

Investigating Legal Consciousness Among Migrants in Greece: A Study of Migrant's Views of Hate Crime and their Legal Rights

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Abstract : Over the past decade, millions of individuals from middle-eastern and African countries have migrated to Europe to seek refuge. The majority of these refugees emigrate from Muslim majority countries and seek to integrate into European societies. Notably, Greece has hosted thousands of individuals seeking asylum since 2015. Many of these individuals have applied for asylum. They have sought to integrate into the Greek society and to navigate their way through the national and European legal systems with regard to their status. This paper, drawn from a PhD thesis project, focuses on the legal consciousness of migrants and the processes open to asylum seekers to assert their rights, notably with regard to incidents of hate crime and including their interactions with the legal authorities in Greece. The research seeks to capture the factors that influence the views and behaviors of migrants towards the law and their legal rights, using legal consciousness as a theoretical framework. The research findings indicate that asylum seekers have developed a multidimensional legal consciousness influenced by their religious and political background, legal knowledge, previous (negative) experiences with the legal system and their socio-economic status in Greece. Asylum seekers, while aware of the rights essential for their survival in the host country (such as applying for asylum to obtain a secure status, claiming for benefits and housing), were unaware of, and less willing to engage with, legal authorities and rights which they did not find essential for their survival. They viewed hate incidents against them as less important, not worth reporting and sometimes did not even consider these incidents as crimes. The research suggests that asylum seekers in Greece are a vulnerable population who need mechanisms to support them and raise their legal consciousness around their rights in order to better integrate, develop and thrive in the host society. Moving forwards, a better understanding of refugees' and asylum seekers' reactions towards hate crime will help to create future policies and support mechanisms that could improve the lives of these individuals.

Keywords : hate crime, legal consciousness, legal rights, migrations

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