

ECRE COUNTRY REPORT 2001: GREECE

I STATISTIC

ARRIVALS

1. Total number of individual asylum seekers who arrived with monthly breakdown and variation in %.

Table 1:

Month	2000	2001	Variation +/- (%)
January	148	121	-18.2
February	210	106	-49.5
March	356	241	-32.3
April	95	92	-3.2
May	290	171	-41.0
June	196	431	+119.9
July	382	519	+35.9
August	217	618	+184.8
September	251	607	+141.8
October	130	426	+227.7
November	95	544	+472.6
December	713	1623	+127.6
TOTAL	3 083	5 499	+78.4

Source: Statistics from the Ministry of Public Order (MPO)

Comments: The events in Afghanistan and Iraq led to a substantial increase in the number of asylum-seekers from these countries (see table below). The doubling of the number of applications in December is due mainly to the arrival of a large boat containing more than 700 persons in the island of Zakynthos (the boat reached Zakynthos on November but the registration of asylum applications was counted for December).

2. Breakdown according to the country of origin/nationality:

Table 2:

Country	2000	2001	Variation +/- (%)
Iraq	1 334	1 972	+47.8
Turkey	591	800	+35.4
Afghanistan	446	1 459	+227.1
Pakistan	141	252	+78.7
Iran	135	217	+60.7
Bangladesh	49	33	-32.7
Sierra Leone	52	163	+213.5
Sudan	41	45	+9.8
Palestine	36	38	+5.6
Sri Lanka	19	28	+47.4
India	27	41	+51.9
Morocco	-	148	-
Ethiopia	-	34	-
Eritrea	-	26	-

DRC	-	32	-
Russian Federation	-	21	-

Source: Ministry of Public Order

Comments: Iraqis and Afghans make up more than half of the total number of asylum applicants. There is a substantial increase in arrivals from Afghanistan (3 times more than the previous year) and Iraq, due to the specific situation of the countries. However all major countries of origin show an increase. Applications by Sierra Leone nationals have tripled in number.

3. Persons arriving under family reunification procedure: 6

Figure not included in 1. and 2.

Source: Greek Council of Refugees figures (GCR).

6 refugees brought their families into Greece according to the requirements set by the Presidential degree 61/99. 4 unaccompanied minors assisted by GCR for family reunification on the basis of the Dublin Convention are included in the total number of asylum seekers of 2001.

4. Quota refugees:

Greece does not operate a quota system.

5. Unaccompanied minors: 118 (2000:115)

This figure is for cases handled by GCR.

RECOGNITION RATES

6. Total number of applications decided and the statuses accorded:

Table 4:

Statuses	2000		2001	
	Number	%	Number	%
No status awarded	1 748		1 165	
Convention status	222		147	9.5
Humanitarian status granted or renewed	175		233	
Total decisions	2 145	100%	1 545	100%

Source: MPO Statistics

7. Refugee recognition rate (1951 Convention; in percentage and absolute number) according to country of origin:

Table 5:

Country of Origin	Refugee Status	2000		2001	
		Total Decisions	%	Total Decisions	%
Turkey		30	48		
Iraq		39	46		
Afghanistan		69	17		
Iran		31	13		

DRC	6	1
Sudan	5	6
Rwanda	2	
Ethiopia	2	1
Nigeria	4	
Bangladesh	3	5
Sierra Leone	12	
Angola	1	
India	3	
Cote D.Ivoire	1	
Jordan	1	
Liberia	1	
Burundi	3	
Pakistan	1	
Sri Lanka	2	6
Palestine	4	
Syria	2	2
Cameroon		1
Myanmar (Burma)		1
TOTAL	222	147

Source: MPO Statistics

DEPORTATIONS / REMOVALS / REPATRIATION WITHIN ASSISTED RETURN PROGRAMMES

8. *Persons returned on third country grounds:*

No information was available.

9. *Number of applications determined inadmissible:*

Greek legislation does not include a clause of inadmissibility. All applications lodged are examined on their merits.

10. *Deportations of rejected asylum seekers:*

No information is available.

11. *Details of assisted return programmes:* 3

1 family of 3 persons were assisted by GCR for voluntary repatriation to Croatia.

12. *Dublin Convention practice comments:*

The examination of an asylum application includes an assessment as to whether the Dublin Convention should be applied or not. The verification of the application or not of the Convention clauses takes place throughout the examination procedure and, in particular, during the interview with the competent police authorities. During this procedure, the police authorities always fill in a special document on the relevance of the Dublin Convention. This document is dispatched to the MPO, which, in turn, proceeds to correspond with the authorities

of other member states, if there are grounds to believe that the Convention clauses should apply.

The competent authority for the handling of claims or requests to take over or take back as asylum applicant is the Asylum Department of the State Security Directorate of the Ministry of Public Order. The Department is also responsible for the transfer of the applicant to the competent country. The asylum seeker in question is provided with a travel document and returned to the relevant member states.

It has to be noted that, due to delays in the procedures of family reunification under the terms of the Convention, there are a number of cases where, instead of the due process, people move illegally to other Convention countries in order to join their families.

13. Dublin Convention practice:

Table 6:

	Total number of requests presented by Greece to other Dublin States	Total number of requests addressed to Greece by other Dublin States
Requests presented	10	680
Requests accepted		
Requests refused		
Requests under Art. 9		

Source: Compilation of various sources as MPO statistics not available.

14. Requests by country:

Information was not available.

II SPECIFIC REFUGEE GROUPS

15. Developments regarding refugee groups of particular concern:

No information was provided.

III LEGAL AND PROCEDURAL DEVELOPMENTS

16. New legislation passed:

An important piece of legislation on immigration was adopted in 2001. Law 2910/2001 on “entry and residence of aliens into Greek territory and naturalisation of aliens”, though explicitly excluding refugees from its scope, has an impact on them, insofar as any alien entering Greece is covered by this law before lodging an asylum application.

17. Important case-law:

The case of a minor from Rwanda, convicted for illegal entry by the First Instance Court and ordered for deportation, was brought by GCR before the Supreme Court (Areios Pagos). The first instance decision was annulled and a review of the case at first instance was ordered.

3 cases were defended by GCR before the Council of State and 8 appeals were lodged before it.

18. *Refugee determination procedure, appeal or deportation procedure:*

The provisions on deportation of Law 2910/2001 have an impact on aliens entering illegally into Greece, before they lodge their asylum application. The law also limits the maximum period of detention, pending deportation ordered by the police authorities, to 3 months.

19. *Developments in the use of the exclusion clauses of the Refugee Convention since September 11:*

It should be stressed that there has been no modification in the treatment of Afghan asylum seekers after the 11th of September.

IV POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

20. *Changes in refugee policy:*

Law 2910 differentiates the time necessary for applying for naturalisation for refugees. Refugees residing in Greece may acquire Greek nationality 5 years after their application (the period is 10 years for immigrants).

21. *International agreements:*

Greece has already signed a bilateral readmission agreement with Turkey in 2000, which has not, as of yet, been approved by the Greek Parliament. Given the paramount importance of Turkey as a country of arrival – the large majority of asylum seekers cross into Greece through Turkey- the ratification of this agreement will affect substantially the situation of asylum seekers arriving in Greece.

22. *Government's policy vis-à-vis EU developments:*

In view of the oncoming Greek presidency of the European Union, the government declared that harmonization of European Union policies on immigration and asylum matters will be a central priority of the Greek presidency.

V THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

23. *Changes in the reception system:*

GCR activities of the past years have contributed to, along with the activities of others, have increased awareness of refugee matters in Greece. Following the increase of mass arrivals of asylum seekers, especially during the second half of 2001, there has been a stronger involvement of state structures in reception and integration of asylum seekers. New reception centers have been created and a program of urgent integration of homeless and vulnerable cases (operated by GCR) has been introduced. In general the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, competent for these matters, has better undertaken its role as the coordinating body.

24. *Changes in the social welfare policy relevant to refugees:*

Several changes have been observed during the year 2001.

The disability benefit for recognized refugees, achieved through GCR lobbying during the previous year, continues to be provided to beneficiaries.

In January 2001, a Circular from the State Social Security Organisation (I.K.A) allowed for asylum seekers to obtain the special social insurance booklet that covers them for sickness and accidents.

In October 2001, the Ombudsman, following a GCR LAU intervention, recommended that the Farming Insurance Organisation accept the registration of refugees as farmers and insure them.

In November 2001 Law 2954/2001 was published. It provides that all financial assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and holders of residence permits granted on humanitarian grounds be exempt from all tax obligations.

25. *Changes of policy in refugee integration:*

Integration of refugees continues as during previous years. Greek language courses are offered by GCR and other NGOs including the Social Work Foundation. The Multidynamic Center of the Red Cross provides, besides language courses, counselling as well as a Day Center for children. In addition, the three intercultural centers of GCR ("Pyxis"), operating in Athens, have organised awareness raising seminars and information provision to representatives of the community (media and citizens), which has contributed to raising public interest in these matters.

26. *Initiatives in social exclusion, antiracism, equality, refugee participation:*

Following the mass group arrivals, the issue of foreign immigrants in general, including refugees, became a topical issue and a series of anti-racist activities were held (anti-racism festivals, music events with the participation of bands playing Greek music and immigrant musicians).

27. *Changes in family reunion policy:*

No changes in family reunion policy were made in 2001.

VI POLITICAL CONTEXT

28. *Government in power:*

The ruling Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) remains in power after the general elections of April 2000.

29. *Asylum in the national political agenda:*

Asylum as such was not a major issue in political debate. The arrival of the boat in Zakynthos (mentioned earlier) did raise the issue of mass arrivals of illegal aliens. This led to a special discussion initiated by the Prime Minister within the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, the adoption of Law 2910 constitutes a turning point in Greek policy vis-à-vis immigration that indirectly affects refugees.

VII CAMPAIGNS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION INITIATIVES

Press/Media

GCR members gave several interviews to Greek and foreign press concerning matters related to the asylum procedure in Greece. Press initiatives included an interview of the GCR Legal Assistance Unit Coordinator by a national TV-channel following the massive group arrival in

the Island of Evia, and the participation of members of LAU in several radio and TV interviews of the island of Zakynthos, following the mass group arrival there in November 2001.

CGR participated together with UNHCR in a press conference on International Refugee Day.

Seminars/Presentations

In March 2001, a special seminar was organized for the facilitation of beneficiaries in the completion of tax forms, with a tax consultant present, at which 25 cases were assisted.

In June 2001 a seminar on the new Immigration Law 2910/2001 was organized. Detailed clarification was given about the new legal framework, followed by a general discussion with special instructions and advice given to those present.

GCR participated in a seminar held in Berlin on NGOs involvement in asylum issues and present developments in European asylum issues.

GCR was represented in a training seminar on topics related to the protection of asylum seekers and refugees, held at the Zakynthos Law Bar Association premises. The LAU Coordinator participated and made a presentation in a seminar, held at the Athens University Law school, on the repercussions of the terrorist acts of September 11 on the protection of civil rights and individual liberties.

The LAU Coordinator participated in and gave a presentation at a seminar the trafficking of women.

The LAU coordinator participated in a meeting with the Council of Europe Committee for Prevention of Torture (CPT) during their visit to detention centres and prisons in Greece which was carried out in order to assess the conditions under which detained asylum seekers were held.

Programmes and other activities

GCR started the implementation of the ODYSSEUS programme, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Order, partly funded by the European Commission. The programme involves training activities of officials at border areas as well as preparation of questionnaires and the organisation of a concluding seminar with participation from all EU member states and candidate countries. In October 2001 initial research on the topics to be examined were conducted with the aim of preparing a questionnaire to be distributed to relevant authorities and NGOs in Europe.

LAU participated in a working group, composed of the human rights NGOs in Greece, on the rights of the children.

Interventions

GCR intervened to the Ministry of Education as regards the registration of refugees at special schools for adults ("schools of second chance").

GCR intervened to the Ministry of Health regarding the free medical care of refugees according to the P.D. 266/99.

GCR intervened to the Ministry of Interior regarding the Law 2910/2001 and its provisions for naturalization.

GCR intervened before the Public Prosecutor for Minors on issues related to the legal representation of unaccompanied minors.

A paper on the legal problems that refugees face in Greece was drafted and presented to the National Committee of Human Rights.

VIII USEFUL REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

During 2001 GCR drafted several position papers, among them a position paper on the assessment of the Greek reaction to the September 11th attacks and its impact on asylum seekers. Another position paper on the European arrest warrant was forwarded to the permanent Greek delegation in the Council of Ministers (Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister of Justice and Minister for Public Order). GCR LA Unit conducted also extensive research on the jurisprudence of other national courts and GCR political scientists continued their periodical research on the political situation in the countries of origin.

IX INTERNET OR ELECTRONIC INFORMATION INITIATIVES

www.gcr.gr - Greek Council for Refugees website (in Greek and in English)