

Update report Greece/ June 2012  
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**Update report Greece:**  
The number of irregular migrants in Greece at the end of 2010  
and 2011

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Please quote as: Maroukis, Thanos (2012): Update report Greece: The number of irregular migrants in Greece at the end of 2010 and 2011, Database on Irregular Migration, Update report <http://irregular-migration.net/>

**Database on Irregular Migration (<http://irregular-migration.net>)**

This website aims at increasing transparency in the field of irregular migration. The database provides an inventory and a critical appraisal of data and estimates in the European Union. Quantitative information is accompanied by substantial background materials, both on issues of general concern and on the situation in individual countries.

**Quality assurance for this paper**

Dita Vogel, Vesela Kovacheva

## 1 Introduction

This estimate was produced in June 2012. It is based on earlier estimates of the same author for the project CLANDESTINO (Maroukis 2009).

## 2 Estimate

It is estimated that there were approximately 350,000 irregular migrants in Greece in December 2010 and 390,000 in December 2011.

Group	Defini- tion	Year	Estimate		Main data source	Short explanation
			Minimum	Maximum		
Total stock	Irregular foreign residents	2011		390,000	apprehension data	Update of 2007 estimate based on the interpretation of apprehension data
Total stock	Irregular foreign residents	2010		350,000	apprehension data	Update of 2007 estimate based on the interpretation of apprehension data

Source: Own calculations, see below (figures rounded)

## 3 Definition of irregular migrant population

Irregular foreign residents in this estimate include all foreign nationals from non-European Union countries living in Greece who have no residence permit.

## 4 Explanation

In order to count irregular migration, first, one has to discuss the ways in which migrants become irregular. The following types of irregular migrants can be discerned by their path into irregularity in the European South: namely, illegal entrants (including asylum seekers who entered illegally and are rejected after a short period of admitted stay as asylum seeker), visa overstayers (legal entrants on a short-term visa that expired) and migrants with a stay permit that fail to renew their legal status (due to the lack of a labour contract as most of them work in sectors with high levels of informality, instability and seasonality like tourism, agriculture, construction and domestic work). These pathways into irregularity are all, more or less, encountered in Greece, Spain, and Italy, three countries at the southern border of the EU with a high share of informal economy in comparison to north-western EU countries (Schneider & Klinglmair 2004).

The estimations produced here are based on a critical elaboration of the existing data and the revisiting of CLANDESTINO project methodology and estimate of irregular migration at the end of 2007 (Maroukis 2009). The CLANDESTINO estimate of 2007 is taken as a base estimate and adjusted based on apprehension data, taking new information relevant for the interpretation of this data and new data into account. However, a number of adjustment factors had to be chosen discretely on the basis of the author's knowledge from various research projects.

Since the CLANDESTINO estimation there have been some developments on the available data sources that shed new light on the evolution of the phenomenon of

irregular migration in Greece. First, the stay permit database of the Ministry of Interior has been improved and we are in a situation today to know with more precision the number of immigrants in possession of a valid stay permit and of those waiting for their stay permits' renewal at the time of the CLANDESTINO estimation (around 600,000). Second, two recent pieces of research on the biggest ethnic groups of irregular migrants in Greece call for a different interpretation of Greek Police data on migrant apprehensions.

The first one is the case study of Maroukis & Gemi (2011) identifying a type of Albanian circular migration to Greece, among others, that is of particular interest to this analysis: that of an *irregular seasonal migration for work in agriculture, construction or tourism*. It composes, firstly, of young Albanians coming irregularly in Greece to work in the fields of Central Macedonia and other areas of Northern Greece following their kin and social networks that assure them a temporary working place in the area; and secondly, of migrants who have been coming to Greece for more than a decade but cannot come through a legal avenue (seasonal worker invitation or regularization). An insight into the current volume of irregular 'circular' Albanian migration to Greece is given by the Chief of the Albanian Border and Migration Police Directorate:

*“Out of a number of 55,000 repatriations that we have every year, 22,000 are repeated ones. That is people that have gone there in January, worked for 2 months, got arrested and repatriated. After 2 months they went again and worked. We have cases where people have gone back and forth 5 times within a year.” (Maroukis & Gemi 2011)*

In the light of these findings, the incidence of double counting in Albanians' apprehension data<sup>1</sup> seems particularly high within a year, let alone over different years, and the pattern of their mobility is to a significant extent circular. This constitutes sufficient evidence not to add up yearly apprehension data on Albanians and to regard the yearly population of apprehended (and immediately deported) Albanians as a non-settled migrant population that moves regularly back and forth between Greece and Albania. We assume that the size of this population every year should be close to the median of the Albanians' apprehensions in the period 2005-2010 which is 61,000. In 2011 the number of apprehensions of Albanians fell dramatically to a total of 11,700. This is mainly due to the deepening of the Greek economic crisis and the visa liberalization with Albania, which involves visa-free access for visits of up to three months in the Schengen area since December 2010. The few people that come do so for irregular work and generally do not stay beyond the period of three months that they are allowed to stay in Greece (Maroukis & Gemi 2011). In this sense they should not be counted as irregular residents.

**Table 1 Apprehension data of Albanians (2005-2011)**

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number (rounded to the nearest hundredth)	52,000	57,000	66,000	72,400	63,500	50,200	11,700

Source: Greek Police, compiled by the author

<sup>1</sup> Apprehension data including multiple arrests of the same person.

The aforementioned changes in stay permit data and apprehensions of Albanian migrants alter slightly the CLANDESTINO project estimate of irregular migrants present in Greece at the end of 2007 (271,000 as opposed to 280,000; see Annex 1 and Maroukis 2009). In the 2007 estimate it is further assumed that there are 85,000 undocumented migrants living in Greece since 2001 who did not apply or qualify for regularization during the 2005 amnesty. We assume that 60% of this number regards Albanians (the share of legally and illegally staying Albanians at the time was the same<sup>2</sup>) and that most of them left Greece by 2010. For the same reason, 60% of the irregular entrants apprehended at the Greek borders in 2004 (that is 18,000 in absolute numbers) should have left Greece by 2010. Back in 2004 Albanians that were apprehended at the border and deported were usually re-entering into Greece shortly after their deportation (Maroukis & Gemi 2011). This is why we regard them as residents.

The second research shedding new light on the irregular migrant stock of Greece is the Triandafyllidou & Maroukis case study (2012) involving life-stories of Asian and African migrants being smuggled into and out of Greece. This study confirms that there is a constant flow of migrants smuggled to other European countries via Greece over the last five years. We shall make a reserved assumption on the volume of the irregular flow of transit migrants leaving Greece and suggest that on average 1 in 10 of the 2005-2011 irregular migrant arrivals managed to cross to other EU member states up to 2011<sup>3</sup>. This outflow rate is based on a combination of migrant key informants' accounts and Greek coastguard and Greek Police estimates. The Greek coastguard operating in the port of Patra asserted in 2008 and 2010 that 80% of the migrants attempting illegal exit is apprehended (Triandafyllidou & Maroukis 2012). We assume that eventually 10% manage to leave Greece taking also into account the migrants that crossed but are immediately returned from the Italian authorities. The number of apprehended irregular migrants attempting to cross to other states from the Athens International airport over the last five years indicates that the assumed outflow share is probably an underestimation of the reality. Also, it needs to be noted that in 2011 smuggling networks seeking to open pathways to Europe have proliferated. Attesting to this are the new modus operandi of smuggling towards Europe that the enforcement authorities have identified in 2011 (see Triandafyllidou & Maroukis 2012). Considering also the undetected smuggling incidents, we assume that at least another 10% of the 2005-2010 arrivals crossed from Greece to other EU countries in 2011 (see Annex 1).

Producing further an outflow estimate of irregular migrant residents that are apprehended in the Greek mainland needs to take into account an even higher incidence of double counting; a migrant may be counted in the mainland apprehension data, say, of 2009 and also appear in the mainland or border apprehension data of different years. For example, the non-Albanians apprehended in the Greek mainland in 2010 are 24,581. Since 10% of which (2,458) is assumed to leave Greece and another 30% (around 7,500) is assumed to regard double counted persons that appear in other years' mainland apprehension or entry flow data, the number of irregular migrant apprehensions in the mainland that remain in Greece eventually goes down to

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<sup>2</sup> See also Kanellopoulos et al. 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The number of undetected entries or stays is not calculated in the estimate since the likelihood of not being apprehended over different years is very small. Moreover I assume that this number is more or less balanced out by the fact that a very moderate share of irregular flows out of Greece is included in the estimates of 2010 and 2011.

14,581 (the same rule is applied for other years' mainland apprehensions in Annex 1).

All in all, the estimate of irregular migrants in Greece for both 2010 and 2011 is around 330,000. Should we add to that the difference in valid stay permits between their peak in 2009 and their decrease in 2010 and 2011 the estimates of irregular migrants for 2010 and 2011 become 350,000 and 390,000 respectively. At least one third of these estimates regard persons that are assumed of living in Greece for more than 8 years. In particular, around 20,000 of the estimated 352,175 irregular migrants of 2010 are regular migrants losing their permits, 41,400 are irregulars living in Greece before 2005<sup>4</sup>, and 61,000 are Albanian irregulars circulating between the two countries. In the 2011 estimate there are 62,411 regular migrants losing their permits, 41,400 are irregulars living in Greece before 2005 and 11,700 are Albanian irregulars circulating between the two countries.

## 5 Discussion

The fact that Greece became the main entry gate to Europe since 2008 (with the interval of the Libyan crisis that affected Italy)<sup>5</sup> shifted the focus on one of the pathways into irregularity, namely that of irregular entry in the country. As a knock-on effect of this focus, media guesstimates on the irregular migrant stock of Greece went up and talks of 1-2 million irregular migrants living in Greece still dominate the public discourse. However, the political importance given to this phenomenon may be disproportionately high in relation to the actual size of the irregular migrant population in the country and to the chronic problems of the Greek economy and its fiscal sustainability. This development is not surprising in a society in seek of stability, security and cohesion where the discourse of migration is one of the very few that can attract fanatic support and votes from the right and the left camps. Indeed migration has become a key moderator of political confrontations at times of external political surveillance where politicians have little room to make promises to the Greek electorate other than those agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union and the European Central Bank.

Interestingly, the systematic estimates of the irregular migrant stock in Greece in 2010 and 2011 indicate a substantial shift in the composition of the irregular migrant resident population rather than its size. In particular, the Albanian irregular resident population has decreased substantially over the last decade due to regularization and lately due to the visa-free entrance regime and a return trend to Albania related to the ongoing Greek economic, social and political crisis. On the other hand, the Asian and African origin irregular migrant flows to Greece have presented an increase since 2008.

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<sup>4</sup> 41,400= 60% of the assumed 85,000 irregular TCNs living in Greece since 2001 are Albanians and have returned to their country and 10% of the 34,000 remaining non Albanians also left; 40% of the 30,000 border apprehensions of 2004 have remained in Greece and a 10% of them have left the country.

<sup>5</sup> Spain's efficient bloc to irregular migrant flows has been a result not so much of increased border patrols and sophisticated surveillance systems but of its diplomatic 'offensive' to major origin and transit countries that involved signing cooperation and readmission agreements with them. The traditionally tense Greek-Turkish political relations pose problems towards the pursuit and consolidation of a similar approach with Turkey, the main transit stop for migrants heading to Europe via Greece (Triandafyllidou & Maroukis 2012).

In conclusion, these two estimates constitute an overestimation of the resident irregular migrant population in Greece for a number of reasons. First, the undetected population that is apprehended in the mainland is much smaller than the assumed<sup>6</sup>. In other words, the incidence of double counting is much bigger. Second, the estimated outflow rate is much smaller than in reality. Apart from the relatively small outflow rate of recent arrivals that is adopted, we assumed in this estimate that a segment of the irregular resident population present in Greece before 2005 has not left Greece.

## 6 References

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<sup>6</sup> Up to 2009 undetected irregular entrants' rates (given by police and migrant accounts) fluctuate between 60% and 30%; in 2010 and 2011 undetected irregular entrants' rates are down to 20%. In our estimates we have endorsed the highest rate.

**Annex 1: Estimates of irregular migrant resident population in Greece in 2010 and 2011**

	Estimating irregular migrant residents in 2010	Estimating irregular migrant residents in 2011
Corrected irregular migrant stock in Greece at the end of 2007 (see Maroukis 2009)	271,239	271,239
Adjustments to the 2007 estimate of irregular migrants in 2010 and 2011	-18,000 (or 60% of) persons apprehended at Greek borders in 2004 that are no longer in Greece -1,200 (or 10%) of the remaining in Greece border apprehensions of 2004 that left the country by 2010 or earlier - 51,000 irregular Albanians who had been living in Greece since 2001 and left between 2008-10 - 3,400 (or 10%) of the non-Albanian irregular migrants who had been living in Greece since 2001 and left between 2008-10	-18,000 -1,200 -51,000 -3,400 -(61,000-11,700)
Irregular inflows from Turkey	+134,310 (data for 2008-2010)	+189,810 (data for 2008-2011)
Irregular outflows from Greece to other EU states (migrants apprehended at Greek-Turkish border)	- 6,915 (10% of 69,153 migrants apprehended at Greek-Turkish borders during 2005-7 that left by 2010 or earlier) - 13,400 (10% of 134,000 migrants apprehended at Greek-Turkish borders during 2008-10 that has left by 2010 or earlier) - 14,871 non Albanians deported in 2005-2009 -3,000 (approx.) non Albanians deported in 2010	-6,915 x2 (another tenth of the arrivals from 2005-7 that left in 2011) -13,400 x2(another 10% of the 2008-10 arrivals that left in 2011) -5,550 (10% of the 55,500 arrivals of 2011 that leaves in 2011) -14,871 -3,000
Readmission of irregular migrants to Turkey in 2010 & 2011	-501	-501 -673
Mainland apprehensions (non-Albanian migrants that had not been arrested before in Greece)	+14,581 irregular migrant apprehensions in the mainland in 2010 that remain in Greece (24,581 were the non-Albanians apprehended in the mainland in 2010 minus 10% departures from Greece, minus 30% double counted (persons appearing in other entry flows data or mainland apprehensions data of Greek Police) +11,786 irregular mainland apprehensions of 2009 that remain in	+17,138 (28,558 total of 2011 apprehensions in the mainland minus 10% departures minus 30% double counting) +14,581 (2010) +11,786 (2009) +12,638 (2008)

	Greece (calculation same as above) +12,638 irregular mainland apprehensions of 2008 that remain in Greece (calculation same as above)	
Total calculation	Total of irregular migrants in 2010: 332,267 (A) + difference in stay permits 2010-2009 (peak period): 603,686 (31.12.2009) – 553,916 (01.12.2010) x 40% <sup>7</sup> = 19,908 (B)	Total of irregular migrants in 2011: 329,067 (A) + difference in stay permits 2011-2009: 603,686 (31.12.2009) – 447,658 (01.12.2011) x 40% = 62,411 (B)
<b>Estimate (A+B)</b>	<b>352,175</b>	<b>391,478</b>

Source: Greek Police and Ministry of Interior data elaborated by the author

<sup>7</sup> Taking into account the return flow of the Albanians, there is a strong likelihood that a substantial number of the migrants that lapsed back into illegality due to the crisis have left the country. Since Albanians constitute almost 60% of the total of TCN stay permit holders in Greece, we assume that only a 40% of the migrants that failed to renew their stay permits remains in Greece in 2010 and 2011.