

# Albanian Integration and Acceptance in Greece



Albanians living in Greece stand in queue prior to an event attended by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, in the Galatsi suburb of Athens, on May 12

*The "paradox": While Greek attitudes toward Albanian migrants are improving, assessments of the political relationship are significantly worse*

BY RONALD MEINARDUS\*

It is hard to imagine everyday life in Greece without them; people with Albanian roots perform essential work for many day-to-day services, especially in the skilled trades. Their relationship with the majority Greek population has seen ups and downs.

The times when migrants from the neighboring country on the Adriatic were viewed as dangerous competition and often faced racial discrimination are a thing of the past. Gone is the widespread anti-Albanian sentiment of the 1990s, when hundreds of thousands of people flocked across the southern border in search of a better future after the collapse of communism.

Today, migrants from Albania make up the largest group of foreigners in Greece, with almost two thirds of registered foreigners coming from Albania. Although they are the largest group with a migrant background, Greece's Albanians are the least visible, having adapted and integrated like no other national group in recent years and decades. One could describe this as assimilation.

"The change that many immigrants undergo even affects their personality and outward appearance," noted an Austrian daily newspaper in a 2014 feature under the headline "Greece's hidden Albanians." If the author were to write about the Albanian community in Greece today, he might title the story "Greece's well-liked Albanians."

This sentiment is supported by an opinion poll published in Athens, conducted by the Market Research Unit at the University of Macedonia in association with think tank ELIAMEP on behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The poll explored Greek attitudes toward bilateral relations and the views on Albanians who have made Greece their home.

The results are surprisingly positive. Almost four out of 10 Greeks (78%) say that people from Albania are making a positive contribution to the economic development of their country. Even higher is the number of those (80%) who believe that the children of Albanian migrants who grew up in Greece and went to school there are fully integrated into Greek society. "Their children are like us, there are no more differences," comments Professor Ioannis Armakolas from ELIAMEP, praising the exceptional qualities of many students with Albanian roots at his faculty.

80% of Greeks believe that the children of Albanian migrants who grew up in the country and went to school there are fully integrated into Greek society.

At a time when reports of xenophobia and intolerance toward foreigners are common in Europe, the statistics from Greece stand out. Armakolas also speaks of a "Greek-European success story."

These findings are noteworthy because they contrast with Greek perceptions of political relations between Athens and Tirana. Armakolas describes this as a "paradox": While Greek attitudes toward Albanian migrants are improving,

assessments of the political relationship are significantly worse. Only one in five Greeks has a positive opinion of the neighboring country, while 40 percent have a negative view. The survey shows similarly poor opinions of North Macedonia, with Bulgaria and Serbia enjoying higher favorability ratings.

The case of the convicted mayor of Himara, Fredi Beleri, has recently caused new tensions. The Athens government placed the Albanian local politician on the list for the European Parliament elections, attracting significant media attention and straining bilateral relations.

One intriguing result of the opinion poll is that a sizable majority of Greek respondents don't share this negative assessment. Two thirds (66%) say there are more important issues in Greek-Albanian relations than the case of the imprisoned mayor.

"The societies are ready for improved relations," concludes Armakolas. "Policy needs to take that into account. Societies are ahead of politics." / **Ekathimerini**

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## 77 Migrants Rescued in Southern Aegean

ATHENS - A group of 77 migrants were rescued off a crippled sailing yacht after a large overnight operation in the southern Aegean Sea, Greek authorities have said.

Nobody was reported missing or injured following the rescue between the islands of Amorgos and Astypalea, the coast guard said. Three coast guard vessels, four merchant ships in the area and two smaller private boats took part in the rescue after passengers on the yacht phoned emergency services for assistance.

The nationalities of the migrants were not immediately known. All were taken to Naxos in the Cyclades island group, where they were given temporary shelter.

It was unclear where the migrants had departed from. They were rescued on a route typically used by smuggling gangs to ferry migrants from Turkey to Italy, avoiding tightly patrolled waters around the eastern Aegean islands.

## Athens Braces for Fresh Heatwave

ATHENS - The Athens municipal authority will be opening up air-conditioning spaces, providing medical advice and support, and increasing fire patrols in the capital's big parks and woods as a new heatwave grips the country, pushing temperatures on Tuesday to the 40-Celsius mark.

Various community centers will be open all day to provide air-conditioned shelter to vulnerable residents and visitors.

Social workers, nurses and psychologists working with the city's homeless will also be out in the streets distributing water, meals, coffee and protection kits.

Foot patrols and drones will be keeping an eye out for any possible fires on Lycabettus Hill and more than 150 water receptacles have been out for stray cats and dogs, the municipal authority said, adding that residents and businesses are urged to take out the trash before 11 a.m. or after 5 p.m. in the evening as collections will not take place during the hottest part of the day.