Passing through Greece

Until the partial opening of the borders through the Balkans in summer 2015, Patras – Greece’s third city and harbour – used to be the main transit port for irregular migrants heading to Italy and the rest of Europe. In 2011, relocation of the port in the southern part of the city prompted hundreds of refugees and migrants to move into an abandoned industrial area just in front of the new port. Mostly Afghans and Sudanese populate these empty factories facing the port, waiting for a chance to sneak under a lorry and embark onto a ferryboat towards Italy.

Among the newcomers, most (mainly of Afghan nationality) chose not to apply for asylum; their only hope is to illegally leave the country before the expiry date of their paper, valid for thirty days, without leaving any trace (or fingerprint). After that term, they would become illegal and possibly face detention. In the Greek asylum system different procedures apply according to the applicant’s nationality and to the period in which the asylum application was lodged. Since December 2014, Syrians have been able to benefit from a fast-track examination procedure that lets them have an answer within the same day. Unsurprisingly, this generates resentment among those seeking asylum.

The eagerness of refugees and migrants to leave Greece and travel to other European countries is quite evident. Whether recent arrivals, or waiting for a response to asylum claims submitted some time before, or facing detention, or even having fallen into irregularity and thus being unable to leave legally, one thing unites them: the unrelenting longing to leave Greece.

Marco Mogiani
584186@soas.ac.uk
PhD student, SOAS, University of London
www.soas.ac.uk

Refugees in Serbia: on the way to a better life

Maša Vukčević, Jelena Momirović and Danka Purić

More than 450,000 people passed through Serbia from the beginning of 2015 until the middle of November. However, even in 2014 the numbers were large, and growing.

There were three shelters for refugees who were just passing through Belgrade, the Serbian capital, in 2014, and five asylum centres for those who wished to apply for asylum. However, the capacities were insufficient, as more than 2,500 people were entering Serbia daily. Up to 600 people, including families with little children, were sleeping in a park by the main bus station. The Belgrade City Council was providing them with water and tents as well as some basic hygiene supplies. Serbian NGOs and citizens of Belgrade brought food and clothes for them every day. The majority stayed in Serbia for no more than a few days.

From a 2014 study¹ it appeared that the typical refugee in Serbia is a 27-year-old man. He is likely to be unmarried, to be travelling alone, to have 12 years of schooling and to have left his family in his country of origin. He has probably spent over a year in transit in his attempt to reach a better life. Men comprise almost 90% of refugees in Serbia and fewer than a third of them are married. The women who seek refuge in Europe, on the other hand, are married in two thirds of cases. Widows or widowers and divorcees are not very common. Half of the refugees are under the age of 26. Many of them are highly educated and their professions vary considerably. One may as easily come across doctors, engineers, teachers and students as mechanics and manual workers. The variability, however, only exists among the males, whereas women are predominantly housewives or teachers and students. Women are equally as educated as men but there does not seem to