

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2016 - Greece

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Events of 2015

Greece's protracted economic crisis, which showed little sign of abating during 2015, has fuelled the rise of far-right parties, such as Golden Dawn, with a strong anti-immigrant focus. In recent years, these organizations have exploited popular frustration and insecurity through xenophobic political rhetoric, in the process winning a significant portion of votes. Despite efforts to clamp down on its activities during the year – including the commencement of a trial in April of 69 Golden Dawn members on charges of participating in violence and criminality – Golden Dawn still managed to secure 7 per cent of votes and 18 seats in the September elections. The areas where Golden Dawn appeared to enjoy the most popularity were those most affected by Europe's refugee crisis, with at least 800,000 mostly Syrian refugees reaching Greece by sea. The islands of Kos and Lesbos, for example, which received a large influx of refugees in the first half of the year, saw votes for Golden Dawn almost double in September. The European Union's (EU) registration system on the islands has been criticized for implementing a tiered system that reportedly privileges Syrian nationals over refugees from other countries. Meanwhile Afghan families were reportedly receiving just one full meal a day and were allowed only one month's leave to stay in the country, compared to the six months granted to Syrians. This system, apparently designed on the assumption that other nationalities had weaker asylum claims than Syrian nationals, was reportedly leading to tensions between refugees from different countries. On a positive note, however, many islanders from Lesbos received worldwide praise for their humanitarian efforts in helping to rescue hundreds of refugees throughout the year and by giving them food and water. Petitions have been set up to nominate some of these residents as candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Besides targeting migrants, Golden Dawn has a policy of physically and verbally attacking certain ethnic and religious groups, such as the country's Jewish minority. In October 2015, three Golden Dawn European Parliament members (MEPs) published a video online containing anti-Semitic and anti-migrant content, accusing the Merkel government in Germany of supporting a 'Zionist' conspiracy against Europe. Anti-Semitism is not confined to Golden Dawn alone, however: the Coordination Forum for Countering anti-Semitism recorded several anti-Semitic incidents during 2015. Former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis was depicted as a 'Jewish loan shark' in a cartoon that appeared in the Greek daily newspaper *Ta Nea*. In June, anti-Semitic graffiti warning

that 'the Jews are murderers' appeared in Kavala and the town's Holocaust memorial was desecrated, while in October one of Athens' main Jewish cemeteries was vandalized with sprayed swastikas and insults against Jews. The anti-Semitic group Combat 18 Hellas later claimed responsibility for the attack by posting pictures on its website.

As is the case in many European countries, the estimated 265,000 Roma in Greece regularly experience marginalization and stigmatization. Although the government's National Strategy for Social Integration of Roma focuses on improving the integration and living conditions of Roma, the community still faces high levels of physical segregation, discrimination and negative stereotypes. In October 2015, after a two-year trial, charges against Roma couple Christos Salis and Eleftheria Dimopoulou – accused of stealing a 4-year-old child named Maria – were dropped, when the court ruled that evidence against the couple was inconclusive. This is a significant step forward in the struggle to debunk myths and stereotypes attached to the Roma minority, such as the one that accuses them of kidnapping children.

In May 2015, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mutuma Ruteere, declared that 'Roma of Greece, while being for the vast majority Greek citizens, continue to face discrimination and remain economically and socially vulnerable.' The most concerning aspects are highlighted as being housing, social care and health services. As most Roma settlements are not connected to Greece's national power grid, it is impossible for Roma people to register with local authorities as they are unable to provide gas or electricity bills as proof of residence. For the same reason, Roma children living in informal camps are not able to complete primary school education. A 2015 study conducted by Antigone, an anti-racism information centre in Thessaloniki, analysed the discrimination that can also take place within Roma communities: varying educational attainment, financial status, religious beliefs and cultural practices are said to be key contributing factors, with Roma women facing gender-based discrimination as well.

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