

Cross-border migration, integration and expectations: A case study

1. Introduction

Immigration is a socioeconomic phenomenon which, dating back to the ancient times, is still present and will be constantly existing, and, thus, has variously attracted the attention of a number of researchers, academics, institutions and states.

Overall, immigration is distinguished as *external* and *internal*, *involuntary* and *voluntary*, *primary* and *secondary*, *incomplete* and *complete*, *innovative* and *conservative* and also *short-term* and *long-term*. In his analysis of migration flows, Robert Gordon Latham, an ethnologist, has distinguished two types of migration: *primary* and *secondary*, whereas Mayo-Smith has described migration as *external* and *internal*. In addition, Saunders has made a further distinction of migration as *continental* and *intercontinental*, considering either the desire or the intention of the immigrant as the cause of movement (Psaraki & Hadjidaki, 2014), and J. Isaac has included involuntary migration in the broader term of 'migration', thus, differentiating voluntary from involuntary migration. Finally, W. Peterson argues for two types of migration, namely *innovative* and *conservative*, and holds the view that these types of migration are related to the impact of migration on the host country (Psaraki & Hadjidaki, 2014).

The integration of immigrants in the host society has been emphasized by various academics and researchers (Katarachia, Pitoska, 2014). The immigrants' attempts to be integrated in the host society involves specific stages (Papaioannou, 2003:1982). In the first stage, immigrants arrive in the host country and try to cope up with the first, new and difficult circumstances. During this stage, integration is rather incomplete and immigrants believe that their stay in the host country will be short-term.

In the second stage, immigrants reexamine their plans for return to the country of origin, cope up with difficulties more dynamically and, depending on employment status, they also define their social status.

In the third stage, the conflict between problems and plans to return to the country of origin is moderated. During this stage, immigrants start changing their lifestyles.

In the fourth stage, when immigrants have lived in the host country for at least 20 years, they strive for establishing the best possible conditions and opportunities for their children and insuring their own pension income.

The Chicago School has named the specific settlement procedure as 'race relations cycle', comprising four stages: a) competition, b) conflict, c) accommodation and d) assimilation, during which national differences disappear (Martikainen, 2005).

The above mentioned approaches are inextricably linked to the causes of immigration, among which economic growth has been the major, motivating and driving factor. Integration is distinguished in a) economic integration (access to employment, economic independence, etc.), b) social integration (access to social insurance, public goods, etc.) and c) civil integration (active participation in politics). Along with the aforementioned distinctions, there is also the dimension of interculturalism, which corresponds to cultural integration (Kontis, 2001).

Immigration has always been an ongoing process in Greece, either as a home or host country. Since the 90s, Greece has received a considerable number of immigrants from the neighbouring country of Albania.

The present paper aims at identifying the degree of integration of Albanian immigrants in the Greek society and economy, the impact of the economic crisis on the immigrants' lives and their future expectations. The research topic has been explored through a relevant literature review and a field research, carried out during the first three months of 2016, by administering a questionnaire to Albanian immigrants living and working in Greece, and more specifically, in the region of Larisa. 100 questionnaires were completed via personal interviews. The research results demonstrate that the Albanian immigrants have been considerably integrated both in the Greek society and economy. The research also provides insights regarding the immigrants' satisfaction with services, their expectations, as well as the difficulties that the economic crisis has brought about in several aspects of their lives.

2. Albanian immigrants & immigration policy

Greece, which used to be a country of emigrants from 1950s to 1970s, has lately become a receiving country for immigrants. Since the second half of 1980s, Greece has been faced with an influx of immigrants from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as a result of the process of liberation of the countries of real socialism. The influx of immigrants reached a climax in the early 1990s when Albanians started migrating to Greece. A number of migrant groups were considered to be of Greek origin (Pontians from the former Soviet Union and Albania) and were eligible to residence and work permit. However, an overwhelming majority of them did not belong to this category and were identified as immigrants of non-legal status ("undocumented") (Cavounidis, 2002).

The sudden influx of immigrants was rather impromptu for Greece, and the government made attempts to form a relevant immigration policy. Law 1975/1991 entitled "Entrance-exit, residence, employment, and deportation of aliens, regularization scheme of refugees and other provisions" was mainly aimed at reducing immigration rates and facilitating deportation of illegal immigrants and migrants who lived temporarily in Greece. After a long period of delays, Greece enforced the first regularization scheme in 1998 following two presidential decrees, implemented in two successive stages (Cavounidis, 2002). The second regularization scheme was introduced - before the first one had been implemented - with the enactment of Law 2910/2001 entitled "Entrance and residence of aliens in the Greek territory, naturalization and other measures", principally aiming at increasing the beneficiaries previously excluded in the first scheme. As permits were originally issued only for one year, causing serious problems both to the competent authorities and the immigrants who had cut down on time and monetary costs, the programme was revised in January 2004 (Law 3202/2003) to issue permits of two-year duration, and, consequently, to facilitate procedures.

According to the Ministry of Domestic Affairs, in April 2016, the number of registered legal immigrants from Albania was 378,023. Of these, 41,831 immigrants possess a stay and work permit; 31,385 are men, and 10,446 women. Additionally,

176,374 immigrants (113,773 men and 62,601 women) are registered with other types of residence permits (long-term resident, ten-year resident, permanent residents, special document, spouse of a Greek citizen, second generation migrants, exceptional reasons), whereas 168,558 immigrants are registered for family reunification reasons (66,105 men and 102,453 women). In addition, 98 men and 162 women have been qualified for study permits. Overall, the total migrant population from Albania is: 211.361 Men, 175.662 Women, Total 387.023.

3. The empirical research and the findings

To investigate the degree of integration of Albanian immigrants in the Greek society and economy as well as the impact of the economic crisis on the immigrants' lives and their future expectations, an empirical research was carried out. The field research was carried out during the first trimester of 2016, by means of questionnaires administered to Albanian immigrants living and working in Greece, and more particularly, in the region of Larisa. 100 questionnaires were completed via personal interviews.

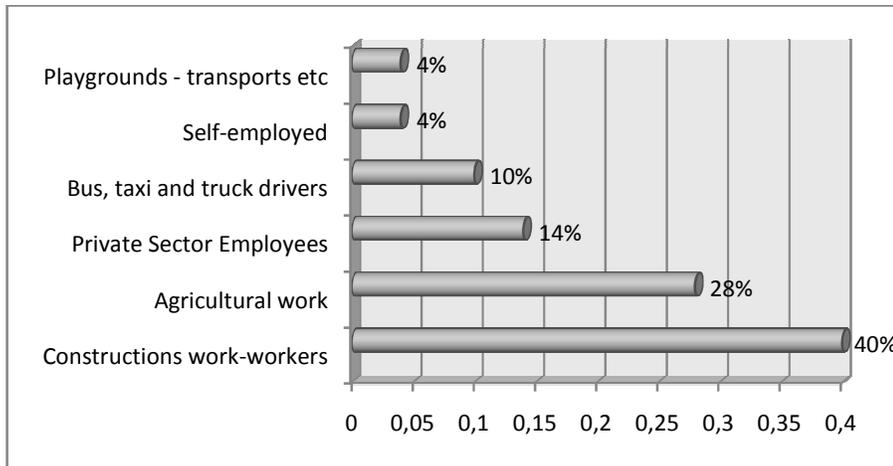
The research analysis demonstrated that:

The survey sample was comprised mostly of male participants (71%), whereas female ones were fewer (29%). Of these, 51% were born in Albania and 49% in Greece. Regarding the date of entry in Greece, it appears that 65% came to Greece from 1990 to 2000, and 36% came to Greece after 2001. In terms of the subjects' marital status, the results demonstrated that 58% were married, 38% single and 4% divorced. The majority (74%) of the Albanian immigrants surveyed in Greece had been married in the host country, whereas a smaller percentage (26%) had been married in Albania. The survey also demonstrated that family size varied from 1-2 children (64%) to over two children (36%).

On arriving in Greece, the subjects were forced to work in various jobs in order to be able to survive. The majority of those surveyed (82%) were employed in construction work, whereas 18% in agricultural jobs.

Present occupation, which is obviously different from the past, is shown in the following Figure (Fig.1).

Figure 1: Present occupation



57% of the respondents were registered for a Social Insurance Institute scheme (IKA), whereas 32% for the Organization for the Insurance of Liberal Professionals (OAEE), and, finally, 11% for the Organization for Agricultural Insurance (OGA).

As regards the respondents' educational status, 25% are Vocational High School graduates, 22% Vocational Training Institute graduates, and 22% are qualified with a Higher Education degree. In addition, 14% of the respondents have graduated Senior High School and 11% Junior High School or Primary School, respectively.

According to the respondents, the difficulties encountered on arrival in Greece were rather few. In detail, 46% stated that they had difficulty in adapting to the new place of residence, 30% in finding a job and, finally, 24% answered that they had problems with the native population's cautious attitudes / bias. On arriving in Greece, 24% of the subjects stated that they met relations or friends who lived in the country, whereas 76% answered negatively. They were mainly supported by their compatriots who had already settled in Greece (89%), by Greek citizens (83%) and the church (46%).

Nowadays, about 25 years later, it is worth noting that the majority (69%) have made Greek friends, whereas only 31% that their friends are only Albanian immigrants.

Integration in Greece is also demonstrated by the immigrants' being familiar with and fostering Greek tradition and customs. In detail, 76% of the subjects maintain that they are familiar with wedding customs, although 24% are not. Similarly, the majority of the participants (72%) are familiar with funeral rituals, as opposed to 28% who are not.

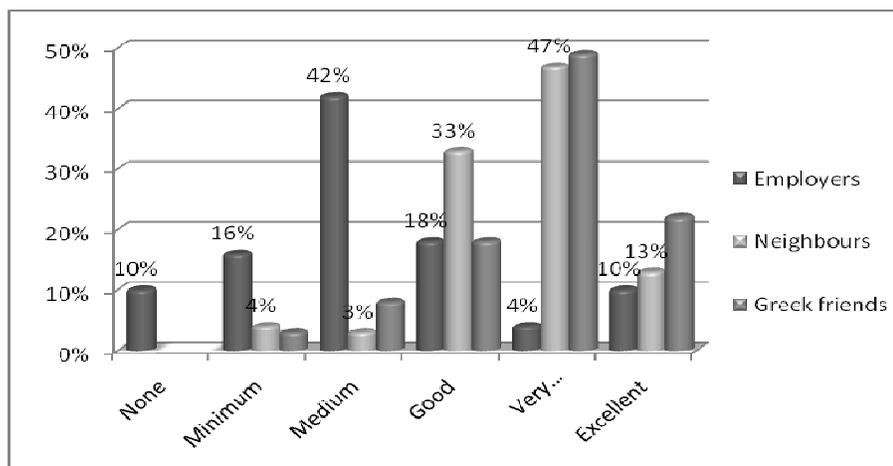
Distress feelings caused by separation from homeland are reported by 55% of the respondents, whereas 45% answered they do not feel homesick after settlement in their new country. In addition, 58% feel a desire for permanent residence in their hometown, in contrast to 42% who do not wish to return home for permanent residence. The percentage of those who have decided to be permanent residents in Greece is slightly different (44%); however, 56% of the subjects claim they do not wish to live permanently in Greece. An overwhelming majority (86%) do not wish to live in any other country except for Greece or Albania, and only 14% of the sample answered they would like to live in another country, where close relatives live.

Remarkably, and according to 55% of the respondents, Greece is a place they would desire to buy property, in contrast to those who wish to buy a home in Albania.

In addition, 71% of the respondents stated that they frequently visit their hometown, whereas 29% answered that they rarely visit home and only for a very short time. After settling in Greece, 74% of the respondents stated that they send money to their country of origin, whereas 26% do not. As far as communication is concerned, the majority (82%) maintained they had regular telephone communication with people in their native country, and 18% answered they had rather rare communication; no participants answered negatively about communication.

As regards the subjects' views about Greek employers, 42% of the respondents claimed that their opinion about employers is fairly good, 18% good, 16% not very good, and finally 10% and 4% excellent, very good or negative. In addition, 47% of the respondents stated that their opinion about their Greek neighbours is very good, whereas 33% say it is good. In relation to their opinion about Greek friends, 49% answered their relationship is very good and 22% excellent.

Figure 2: Relationship evaluation



As regards the immigrants' attitudes towards Greek local authorities, 40% answered they had a positive attitude, and a lower percentage (23%) answered their attitudes to Greek authorities were fairly positive.

Municipal services were rated high (48%) by the participating immigrants, 67% of whom claim that the services offered by the Work Permit Office are good and fairly good, or, according to 12% of the respondents, very good. Similarly, 69% of the subjects answered that residence permit services are good, whereas 22% believe they are very good and 7% and 2% excellent and fairly good, respectively.

As far as their views about the Hellenic Police are concerned, 47% of the respondents answered they are positive. Highly rated are the services offered by the Social Insurance Institute (IKA) (39%) and the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) (49%). The quality of services offered by the Agricultural Insurance Organization is rated as fairly good (47%) and good (25%). According to the answers given by 53% of the participants in the present study, the quality of Greek education is very high. In addition, 35% of the survey respondents state that the quality of the Greek Health System services is good and 23% very good. As regards bank services, 45% of the subjects answered that the quality of Greek bank services is fairly good

and 40% good. The following table (Table 1) shows an overview of the given answers.

Table 1: Evaluation of Greek Services / Institutions

	Negative	Not good	Fairly good	Good	Very good	Excellent
Local Authorities	3%	12%	23%	40%	12%	10%
Municipal services		3%	37%	48%	10%	2%
Work permit service		4%	12%	67%	12%	5%
Residence permit service			2%	69%	22%	7%
Hellenic Police		4%	9	47%	26%	14%
Social Insurance Institute	7%	8%	37	39%	9%	
Manpower Employment Organization			5	49%	40%	6%
Agricultural Insurance Organization	10%	10%	47	25%	8%	
Education			6	22%	53%	19%
National Health System	15%	6%	21	35%	23%	
Greek Banks			45%	40%	12%	3%

The Albanian immigrants in Greece have been experiencing difficulties owing to the prolonged economic crisis in the country, such as high unemployment rates, low income, high rent rates, food, clothing, footwear, health, children upbringing and education. In detail, the difficulties encountered by immigrants are shown in Fig. 3 and Table 2 below.

Figure 3: Degree of difficulties

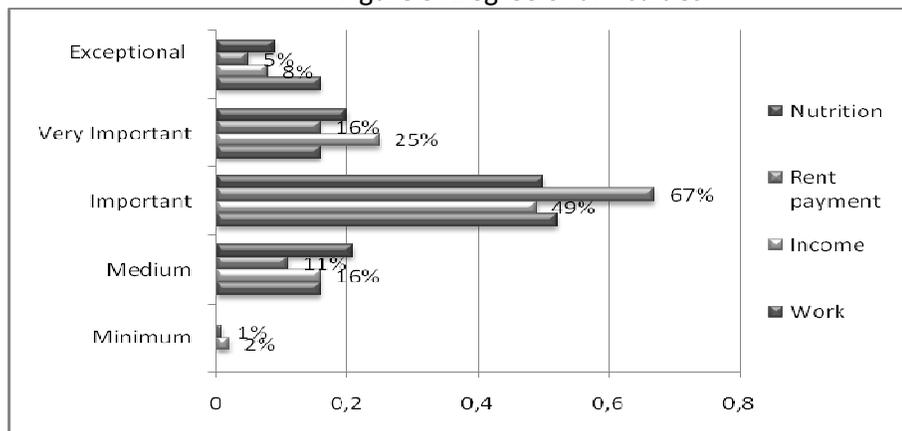


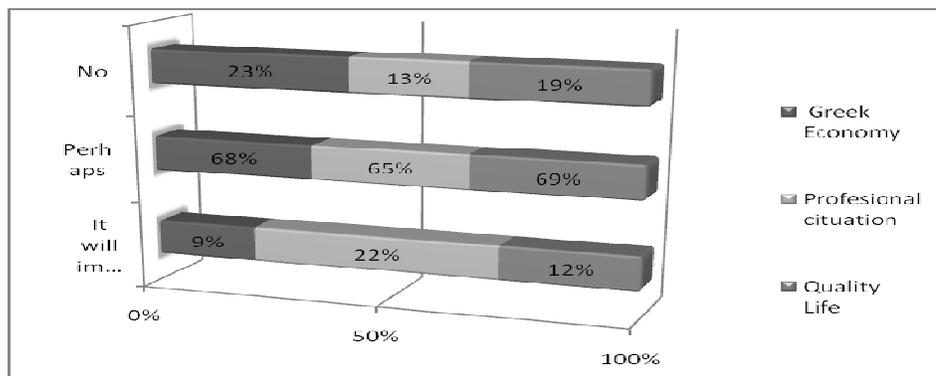
Table 2: Degree of difficulties

	Clothing & Footwear	Entertainment	Health	Raising children	Education
Rather			42%	4%	17%

serious					
Serious	4%	35%	51%	40%	67%
Very serious	35%	60%	60%	41%	14%
Exceptional	61%	5%		15%	2%

As regards their views about the future of the Greek economy, the participating immigrants were rather skeptical, as 68% of them believe that it is likely to improve and only 9% believe it has been improving. Similar are the views about professional status and quality of life improvement.

Figure 4: Views about the future



Conclusions

Economic migrants who originate in neighboring Albania and have settled in Greece have so far gone through four stages in relation to the local society and economy.

In the early 1990s, they had to face migration problems and problems related to job security. Their jobs during the early stages were mostly manual (builders, workers) and the most significant problems they encountered were related to language and state services.

After about 25 years of residence in Greece, the Albanian immigrants, now in the fourth stage, have been striving to insure the best possible conditions and prospects for their children and also for their personal future retirement.

They have significantly improved their professional and work status and have gained considerable professional experience. They are also less engaged in manual work. An overwhelming majority are social security beneficiaries and enjoy public goods (i.e. education), have gained social status and are acculturated in local societies.

In addition, they are socially integrated in the host country to a significant extent, they have made Greek friends, are familiar with local customs and in case of a difficult situation, they are supported by Greek natives. In addition, they have kept contact with the country of origin, despite the fact that their desire and expectations to come back home have weakened.

In conclusion, the economic migrants from Albania in Greece appear to have been satisfactorily integrated in the local economy and society after a 25-year period.

It is also worth noting that the economic crisis in Greece has caused significant problems to economic migrants as well, in relation to employment, income, food, raising children, etc.

Finally, in relation to the Greek economy and their future prospects, the participating immigrants appear to be very skeptical.

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