

## **MIGRANT PROTEST IN GREECE**

### **Political action rather than an act of desperation**

Political values, rational choice and ideology are more important factors than relative deprivation in driving migrant protest, according to research to be presented to the NORFACE migration conference at University College London this weekend.

**Georgios Karyotis** and **Dimitris Skleparis** conducted face-to-face interviews with undocumented migrants who embarked on a 44-day hunger strike in Greece in 2011. The empirical evidence gathered in July 2012 offers a rare opportunity to map the profile of migrant protesters, explore how they got mobilised and assess their framing of the protest action.

The analysis underlines the detrimental impact of the economic crisis on the migrant experience. The shrinking in labour opportunities and the increase in xenophobia are identified as the main problems. Nevertheless, the protesters' profile contradicts media portrayals of them as being 'desperate' or 'hopeless' or deprived of basic living conditions.

Instead, this research suggests that migrant participation in protest is driven by rational choice variables, left-wing ideology and a high level of interest in politics, facilitated by the support of social networks, such as migrant associations and political parties.

The authors comment:

'The hunger strike was not act of desperation but a deeply political act. Participants and supporters framed the protest action as representing the interests of all workers regardless of their legal status or nationality, in a strategic attempt to appeal to broad left-wing audiences.

'The protesters reject their victimisation and consider themselves to be committed political agents and pioneers of the migration movement.'

From the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street movement and the mass anti-austerity demonstrations across Europe, a new wave of protest is spreading around the world. One aspect of this phenomenon that has received limited attention concerns the increasing number of migrant protests and what leads migrants to participate in such collective actions.

Findings from the Greek case suggest that while migrant communities may be particularly hit by the economic downturn, the extent to which they resort to organised protest in crisis-ridden countries will largely depend on the availability of and their ability to attract the support of powerful social and political allies.

ENDS

'Migrant Mobilisation during the Economic Crisis: Identity Formation and Dilemmas' by Georgios Karyotis and Dimitris Skleparis, forthcoming in Tsilimpounidi, M. and Walsh, A. (eds), *Remapping the Crisis*, Zero Books

The research was funded by the Carnegie Trust

Georgios Karyotis (PhD, University of Edinburgh) is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Strathclyde and Secretary of the Greek Politics Specialist Group (GPSG) of the PSA. His research interests include international security theory, European migration policy, terrorism, political behaviour, austerity politics, and South-Eastern Europe politics.

Dimitris Skleparis is a PhD Candidate and part-time Teaching Assistant at Queen Mary, University of London. His research focuses on the securitisation of migration and asylum in Greece, the role of EU policies, governmental and non-governmental actors, and security professionals in this process, and the individual and collective migrant acts of resistance that emerge as challenges within this context.

Contact:

Georgios Karyotis  
07957 642693; g.karyotis@strath.ac.uk

Dimitris Skleparis  
07449 18 55 77; d.p.skleparis@qmul.ac.uk