Country Focus: Migration of Greek nationals during the crisis

Ruby Gropas and Anna Triandafyllidou

Global Governance Programme, European University Institute (EUI)

Background

In 2013, the EUI's Global Governance Programme launched an e-survey to gather new qualitative data on high-skill emigration from five EU Member States hard hit by the crisis: Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. The e-survey was launched in collaboration with Real Elcano Institute, Trinity College Dublin and the Technical University of Lisbon. It was launched simultaneously in five languages (English, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish) and ran between 21st May and 18th August 2013.

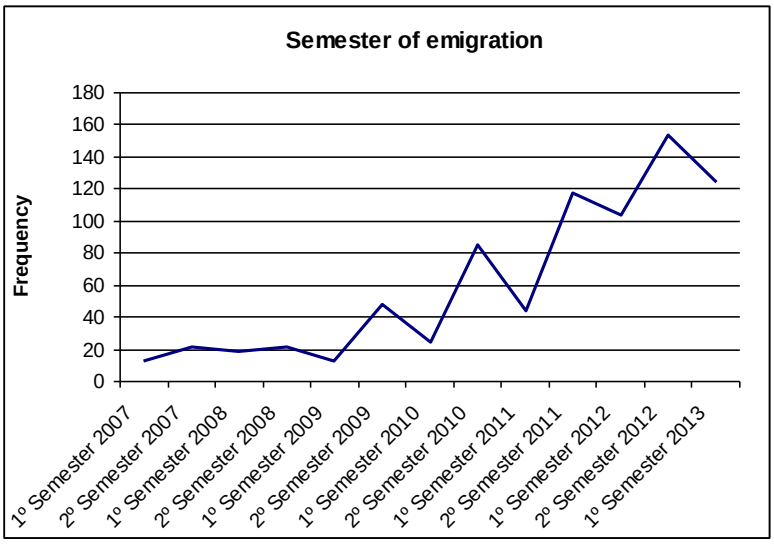
In this report we focus on the Greek respondents. While not representative of all those who have left Greece since the outbreak of the crisis, the material we collected through this e-survey presents new insights into the socio-demographic profile, family situation, educational and professional background of Greek nationals who have left Greece in recent years. We also present information about their destinations, their experiences in the destination countries, particularly with regards to their employment, as well as their intentions to settle in the destination country, return to the country of origin, or migrate further. The e-survey also included four open questions providing rich additional qualitative information.

Out of a total of 6,750 valid responses, 919 were from Greek nationals. This report provides some results from our initial analysis of the Greek data, focusing on Greek citizens who left the country after 2007.

The main characteristics of our Greek dataset

- ✓ 68% male, 32% female
- ✓ 48% under 30 years old; 49% between 31 and 45 years of age
- ✓ 88% hold a **higher education degree**
- ✓ 53% have a partner or spouse, and of these 83% hold a higher education degree

Figure 1. Date of departure from Greece (2007-2013)



- ✓ Main **countries of destination in the EU**: UK, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, followed by Sweden, France and Austria (in order of importance).
- ✓ Main **countries of destination outside the EU**: Switzerland, USA, Norway, United Arab Emirates, Canada and Australia (in order of importance).
- ✓ Just over 50% were **employed prior to leaving**; of these, 41% held a long term contract, 27% held a short-term contract while 32% had no employment contract

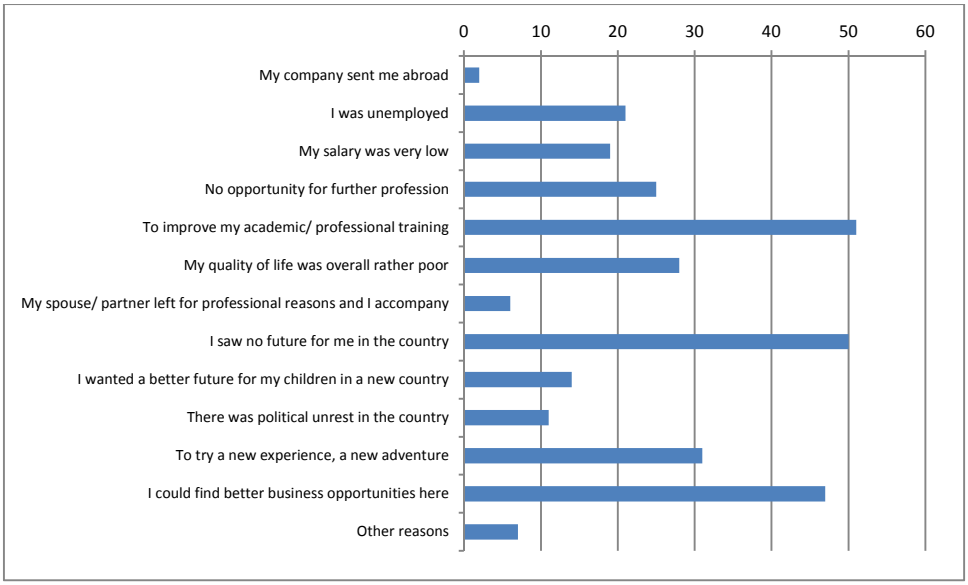
First results

A combination of push and pull factors seems to have driven the decision to migrate. In fact, the three most significant reasons for leaving were the motivation to **improve their academic and professional situation**, a sense of **not having a future in Greece**, and the belief that they would be able to **find better professional opportunities in their country of destination.**

It is interesting to note here that in spite of the high unemployment rates in Greece, particularly among young Greeks, only 21% of our respondents cited unemployment as one of their core reasons for deciding to leave the country.

Table 1. Main reasons for leaving Greece (%)

Note: multiple reasons could be ticked by the respondents



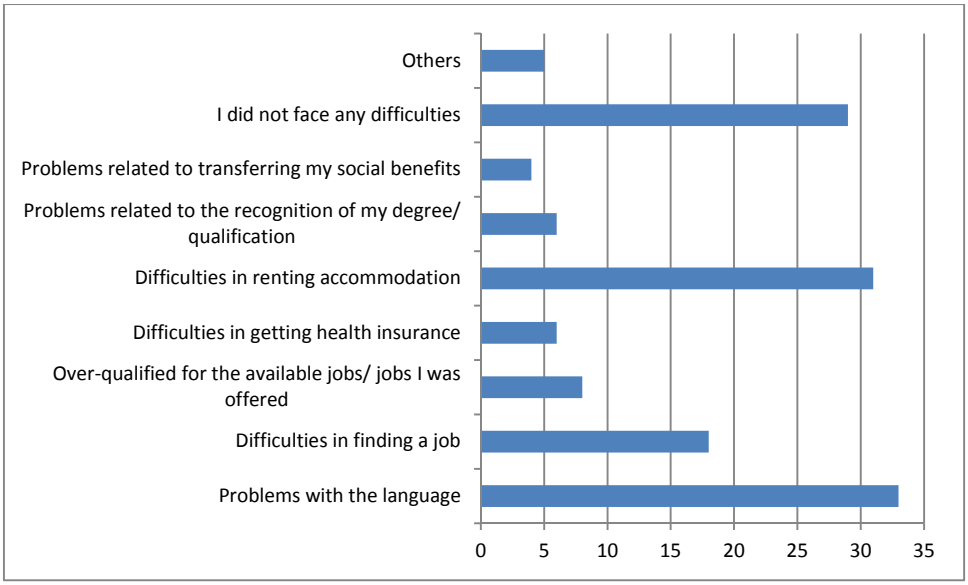
73% of our respondents were **employed** in their country of residence and of these approximately 58% declared they were **satisfied with the income** they were earning.

The **core areas** in which they are employed are information technology, education and research, the service sector, medical and paramedical jobs, hotel and catering and engineering.

Knowledge of the language of the receiving society is important. It determines both how easy or hard the migration experience is, and it also drives people's choices in the country they choose to migrate to.

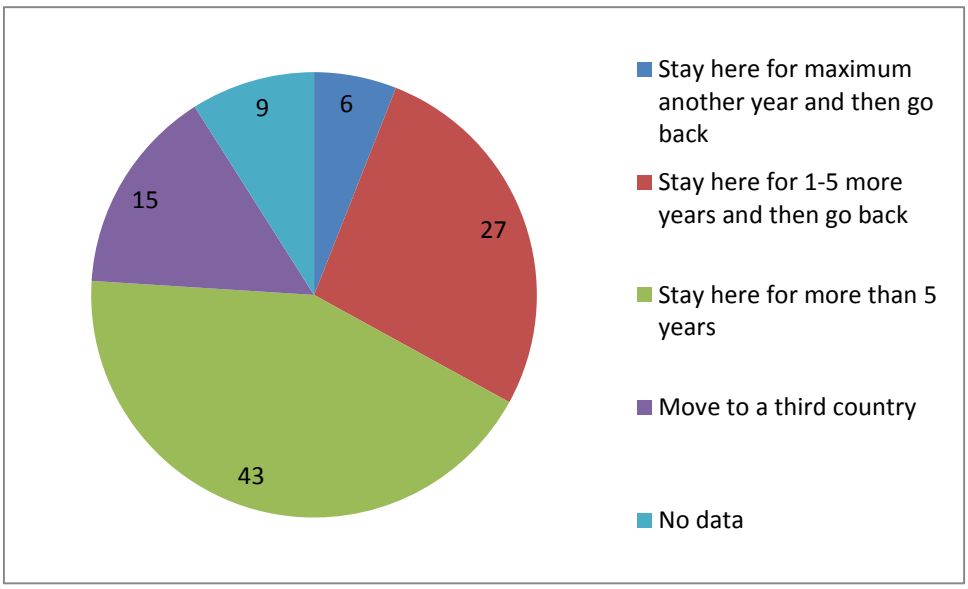
Table 2. Difficulties faced while settling into their new country of residence (%)

Note: multiple reasons could be ticked by the respondents



Among our respondents, although 45% had never previously emigrated, their current migration project has a clear long term perspective with only 6% intending to return to Greece in the next year.

Figure 2. Future plans (%)



The respondents who declared an intention to further migrate to another country underlined that their main reasons were professional.

The USA was by far the most common preferred future destination for the job opportunities they felt would be available to them there. This is followed by Australia and Canada.

Within the EU, the UK was also identified as a future preferred destination. Here, the fact of speaking English was noted as a facilitator. Germany was also frequently identified as a preferred future destination mainly for its potential employment opportunities along with Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Finally, our preliminary analysis of the comments and responses provided to the open question of our survey suggest that the following factors are **significant drivers of out-migration from Greece:**

- ✓ Disappointment with the **lack of meritocracy**
- ✓ Anger with the level of **corruption** and the political system
- ✓ Discouragement with the **lack of job opportunities** and/or **career development prospects**
- ✓ Frustration with the pervasiveness of **clientelism** and political networks
- ✓ **Mistrust** towards the state
- ✓ Job **insecurity** and precarious working conditions (low pay, undeclared work, etc)