	0.43%
Indonesia	3	0.26%
Nepal	2	0.17%
Vietnam	1	0.09%
TOTAL	1,172	

Sources: Ministry of Public Order, UN High Commission for the Refugees (UNHCR), Martin Baldwin-Edwards.

* Share of total of asylum-status holders in Greece (1.172)

Annex 8.4.: Asian communities in Greece

Table 8.4.1.
Size of Asian communities in Greece, 1981-2006

Country of origin	1981	1991	2001	2006*
Pakistan	713	1,911	9,945	15,478
India	754	1,720	7,583	10,697
Philippines	764	3,605	3,451	6,863
Bangladesh	-	-	4,118	5,432
China	186	106	1,356	2,070
Iran	937	850	180	-
Sri Lanka	-	-	522	878
Japan	1,047	381	152	-
Vietnam	195	229	6	-
South Korea	120	174	87	-
Indonesia	113	63	89	-
Thailand	108	105	88	-
Afghanistan	-	-	2	-

Sources: National Statistical Service of Greece, Ministry of Public Order, Martin Baldwin-Edwards.

* The 2006 figures are clearly incomplete.

Table 8.4.2.
Registered migrants in Greece by region of origin, 1990-2006

Region of origin	1990 Residence Permits	1991 Census	1997 Regularisation	2001 Census	2006 Residence Permits*
Europe	26,483	86,525	313,109	600,736	491,616
South Europe	2,829	27,185	244,403	450,271	374,798
East Europe	12,471	27,968	68,564	108,693	116,588
North Europe	5,696	13,803	112	18,151	208
West Europe	5,487	17,569	30	23,621	22
Mideast-Mediterranean	12,216	38,776	24,511	80,297	41,288
North Africa	5,393	5,220	7,283	9,026	12,110
West Asia	6,823	33,556	17,228	71,271	29,178
Asia	9,189	9,144	27,706	37,282	44,801
East Asia	759	661	363	1,513	2,453
South-central Asia	3,697	4,481	21,813	28,584	35,091
Southeast Asia	4,733	4,002	5,530	7,185	7,257
Sub-Saharan Africa	1,530	2,623	4,083	6,674	4,469
East Africa	793	1,334	1,575	2,118	1,547
Central Africa	35	222	142	530	296
South Africa	155	564	37	1,085	235
West Africa	547	503	2,329	2,941	2,391
South and North America	6,063	20,872	527	27,347	3,931
Oceania	520	6,505	34	9,065	310
TOTAL	56,001	164,445	369,970	761,401	586,415

Sources: National Statistical Service of Greece, Ministry of Public Order, Martin Baldwin-Edwards.

* Estimate.

Table 8.4.3.
Major regions as a share of the total of migrants in Greece, 1990-2006

Region of origin	1990 Residence Permits	1991 Census	1997 Regularisation	2001 Census	2006 Residence Permits*
Europe	47.3%	52.6%	84.6%	78.9%	83.8%
Mideast-Mediterranean	21.8%	23.6%	6.6%	10.5%	7.0%
Asia	16.4%	5.5%	7.5%	4.9%	7.6%
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.7%	1.6%	1.1%	0.8%	0.7%
South and North America	10.8%	12.7%	0.1%	3.6%	0.6%
Oceania	0.9%	0.4%	0.0%	1.2%	0.1%

Sources: National Statistical Service of Greece, Ministry of Public Order, Martin Baldwin-Edwards.

* Estimate.

Annex 8.5.: Economic and social profile of Asian migrants in Greece

Table 8.5.1.
Size and areas of employment of some Asian communities during the 2001 census

Country of Origin	Total number	Agriculture	Industry	Construction	Trade, Tourism	Other	N/A*
Pakistan	9,238	13.3%	43.2%	13.5%	13.1%	5.9%	11.1%
India	6,062	52.7%	18.3%	8.3%	5.8%	5.2%	9.7%
Philippines	4,948	1.1%	2.2%	0.7%	8.3%	82.2%	5.5%
Bangladesh	4,101	2.4 %	52.2 %	5.5 %	26.1%	5.0 %	8.7%

Source: National Statistical Service of Greece (2003).

* Non available.

Table 8.5.2.
Year-on-year change in the volume of remittances of Asian migrants in Greece transferred through Western Union, 1997-2006

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
India	516.7%	55.4%	12.2%	227.1%	93.8%	140.3%	147.3%	38.6%	9.7%	59.8%
Pakistan	220.0%	187.5%	215.2%	137.9%	82.3%	143.2%	52.0%	4.6%	63.9%	58.0%
Bangladesh	0.0%	-100.0%	---	258.8%	-26.8%	145.4%	-10.1%	-13.6%	216.7%	55.4%
Indonesia	1.383.3%	-33.7%	23.7%	274.0%	75.8%	90.2%	21.5%	38.3%	41.2%	19.4%
Philippines	61.0%	43.9%	196.8%	421.3%	131.8%	88.3%	6.0%	-3.4%	37.9%	21.0%
China	---	---	120.0%	131.8%	41.2%	251.4%	45.5%	93.8%	94.8%	59.1%
TOTAL	244.6%	27.5%	156.3%	285.8%	83.1%	108.2%	34.8%	14.4%	42.2%	42.7%

Source: Western Union - Greece

Table 8.5.3.
Educational levels of Pakistanis, Indians and Filipinos compared to the total of Asian migrants in Greece, 2001

Country of origin	MA/MB or Ph.D. holders	University Graduates	Higher professional training	College graduates	Secondary school graduates	Primary school graduates	Primary school – partly	Basic reading and writing skills	Illiterate
Total of migrants	0.6%	9.3%	2.7%	29.3%	16.8%	21.9%	7.4%	2.8%	9.2%
Pakistan	0.2%	1.8%	2.3%	21.2%	21.6%	30.6%	0.65	8.0%	13.8%
India	0.3%	1.6%	1.2%	22.9%	21.1%	35.8%	0.6%	5.75	10.7%
Philippines	0.4%	10.5%	11.7%	41.1%	13.35	10.9%	3.1%	1.9%	7.25

Source: National Statistical Service of Greece (2001 Census).