

## **IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN GREEK SOCIETY: AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

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### **—Abstract—**

Since the beginning of the 90s, Greece has rapidly become a reception country of a significant number of immigrants. It is estimated that, nowadays, the number of immigrants, both legal and illegal, is approximately 1,2 million. At the same time, Greece is, moreover, being used as an intermediate, temporary station in the immigrants' effort to reach the countries of the central Europe. Consequently, the existing migration stock of Greece is too significant to be left unexamined, especially since various previous researches indicate that a considerable number of immigrants express their intention to make Greece their place of permanent residence. Therefore, the application of an integration immigration policy in Greek society is considered to be a necessity and the examination of the parameters that will support its effectiveness rises as an important practical issue.

The present study empirically investigates the main factors that compose, according to relevant literature, the immigration policy of each country (employment, education, legalization procedures, culture, racism, etc). More specifically, it is estimated whether these factors support or undermine the integration of immigrants in Greek society. Under this framework, the results of the pan-Hellenic empirical research are presented and the relevant findings are discussed.

**Key Words:** *Immigration, Immigrants' integration, Migration stock, Greece*  
**JEL Classification:** *O15, R23, F22*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The significant number of immigrants that permanently reside in Greece during the last two decades (9% of the total population of the country) and the noteworthy attitude of these immigrants towards remaining in the country for an indefinite period, create a permanent phenomenon that the Greek State should consider, discuss and, finally, face. The required action is the implementation of a coherent integration policy that will successfully confront the issue. In this context, it is imperative to highlight and evaluate the factors that have a direct impact on the integration procedure.

The present paper places immigrants on the centre of the research attention and tries to empirically investigate the importance that they put on various 'integration factors'. The expected results are of significant research interest, since they shed light in areas never discussed before in the Greek context. Moreover, the expected results would be extremely useful in the process of selecting and implementing immigrant policies that target in the unobstructed integration of immigrants in the Greek society.

The following two sections of the paper include a brief literature review concerning the immigration phenomenon in Greece. In the forth and fifth section, the research methodology and the results are being presented. Finally, the discussion and the conclusions are quoted in sections 6 and 7 of the paper.

## 2. THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN GREECE

Greece became an important recipient country of immigrants after the beginning of the 1990's, initially by welcoming Greek expatriates from the countries of the former Soviet Union and economic immigrants from the neighbouring countries of the Balkan region. Despite the upward trend in the flow of immigrants since the

1990's, there is a difficulty in calculating the exact number of the immigrant population in Greece (both legal and illegal), mostly for two reasons.

The first reason is the significant high number of illegal immigrants that currently reside in Greece, a problem that could not be solved even after numerous legislative initiatives that were made by the official Greek state during the last years. The second reason is highly correlated with the role of Greece in the immigration pattern of the region, since the country is often being used as an intermediate station in the journey of the immigrants towards countries of the European Union or, even, overseas. Consequently, only estimations can be attempted about the total number of immigrants that currently reside in Greece. According to official data that were released by the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute (Lianos *et al.*, 2008) the number of immigrants for the year 2004 was between 890 and 930 thousand people.

The overwhelming majority of the immigrants that reside in Greece are Albanians, belong to productive age groups, live, mainly, in urban centres of the country and have a quite flexible labour profile. More specifically, they are, mostly, occupied in agriculture, farming, fishery, construction activities, while they, moreover, have a significant participation in the service sector of the economy. During the last years, they have developed a trend towards establishing autonomous business endeavours in the sectors of commerce, construction and dining, while they create and maintain national networks in order to increase solidarity and take advantage of the proximity with their nationals. The children of the immigrants that reside in Greece attend Greek schools, develop social relationships with the natives and, therefore, constitute the main instrument of the integration procedure of their families in the Greek society (Fakiolas, 2003, Kontis *et al.*, 2006, Markova, n.d.).

Considering the methods that the official Greek State uses in order to manage the immigration phenomenon, it should be underlined that Greece has adopted the basic directives of the EU in the area of immigration, as they have been formed in 2003 with the communication of the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament (COM/2003). According to that text, the basic pillars of the integration procedure are: Integration to the labour market, Education and familirialization with the Greek language, Accommodation and urban environment, Social services and medical treatment, Social and cultural environment, Nationality, citizenship, respect to the difference.

### 3. FACTORS IN THE INTEGRATION PROCESS OF IMMIGRANTS

The international literature highlights certain factors that are considered to have an impact on the integration of immigrants in the host country. As such, the following factors can be mentioned:

1. The legal identity that is attributed to each immigrant upon his arrival at the host country. According to Kupferberg (2003), the categorization of each immigrant in different clusters significantly determines the procedure of his integration. The normality of the 'integration procedure' varies between different categories of immigrants (illegal immigrant, political refugee, student, etc). Papadopoulou (2006) argues that immigrants can be occupied in facing all the complex problems of their immigration (employment, children education, etc.), only after the matter of their legal identity is been solved.
2. The prospects of employment. The social and economic status of each immigrant is highly influenced by his position in the labour market, making employment one the most important factors in the whole integration process. Furthermore, unemployment is a crucial factor of discrimination and social exclusion, while the level of the wage can undermine or support the integration of each immigrant in the host country (Hatziprokopiou, 2008, Dimoulas, 2006). Additionally, it should be underlined that an immigrant is influenced by all the aspects of the labour market that have an impact on natives, such as the nature of the employment, the length of the absence from the labour market (long-term unemployment), the flexibility of the labour environment, the social security rights, etc. All these factors can significantly affect the economic and social acceptance of each immigrant.
3. Accommodation and standard of living. This category includes factors such as the quality of the accommodations provided to immigrants, the possible discriminations in house renting, the development of settlements with purely nationalistic criteria or the diffusion of immigrants to the main structure of each town / city (Maroukis, 2010).
4. Access to education. It is one of the basic factors of the integration process and, mainly, concerns the children of the immigrants (Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2007). The unconditional participation of immigrants in all educational levels is a crucial step towards the social acceptance of their culture and significantly assists in creating a coherent web between

youngsters, in an environment, such as school, that is tolerant and promotes learning (Skourtou *et al.*, 2004).

5. Social integration and civil rights. Important for nurturing positive prospects for integration are issues like the operation of immigrant communities, the development of cultural activities and their participation in the public social life of the country through exposure from the media (television, radio, newspapers, internet) (Gropas, 2011). Moreover, it is evident that the integration process is more efficient when immigrants are actively participating in the common life (e.g. employment unions) and have civil rights.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Northern Greece from 1/12/2010 until 1/3/2011 by the Department of Accountancy of the University of Technological Institute of Kavala. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing 39 questions. The questionnaires were distributed randomly to immigrants who were asked to complete them anonymously and return them. The 39 questions were divided in to five sections. Section 1 consisted of seven questions related to demographic data. Section 2 consisted of five questions regarding the arrival of the immigrant to Greece. Section 3 contained three questions involving the economic status of the immigrant. Section 4 consisted of thirteen questions about the state and social conditions related to the life of the immigrant. Finally, Section 5 contained eleven questions related to legitimation of the immigrant and his/her integration to local societies. The purpose of its section is to document and analyze the specific factors that influence the integration of the immigrants. The factors used in our survey are extensively used in relevant literature (Reference??). The questions were mainly of closed type, meaning the immigrant had to choose specific answers. There was also an open type question about the nationality of the immigrant where one could answer however he/she chooses and mixed type questions where there were certain answers to choose from and an answer "other" were one could write whatever he wanted. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the program SPSS v17.

#### **5. RESULTS**

The number of immigrants who responded to our questionnaire were 714. 354 (49.6%) were men and 360 (50.4%) were women. Most of them (343 - 48%) were

in the age class of 31-65 (Table 1). This age class corresponds to the most economically active class. 346(48.5%) lived in a town, 287 (40.2%) in a village and 81 (11.3%) in small towns.

Table1 - Age classes

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-22	98	13,7	13,7
	23-30	236	33,1	46,8
	31-65	343	48,0	94,8
	65-	37	5,2	100,0
	Total	714	100,0	

The occupation of the immigrants can be seen at Table 2. One of them did not answer this question. Most of them (320 - 44.9%) are working in the private sector, while only 25 (3.5%) are working in the public sector. There is also a significant number of immigrants that is not working the whole year around, as can be seen from Table 3, while most of them have no or low incomes (Table 4). It is also noteworthy that 228 (31.9%) of them have no health and retirement insurance.

Table2 - Occupation of immigrants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Public sector	25	3,5	3,5	3,5
	Private sector	320	44,8	44,9	48,4
	Farmer	127	17,8	17,8	66,2
	Unemployed	146	20,4	20,5	86,7
	Student	61	8,5	8,6	95,2
	Retired	34	4,8	4,8	100,0
	Total	713	99,9	100,0	
	Unanswered	1	,1		
Total		714	100,0		

Table 3 - Months immigrants are working per year

	Frequency	Percent	Percent for those who answered	Cumulative Percent
12 months	156	21,8	24,8	24,8
9-12 months	160	22,4	25,5	50,3
6-9 months	141	19,7	22,5	72,8
3-6 months	85	11,9	13,5	86,3
1-3 months	86	12,0	13,7	100,0
Total	628	88,0	100,0	
Unanswered	86	12,0		
Total	714	100,0		

Table4 - Family income

	Frequency	Percent	Answered	Cumulative Percent
From 20.000 €and above	27	3,8	3,8	3,8
From 12.000 - 20.000 €	118	16,5	16,6	20,4
From 5.000 - 12.000 €	291	40,8	40,9	61,3
Up to 5.000 €	167	23,4	23,5	84,8
No income	108	15,1	15,2	100,0
Total	711	99,6	100,0	
Unanswered	3	,4		
Total	714	100,0		

Table5 - Educational Level

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Master's degree - Doctorate	5	,7	,7
Higher Level (Bachelor)	132	18,5	19,2
High School graduates	255	35,7	54,9
Elementary school graduates	217	30,4	85,3
Illiterate	105	14,7	100,0
Total	714	100,0	

Their marital status was married for 436(61.1%) of them, 233 (32.6%) single and 45 (6.3%) widower. Most of them (255 – 35.7%) were high school graduates and

only 5 (0.7%) had a postgraduate diploma. In detail the educational level of the immigrant can be seen at Table 5.

Also, there are several different nationalities that responded our questionnaire. Most of them were Albanian, followed by Russian and Bulgarian. Most of the immigrants are already staying at Greece for 10 to 20 years as one can see from Table 6 and 69.7% plan to stay at least another six years. It must be noted that 60.7% have not yet considered if they would like to return to their homeland. Most of the immigrants do not have all of their family members at Greece (Table 7). Nevertheless, 590 (82.6%) have a relative at the place they are staying at. Only 118 (16.5%) have no relatives where they live. 632 (88.5%) believes that it is very important to have a network of relatives or friends in the country they are migrating in order to facilitate their installation.

Table6 - Years at Greece

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
More than 20 years	127	17,8	17,8
10 – 20 years	288	40,3	58,1
5 – 10 years	153	21,4	79,6
2 – 5 years	107	15,0	94,5
Up to 2 years	39	5,5	100,0
Total	714	100,0	

Table 7 - Family members at Greece

	Frequency	Percent	Percent from those that answered
Everyone here	405	56,7	57,0
Not everyone	305	42,7	43,0
Total	710	99,4	100,0
Unanswered	4	,6	
Total	714	100,0	

The main reasons for leaving their country were economical.(Table 8). As far as it concerns the privileges that the government is giving them 383 (53.6%) are not taking any advantage. Nevertheless, 131 (18.35%) is taking the allowance for children, 71 (9.9%) the allowance for renting a house and 51 (7.14%) the support for helping them find a job. 253 (35.4%) they would like the government to improve their jobs, 173 (24.23%) would like the government to offer them better insurance and 148 (20.8%) better medical care. On the contrary the majority of

them (72.5%) are very pleased from the government laws that were applied for the legitimation of the immigrants. Nevertheless, 65.4% is not interested in getting the Greek citizenship or has never applied for it. It is also noteworthy that 221 (31.1%) are not paying their taxes to the state.

Table 8 - Reason for leaving their country

		Frequency	Percent	Percent from those that answered	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Economical	576	80,7	85,1	85,1
	Social	57	8,0	8,4	93,5
	Political	44	6,2	6,5	100,0
	Total	677	94,8	100,0	
	Unanswered	37	5,2		
Total		714	100,0		

They consider the most important problems they are facing with the public services (a) bureaucracy (228 – 31.9%), (b) no equal treatment compared to natives (174 - 24.4%) and (c) the language (123 - 17.2%). The language is one of the problems, since approximately only one third of them know very well the Greek language. On the other hand, 43.8% believes the problems with the public services have as a source the public officials and the system. On the other hand when they were specifically asked about how they are treated in hospitals, 340 (47.6%) replied that they were treated without discrimination from the rest of the population. Much fewer (204 - 28.5%) replied that the hospital staff treated them with suspiciousness.

As far as the general attitude of the natives towards the immigrants the replies show that (a) 96.1% of the immigrants are treated at least in an acceptable manner and better in their jobs. Furthermore, 97.7% are treated the same from their native neighbors as in their jobs. The majority of the immigrants would neither prefer to leave in a neighborhood with only immigrants or Greeks.

As far as their children are concerned, 98.1% believe that their children have the same treatment from their school teachers. Also, 94% replied the same concerning the treatment of their children from their classmates. Most of the immigrants (93.1%) also believe that the education and the relationships between their children and their classmates make them feel welcome to Greece. Furthermore, 89.6% of them consider that their children play a crucial role for their integration

to the Greek society and 88.4% are neutral to very positive if their children or even they get married to a native person.

Finally, 55.9% of the immigrants consider Greece to be a place where the cultural differences are respected.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

The aforementioned results are analysed through the perspective of the five main factors that are described in the introduction section and concern the integration of the immigrants to the society.

The first factor which is the most important involves the legal status about immigration and immigrants. The survey indicates that 2 out of three immigrants in our sample are legal which means that they have solved one of the main problems for their integration. It is only when the immigrant has settled the legal status for his/her presence in a country that he/she can ensure the proper conditions for integration.

The rest one third of our survey refers to the illegal immigrants leaving in Greece. The second factor concerning the integration of the immigrants is the prospect of occupation in the hosting country. The occupation either partial or even better full constitutes a major factor in the integration process of the immigrants. The results of the survey show that 20% of the interviewers are unemployed. This implies that integration to the Greek society is a difficult task. The rest of the immigrants replied in 50% that are occupied at least 9 months in a year. These immigrants have a higher social and economic profile which facilitates their integration.

The third factor is about the cohabitation with natives. The statistic results are interesting, since two thirds of the interviewers reject the possibility of leaving in neighborhoods either with solely Greeks or with immigrants. This fact shows their disposal to adapt to multinational cohabitation.

The fourth factor concerns the education of the immigrants. It is interesting that an adequate number of immigrants believe that they know the Greek language good enough and thus can better communicate, interact and cooperate with other citizens and thus become social accepted. It is even more interesting that the vast majority of the immigrants' children that are considered to be the most important foundation of the integration process of the whole family believe that their

teachers, classmates and their friends are positive towards them. Thus, we can conclude that the immigrants' children mobilize and accelerate the integration of their parents in the hosting country.

The fifth factor involves the social integration and political rights of the immigrants. As far as the rate of acceptance of the immigrants from institutions, services and people is concerned the survey indicates that are considerable problems. The problems are mainly about general public services, while one third of the immigrants face also problems with the hospitals. Nevertheless, it is positive that 88.4% is neutral to positive towards the marriage with a native of their children or even of themselves.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

It is evident from our survey that the immigrants are generally happy with their stay in Greece. The main problems they are facing concern public services and bureaucracy, but this is also a major problem for the natives. It is very hopeful the majority of the immigrants consider Greece to be a place where the cultural differences are respected and can relatively easy integrate with local societies.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research was supported by the Research and Education Commission of Kavala Institute of Technology under the project 'Immigrants and local economy/society - 15 years later'.

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