

# Migration to Greece: A New Type and Emerging Problems

*Laura Alipranti-Maratou*

Greece is a country with an age-long tradition in emigration and population movements due to specific historical factors. In the twentieth century certain political, economic and family reasons caused a large outflow of Greeks and nearly one million emigrated to western Europe (mostly Germany) and overseas countries (USA, Canada, Australia etc). However, in recent years Greece has witnessed a major reversal of historical patterns and become the hosting country of a large number of immigrants. Since the early 1980s, immigration has increased considerably and Greece has become an immigration country and an attractive destination or transit point for illegal migration. Contemporary migrations are more likely to be of a transnational nature. Given that context, this study presents recent movements of foreign population in Greece which are thought to have induced a “new” type of migration. It will also refer to emerging problems.

## Introduction

The analysis of migration has become an interdisciplinary study area for comparative history, economics and the political and social sciences. Emigration and immigration may seem to be new phenomena in a particular place and time but in reality population movements have a long history and understanding through which the old and the new emerge (Green, 2004).

In the nineteenth century, massive migration was mainly labour migration. From then on economic factors have constituted the prime motive in the migration movements. The migrant is not only a foreigner but he/she is also a worker. Work is required for survival while integration will take place in relation to the migrant's past and the present social context. The concept of the “other” is constructed in relation to his/her economic and socio-cultural role.

Contemporary migrations are more likely to be of a transnational nature, while earlier migrations were more often, though never always, of a more permanent nature. The term “international migration” is a broader, more inclusive one and refers to permanent migration, contrary to the recent, transnational, circular

movements, which are more likely to involve “new” types of migration. In addition migration problems have become more complex in the last decades because of various international developments, including the continuing globalisation of the world economy and the recent collapse of the Soviet bloc (King and Black, 1997; Bahr et al., 2002; Tastsoglou and Maratou-Alipranti, 2002).

In the framework of this study, we will present a brief historical retrospective of the issue of migration to Greece, as national context is important in understanding immigration. In a second stage we will examine immigration movement and current efforts of the Greek state to set up an immigration policy as well as emerging problems resulting from the settlement of foreign migrants in the country.

## **Structural background: Emigration of Greeks, nineteenth and twentieth centuries**

Greece is a country with an age-long tradition in emigration and population movements due to specific historical situations which occurred throughout the period of the Ottoman Empire. *Η ξενιτιά*, that is, “staying in foreign countries”, which in most cases became a permanent exile from the home country, has been transformed into a unique historical experience for the Greeks in recent years (Clogg, 2004).

During the Ottoman rule, Greeks settled in important urban centres of Europe; by becoming members of social-religious communities, these immigrants therefore contributed to the formation of a Greek diaspora. Greeks abroad maintained sentimental, cultural, and financial bonds with Greece in various ways. Thus, keeping their national identity contributed to the preservation of the Greek nation as a notion of self-reference (Chassiotis, 1993).

The three broad waves of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries followed totally different routes:

- Firstly in the 1890s, as a result of economic crisis in the kingdom of Greece, a great wave of emigration to the U.S. started that lasted until the beginning of the First World War.
- Secondly, in the 1920s and 1930s, with the introduction of the quota system there, Greek migration to the U.S. almost ended, but limited migration to South America, Africa and Australia picked up during that period.
- Finally the third migratory wave took place from the 1950s till the mid 1970s. During this period political, economic and family reasons caused a large outflow of Greeks (nearly one and a half million young Greeks), mostly to Australia and Canada, but also to western European countries (mostly to Germany) (Clogg, 1999).

This massive emigration offered a solution to the acute unemployment of that period. However, in the long run, it has produced many negative consequences, namely an ageing population structure and significant depopulation of rural areas (Emke-Poulopoulou, 1986; Fakiolas, 1996).

The Greek diaspora today consists of three to four million people globally. Australia, Canada and the US account for half of these communities; while the USA alone is home to around 30 per cent of the Greeks abroad.

## Foreign population in Greece

In the 1980s, slowly but steadily, the first flows of migrants make their appearance in southern European countries (Italy, Greece, Spain). At first these countries constitute a "forefront" for the newcomers to enable them later to move towards western Europe or more distant countries (King, Lazaridis and Tsardanidis, 2000). Southern Europe, which was once an area that exported migrants, has witnessed a major reversal of historical patterns and became the receiver of large numbers of migrants (both economic migrants and refugees). This immigration has been explained in terms of a combination of factors: geographical location, economic and social development and transformation of the region to post-fordist structures (that is tertiarisation, flexibility and informality) (King and Black, 1997).

In the case of Greece the rapid growth of the economy and the particular conditions of development resulted in shortages in the labour market, and in the 1980s the country started attracting foreign workers. Since 1990, after the collapse of communist regimes in central and eastern Europe illegal immigration has increased considerably (Mavrakakis, Parsanoglou and Pavlou, 2001; Chletsos, 2001; Drettakis, 2001; Fakiolas, 2001).

Undoubtedly, the major factors which gave a new turn in migratory movement were: a) the 1988–1991 political changes in the former socialist countries, b) the ethnic and political conflicts in the Balkan countries with the collapse of the Albanian regime, and c) the demographic push in many Third World countries.

Official data from the Greek National Statistical Service (NSSG) show that in 1951 approximately 30,000 foreigners lived in Greece and in 1981 171,424. In the recent population census in 2001, the total foreign population was about 800,000 people and 45% of them were women. The same year the general total population of Greece (Greeks and foreigners) was 10,964,080 people (Tzortzopoulou, 2005).

Immigrants in Greece fall into three categories: a) legal foreign workers, permanent and temporary; b) illegal foreign workers without a residence or work permit; and c) ethnic Greeks.

Certainly, economic, socio-cultural, and geopolitical conditions favour illegal immigration into Greece. Economic conditions include: the growing underground economy; the relatively limited flexibility of the local labour market (limited part-time jobs for young people, housewives etc.); the high seasonality of the Greek

economy (three major sectors — agriculture, tourism and construction — have seasonal peaks in the summer) (Baldwin-Edwards and Aranjó, 1999; King, Lazaridis and Tsardanidis, 2000).

The illegal flow of Albanians who cross the mountainous borders and the arrival of immigrants from other eastern European countries continued until recently despite a repressive immigration law implemented in 1991. In 1997 (before the legalisation processes) illegal immigrants were estimated at around 600–750,000 people.

Parallel to these developments since the 1980s a distinctive migration movement towards Greece has made its appearance and has intensified in recent years. A great number of newly arrived migrants were ethnic Greeks from the former Soviet Union (the Pontians) and from Albania (Vorio-Epirotes).

### *Ethnic Greek: Pontians and Vorio-Epirotes*

The Pontians had settled in the former Soviet Union in the nineteenth century or earlier and it is estimated that there are about 500,000 there. With the Perestroika reforms, their ethnic identity has been recognised and they have the option to return to Greece. The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that 200,000 Pontians have returned, of whom only about half have official papers (Kassimati, 1992; Kassimati, 2003).

People who can prove Greek ethnicity are immediately recognised and entitled to special treatment. They immediately obtain a work permit and have a right to social security and other benefits. However, they face many problems: the dialect they speak is not easily comprehensible and they encounter economic problems such as housing, finding employment and learning Greek (Georgoulas, 2003; Kassimati, 2003).

The second group is that of the Vorio-Epirotes, who are members of the Greek minority group in southern Albania. Albanian nationalism resulted in the oppression of the national minorities — including Greeks — and so the hidden hostility towards the minorities after the fall of the communist regime forced a great number of Vorio-Epirotes to leave their homes in southern Albania. From the late 1980s ethnic Greeks/Vorio-Epirotes have been assisted to settle in Greece legally. It is estimated that almost 80,000 Albanians of Greek ethnicity live in Greece and their integration into Greek society presents problems identical to those of the Pontians (Kassimati, 2003).

### **Efforts at resolution: the legalisation process**

Much later than in the three other southern European countries in 1998 a legalisation procedure for the regularisation of illegal migrants started in Greece (Presidential decrees 358/1997 and 359/1997) which grants them the right of residence and guarantees the same treatment as to Greek citizens in the labour market, the

right to free treatment in state hospitals in emergency cases, and to their children the right to enrol in state schools.

The participation of 372,000 foreigners in this first Greek legalisation programme make it the most important plan undertaken by a southern European country. Regarding their country of origin 91% of them come from 10 countries. Almost two thirds come from neighbouring Albania (65%); other large groups include Bulgarians (6.7%), Romanians (4.5%), Poles (2.3%), Ukrainians (2.7%), Georgians (2.0%), and Filipinos (1.5%) (Kavounidis, 2002).

Immigrant women are about a quarter of total immigrants. However, in many specific ethnic groups women outnumber men, giving emphasis to the ongoing feminisation of migration. For example they make up 78.6% of the Ukrainian immigrants, 61.7% of the Georgians, 73.3% of the Russians and 81% of the Filipinos (Kavounidis, 2002; Maratou-Alipranti and Fakiolas, 2003).

The 2001 immigration law (29.10.2001) also contained a last minute legalisation process and made little innovation other than devolving to local authorities the power to grant one year work and residence permits. The number of applicants for permits in the second program was recorded as 351,000 — a figure which fits well with the 2001 Census data of around 360,000 foreign workers without EU nationality or ethnic Greek status.

A new opportunity for legalisation was provided by the recent law (3386/2005) that gave the possibility to 145,000 foreign workers living illegally in Greece to submit their application in order that they and the members of their family (spouses and children) may obtain a permit to stay. The same law introduces a series of very important breakthrough measures and contributes greatly towards the elimination of the state bureaucracy. Moreover, regulations for social integration and inclusion of migrants within Greek society are for the first time established by law.

Certainly, the legalisation processes that have been applied so far aim to restrict the flow of immigrants by strengthening external and internal controls and to prevent other migrants from entering Greece illegally.

## **Demographic and economic characteristics of the foreign population**

In the 2001 Population Census some data were collected and in particular for those “who have declared that they have settled in Greece for employment reasons”. Examining the basic reasons for the settlement of immigrants in Greece we realise that the most important reason is seeking work, that is, 54% of male and 49% of female foreigners came to Greece to find a job and only 13% of the male immigrants and 15% of the female arrived for family reunion (Tzortzopoulou, 2005; Maratou-Alipranti and Gazon, 2005).

Investigating the age structure of the Greek and the alien population it is clear that aliens are younger than Greeks. The vast majority of foreigners are of working age: 80% of the total were under 45 years of age and only 17% were older than 45 years of age, providing more evidence that the bulk of immigrants came into the country for employment purposes. On the other hand, the number of people above 65 years represents 3.4% of aliens compared to 18% of Greeks (Tzortzopoulou, 2002 and 2005; Bagavos, 2003; Maratou-Alipranti and Gazon, 2005).

Regarding marital status, as expected, there are more married women than men (62.7% and 51.3% respectively). The proportion of divorced people seems to be low for both men and women (6% and 9%). Finally, immigrants are relatively young, more than one third being unmarried (35% in total but only 22% of women).

Recent immigrants in Greece are educated and very different from the post-Second World War migration flows to the developed overseas countries, when the majority of the migrants were peasants and mostly illiterate. This is because great numbers of immigrants come from the former socialist countries which have had long-established practices of nine-year compulsory school education and extended technical training. Statistical data show that the educational level of foreigners settled in Greece is quite high and the differences between the native population and the foreigners are not important: 87.4% of the aliens have a secondary level certificate as against 84.2% of the total population (Tzortzopoulou, 2005).

Examining the employment profile of the foreign population we see that 9.5% of the total labour force are foreigners, who comprise 13% of all salaried employees. Foreign working women constitute 30.9% (120,903) of the foreign labour force while the percentage of Greek working women is slightly higher: 37.3% (1,384,167) (Maratou-Alipranti and Gazon, 2005).

The predominant employment of foreign male migrants is in the construction sector (42%) followed by agriculture (23%), and industry (12%). Female employment is quite different and we found the majority of women in personal services (housekeeping) (52%), in tourism (19%) and in agriculture (15%), the smallest percentage being in industry (9%).

Immigrants in Greece work in a highly segmented labour market, doing temporary, part-time, heavy or dangerous work, that is, the jobs that Greeks refuse to do, especially in construction, heavy industry and agriculture (Fakiolas, 2000; Bagavos and Papadopoulou, 2003; Baldwin-Edwards, 2005; Kassimis et al., 2003).

## Emerging problems

### *Economic consequences of immigration*

In general the investigation of the consequences of immigration is related to the country of origin as well as to the receiving country. The relatively limited research on the impact of immigration on economic growth has indicated an “unsettled relationship” between them (Moussourou, 2003).

As far as the economic implications in the receiving country are concerned there are references in the international literature, primarily to the effects which are caused in the labour market and how the employment of immigrants increases the unemployment of the local unskilled workers.

A characteristic of the recent immigration in southern Europe is that it coexists with high unemployment rates and underemployment in the countries of reception. It should also be noted that in the 1990s Spain, Italy and Greece had the highest unemployment rates in Europe, whereas at the same time they were countries of massive reception of migrants. In Greece, unlike other countries, the unemployment rate for immigrants is higher than that of the natives and it is relatively high for both (more than 11% for Greeks and 12.5% for foreigners in 2003) (Lianos, 2003).

On the other hand there are many indications of a positive effect of immigration on Greek economic growth. As empirical data have shown, the foreigners contribute approximately 10–15% of the country's GNP (Gross National Product) whereas the real impact on wages and unemployment is low (Georgoulas, 2003). Another study which investigated the implications of illegal migration in the economy of northern Greece discovered that illegal migrants receive payment that amounts to 60% of the payments received by Greeks, and that they have partly replaced the Greek workers in the unskilled jobs (Lianos, Sarris and Katseli, 1996). In addition, many enterprises that use immigrants as a cheap labour force would probably have been shut down if the labour costs were higher. It is also pointed out that migrants are mainly used in the illegal market, which results in the inflation of that part of GDP that is not registered, with the consequence that the government loses revenue (Fakiolas, 2000).

A recent study of the socio-economic implications of migrant labour in rural Greece shows that overall these were positive. It is suggested that the inflow of migrants contributed to the economic and demographic revival of the depopulated rural areas. Immigrants covered labour needs and gave the possibility to many peasants to keep, restructure and improve their rural activity (Kassimis et al., 2003).

However, some of the negative effects of immigration include large expenses for applying external and internal controls and social security costs. Indeed, the recent report by the Greek police on illegal migration describes the following negative implications of illegal migration:

- Increase of unemployment;
- Increase of criminality;
- A sense of insecurity among people residing in the border areas;
- Increase of xenophobia and racism;
- High costs for police safety patrols and the repatriation of illegal immigrants (Delithanassi, 2005).

In addition, a study of the impact of migration on the social security system reveals that the integration of foreigners into the local labour market adds to the operation of the pension system in the sense that a large percentage of foreigners in proportion to the whole population pay contributions towards the pensions of Greek senior citizens. In the long term, however, when all these foreigners receive the occupational pension income which corresponds to the proportion of their contributions, the economic viability of the system will be subverted (Maratou-Alipranti and Gazon, 2005).

### *Perception of social problems*

The sharp and sudden change of Greece into a country of reception found both the state and the citizens unprepared. The new situation created conditions of xenophobic behaviour both on the part of the state and the part of citizens. The legislative framework which existed until then was fragmentary and served previous needs which had changed significantly. However, political reaction was spasmodic and the lack of experience in dealing with emigration pressures led inevitably and initially to the reproduction of the western European model of “guest workers” (Moussourou, 2003; Kapsalis and Linardos-Rylmon, 2005).

Racism and xenophobia in Greece have not been expressed through a collective political behaviour as is the case in other European countries. Nonetheless, studies on attitudes and perceptions of the “other” have shown that there are conservative and negative attitudes towards aliens. The Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey (ESS) also verify these tendencies. Many Greeks view aliens with suspicion and insist on the restriction of their rights. In addition, many Greeks hold the aliens responsible for unemployment (EKKE, 2003).

During the last decade, the threatening “other” is personified primarily as the Albanian, who is regarded as equivalent to a dangerous criminal. A relevant study has shown that the negative perceptions of Albanians as “bad”, “hostile”, “cunning”, “nosy”, “difficult” and “insincere” are related to a general perception that they have committed crimes. In addition, the same study indicates that 92% of people believe that there is racism in Greece while 65% consider the behaviour of immigrants to be the main cause of racism. In line with that, 49% believe that the media are responsible for the racism due to their overall negative representations of the immigrants (Galanis, 2003).

There are also regional variations regarding the perceptions of immigrants throughout Greece, with the most negative being found in regions close to the Albanian border, Macedonia and in the city of Thessaloniki as “the region of Macedonia constitutes the ‘first portal’ for the reception of the influx of immigrants from neighboring countries, and also troubled areas of the Balkans” (Michalopoulou et al., 1998:67).



Moreover, the recent report of the European Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia reveals that 87% of the Greek people have negative attitudes towards the phenomenon of migration (the highest percentage) and 59% are unfavourable towards multiculturalism. The report also shows that the Greek public is generally less tolerant of cultural difference than other Europeans. Finally, it should be noted that proper education and the media can influence public opinion to a large extent (Delithanassi, 2005).

However, the migration policy that has been applied so far is not effective and the Greek state does not have a specific policy of supporting and integrating the migrants, a situation which reinforces their inferior legal and social position within Greek society (Pavlou and Christopoulos, 2004).

## Conclusions

Greece as a country with an age-long tradition of emigration has since the 1980s become a reception country for hundred of thousands of migrants. Nevertheless, the migration model differs to a large extent from earlier postwar migrations. Contemporary migration is more likely to be of a transnational nature, while earlier migrations were more often of a more permanent nature. Contemporary circular movements are more likely to involve new types of migration.

The multiplicity and heterogeneity of nationalities, the asymmetry of male and female migrant population, the non rural origin, the relatively high educational level all characterise the migrant population in Greece.

Immigrants are mainly engaged in the construction sector, in personal services and in commerce, in tourism (hotels, restaurants) and in the agricultural sector, and undertake semi-skilled and unskilled jobs which the indigenous workers are not willing to do. Relating to ethnic Greeks (Vorio-Epirotes and Pontians), specific regulations were made for their acquisition of Greek nationality and integration in the country.

The implications of the migrant inflow to Greece are multiple. Some are positive and others are negative. The most important implication has been that migration tackled the gaps in the labour market and contributed significantly to the revival of the rural sector. Another characteristic is that recent immigration coexists with high unemployment rates.

However, the Greek state did not have adequate experience to properly tackle the complex issues raised by the arrival of large numbers of economic immigrants. Although three legalisation programs have been applied, the lack of integration policy contributes to the preservation of issues of racism and xenophobia.

The growing immigration into Greece poses a very significant challenge and it will undoubtedly influence the structure of society and open up a new era in the country with eventual outcomes which are as yet unclear. Migration to

southern Europe and to Greece more particularly has been correctly characterised as “post-industrial” compared to migration to the developed countries in previous decades.

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