

# State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Greece

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Until two decades ago, Greece was a relatively homogeneous society, with an estimated 98 per cent of the population Christian Orthodox and of ethnic Greek descent. Since the early 1990s, however, Greece has received approximately 1 million people from outside the country: co-ethnic returnees from the Soviet Union, Greek Albanians from South Albania and economic migrants from Eastern European, Asian and African countries. Together these groups account for more than 10 per cent of the population in the country. This rapid transition towards a more diverse society has been accompanied by visible hostility and resistance towards Greece's minorities in some quarters, particularly extreme right-wing groups such as Golden Dawn.

An important element in the rise of extremist organizations with a strong anti-minority focus is the deteriorating economic context in the country. Among EU member states, Greece has probably suffered most from the global financial crisis and the Eurozone debt crisis of recent years. At the end of 2013, well over half of under-25 year-olds (61 per cent) were unemployed: over twice the level of the already high overall unemployment rate of almost 28 per cent. As well as the financial burdens arising from job losses, Greeks have been straining under the burden of pay cuts, tax hikes, public sector financial retrenchment and cutbacks.

This hardship is widely seen as an important contributing factor in Golden Dawn's rising popularity. Following its election in 2012 to the Greek parliament for the first time, with a platform aiming to rid Greece of 'illegal immigrants', Golden Dawn has courted publicity through some controversial high-profile actions, such as a 'Greeks-only' blood bank drive and food handouts. They continued to be active in 2013, holding rallies and 'awakenings' at schools. However, in the beginning of May, police dispersed a 'Greeks-only' food handout by Golden Dawn members in Syntagma Square, Athens.

Golden Dawn's hostility has not been confined to targeting foreign migrants in Greece. In April 2013, during a sweep by its members of Kalamata hospital in search of migrant workers – a

recurring pattern of intimidation undertaken by the organization – violence broke out between the group, including MP Dimitris Koukoutsis, and a number of Roma, who were accompanying a 22-year-old Roma man injured earlier in a racially motivated attack. The fight was broken up by hospital staff, but Koukoutsis subsequently told journalists that delinquency was 'in their DNA' and stated that Golden Dawn would not regard them as equal citizens until they ceased their criminal activities. This derogatory stereotype has also achieved wider circulation in mainstream platforms, as was evidenced by media coverage in the country following the arrest of a Roma couple for the alleged abduction of Maria, a blonde eight-year-old girl who it later transpired had been given to the couple by the biological mother, a Roma woman who had moved to Bulgaria. The coverage of the incident, as well as the manner in which the child was forcibly removed into social care, was criticized by some commentators for reflecting negative stereotypes and public hostility towards Roma.

By contrast, the continuing segregation and marginalization that Roma communities face in Greece often go unnoticed by the wider public, even though exclusion from basic rights and services is ongoing. In May 2013, for example, the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Lavida and Others v. Greece* ruled that the segregation of Roma children into a separate primary school in Sofades, a town in Thessaly, central Greece, constituted discrimination and a breach of the right to education. It was the third European Court ruling on discrimination against Roma pupils in Greece.

Racialized anti-migrant rhetoric has featured prominently in Greek politics, such as the denigration of migrants as 'subhuman' by Golden Dawn MP Eleni Zaroulia in the Greek Parliament in October 2012. Anti-migrant rhetoric has not been confined to the extremist political fringe in Greece, however. In August 2012, for instance, at the time of the launch of Operation Xenios Zeus, a high-profile police crackdown on irregular migrants (and oddly named after the ancient Greek god of hospitality), the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection Nikos Dendias reportedly stated that 'We will not allow our towns, or our country, to be occupied and become a migrant ghetto.' By February 2013, Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that 85,000 foreign nationals had been accompanied to police stations to verify their status, but only 6 per cent had been found to be undocumented.

Given the economic austerity and the deprivations affecting many in Greece, which have fuelled anti-immigrant sentiment and support for the far right, there is a common perception that the country has experienced a rise in racist hostility and a consequent increase in racist hate crime. According to the Racist Violence Recording Network, 166 cases of racist violence took place during 2013 – up from 154 reported incidents in 2012 – with a total of more than 320 victims. The total was particularly high as a result of an incident in April at a strawberry farm in the town of Nea Manolada, when supervisors opened fire on at least 135 protesting migrant workers, wounding 35 people. However, it is difficult to determine with certainty the exact trend in racist hate crime in Greece. Official records provide a very unreliable indicator of the problem. In its submission to the ODIHR annual hate crimes report for 2012, no information was provided about any hate crimes recorded by the police. These figures are therefore likely to be a gross underestimate of the real extent of the problem.

Little of the context to the attacks is reported in the Greek Racist Violence Recording Network report. However, it is notable that more than two-thirds of the recorded attacks occurred in the municipality of Athens. The majority reportedly involved physical attacks: many with the use of weapons such as batons, knuckledusters, broken bottles, clubs, crowbars, knives, incapacitating

spray and even the use of large dogs. Almost all the recorded attacks were against migrants and refugees from beyond the EU, particularly Bangladesh and Afghanistan, and the majority of victims were Muslims. Furthermore, while in general the majority of hate crimes in Europe appear to be perpetrated by individuals rather than organized groups, in Greece a large proportion of the violence seems to have been undertaken by organized groups such as Golden Dawn. This was evidenced by the seemingly coordinated nature of many attacks by groups of offenders, sometimes dressed in black and wearing combat trousers.

In one of the attacks in the early hours of 16 January, in the Athens suburb of Petralona, Shehzad Luqman, a Pakistani migrant worker, was stabbed to death while making his way to work on his bicycle. While a police officer was reported to have told journalists that the killing followed an argument, the attack is widely believed to have been racially motivated. Thousands of migrants and human rights activists subsequently held a rally protesting the murder while Amnesty International highlighted that Luqman's death was not an isolated incident but the 'result of the Greek authorities' continuing failure to take decisive action against racially motivated violence'. However, despite Golden Dawn leaflets and weapons similar to those used by organized militias being found in the homes of the two people who confessed to the crime, possible connections to Golden Dawn were reportedly not investigated and the authorities did not attribute the murder to racist motives. The mayor of Athens, Giorgos Kaminis, however, stated that the opening of the trial was 'the start of the political isolation of racism and xenophobia'. A trial for the murder began in December and resumed at the beginning of 2014. Activists have highlighted the organized nature of the attack and called for it to be recognized as a hate crime.

Another murder that attracted significant media coverage was the stabbing of 34-year-old Pavlos Fyssas, an anti-fascist hip-hop artist and concert promoter known as 'Killah P', on 18 September outside a bar in Athens. His attacker was an active supporter of Golden Dawn. Some witnesses alleged that motorbike policemen who had also arrived at the scene failed to intervene. The murder of Pavlos Fyssas triggered protests, some violent, in Athens and other cities. The murder was also met with condemnation from across the political spectrum, including the Greek President and Prime Minister, who both called for a united front against the threat of right-wing extremism. While Golden Dawn categorically denied any connection with the murder, it triggered a crackdown on the party with the Golden Dawn leader and three of its members of parliament arrested. The party is facing charges of operating as a criminal organization. In early 2014, it announced that it would re-emerge under the banner of 'National Dawn' if it were to be banned.

Since 2008, Greek legislation includes a provision that recognizes racist motivation as an aggravating factor and allows for judges to impose the maximum penalties on offenders. However, in practice this legislation has rarely been applied. The first known ruling in which it has been used was in November 2013, when two alleged members of Golden Dawn were sentenced by an Athens court to three years and five months in prison for firebombing a Tanzanian man's store, although they will reportedly be able to pay a fine of around €12,500 each instead of serving these sentences. The same month, a draft anti-racism law also appeared in parliament that includes among other measures penalties for hate speech and incitement to violence. However, activists have criticized the limited focus of the law and its failure to mention related issues, such as improving victim reporting and police procedures.

At present, a large portion of hate crimes go unreported because victims, many of them undocumented or illegal residents, are afraid to present themselves to police. For victims in this

group, there is no assurance that reports will be processed. In fact, unregistered migrants who file a complaint at police stations are detained automatically and may subsequently face deportation. This threat means that the majority of victims do not report crimes to the police. This contributes to a climate of impunity for perpetrators that has been reinforced by the failure of public authorities to develop an adequate response to the wave of hostility against migrants. There is even evidence of official complicity in some incidents against minorities. Police officers were reportedly involved in 31 cases during 2013 where victims reported violence or discrimination due to their religion, ethnicity, nationality or skin colour.

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