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# **MIGRATING FROM GREECE TO GERMANY AFTER 2010: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

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## **Abstract:**

Greece was severely hit by financial crisis in 2009. Outward migration flows that already existed for decades were then intensified and escalated. Those flows were, mostly, towards other European countries and also others. Among all those countries, Germany has been receiving many new Greek migrants, and is widely considered a top destination for Greek migrants. Though a qualitative approach (online interviews) and with references to existing scholarship, the study attempts to investigate five main topics concerning Greek migrants in Germany. First, the reasons that motivated, pushed or made the participants emigrate to Germany. Second, their reflections on their life in Germany. Third, whether their decision to migrate to Germany is a permanent one. Forth, what would make repatriation a possibility for them. Finally, what are their desires and plans for the future. Push and pull factors seem to be very important in the decision-making processes of the informants. Family and social networks also play major role for members of the sample in terms of deciding to migrate, choosing Germany as destination, and adjusting to their new social environment in the receiving country. The empirical evidence from the research, confirm existing theory to a great extend and raise many important parameters. Such parameters are specific economic and social factors, along with participants' personal perceptions.

## **Keywords:**

Greeks, Crisis, Migration, Outward Migration, Repatriation

**JEL Classification:** G01, I30, J69

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## Introduction

“Migrations are as much part of the human condition as birth, reproduction, sickness and death.” (Bade, 2003: p.ix) Taking the above realization in consideration one can understand that migration is a universal phenomenon, deeply correlated to human nature, and society. Thus, observing and studying migration can reveal very important information about the human condition as a whole. In this paper, the migration of Greek citizens to Germany after the major 2009 financial crisis that stalked Greece is studied. So, in order to approach the phenomenon in a more holistic way, main characteristics of this crisis should be mentioned. The 2009 financial crisis is very indicative for the level of globalization and financial, economic, social and political interconnection during these first decades of the 21st Century. After the 2008 collapse of the Lehman Brothers global bank, the global financial and social system was severely devastated affecting jobs and lives, worldwide (Gemi, 2014; Karli, 2016). This crisis caused a combination of financial, economic, social and political turbulence, and also great social and political inequalities (Reinhart and Rogoff, 2011; Aiyar and Chandra, 2012), that affected almost every financially developed country around the globe (Karli, 2016).

Crisis had such an enormous socioeconomic impact (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2019) on Greece, that the country can be described as one of the most severely struck in the world (Artelaris and Tsirbas, 2018). As Artelaris and Tsirbas (2018: p. 589-590) present “real gross domestic product (GDP) and disposable income have shrunk more than one-quarter and one-third, respectively. Its unemployment rate has nearly tripled, exceeding 26%, while the employment rate has reached 50%, a record low. Moreover, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate has risen to alarming levels from 28.1 to 36.0% while several other well-being indicators related, inter alia, to health, education and social services have sharply deteriorated (Eurostat, 2016)”.

This severe crisis and its impact on Greek citizens' lives are interpreted by many scholars as of the major reasons that boosted the emigration flows deriving from Greece after 2010 towards many countries around the world including Germany as one of the most popular destination (Damanakis, 2014; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016). Germany has the fourth biggest nominal Gross Domestic Product<sup>1</sup> and the sixteenth biggest Gross Domestic Product per capita<sup>2</sup>, worldwide. Also, Germany has a capital-intensive industry, with products that are exported all over the globe making the country a world exporting leader (Hague and Harrop, 2013). All those factors, make Germany a famous destination for migrants from the Middle East, North Africa, and other European countries, including Greece. Either way, Germany was also a famous destination for Greeks, after WWII. According to data, between the years 2010 and 2016 nearly 190,000 Greeks had entered the Federal Republic of Germany, making it by far the most popular destination for Greek migrants<sup>3</sup>.

This qualitative approach attempts to enlighten the reasons that made the participants emigrate to Germany, the subjects' reflections on their lives there, as well as their perception regarding the permanence of their decision to migrate. Repatriation motives of the participants are investigated too, so that possible motives for repatriation can be discovered. Moreover, the interviewees' future plans and desires for their futures are enlightened via interview questions

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD> (viewed 25 August 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD> (viewed 25 August 2021)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/genesis/online> (viewed 25 August 2021)

so that the role of Greece in their plan-making can be spotlighted. Ethical approval was sought and received for the study at the University of Essex.

After the introductory section, there is a literature review section where similar up-to-date researches and inquiries are presented for a better understanding of the examined issue. That section is in turn followed by the methodology sector where the research method used in the study is presented. Afterwards, there is the section where findings are presented, and discussed. Finally, there is the conclusion section that includes the conclusions drawn by the study, together with the acknowledgment of the limitations of this research, followed by an appendix that includes the interview questions.

## **Literature Review**

### **A Current wave of Greek Emigration**

Among other reasons, financial austerity, high unemployment rates, long-time unemployment, absence of need for high qualified workforce and low wages in the job market (Labrianidis, 2011; Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Karli, 2016; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016; Toubalidou, 2019), large numbers of Greek citizens of different educational backgrounds made the decision to emigrate. Labrianidis (2014) presented a number of 222,457 Greek citizens who migrated from 2010 until the late 2014 and made an estimation of even greater numbers. Thanks to the liberty of mobility within the European Union, Greeks migrated to countries-members of the EU in great numbers (Damanakis, 2014; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016).

The increasing levels of emigration in addition to low birth rates and low immigration patterns have contributed to a steep demographic decline. The Greek population has been continuously decreasing since 2011 onward (Eurostat, 2019). On top of that, the decreasing population is currently aging, making matters worse in terms of economic activity, sustainability of social security and also social development in general. As a result, Greece is losing really valuable human, social and political capital (Kapur, 2014).

The high skills, qualifications and credentials of many Greeks who emigrated after 2009, have allowed scholars throughout the literature to identify the Greek 'brain drain' phenomenon (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016; Toubalidou, 2019). It is a phenomenon that exists in Greece even since the mid-1950s, but after 2009 has escalated (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014). It was estimated by Labrianidis (2011) that between 114,000 and 139,000 Greek graduates resided abroad at that time. Numbers that represented a 9-11% of the total number of higher education alumni nationwide.

The increased unemployment rates in Greece, the lack of demand for highly skilled workers, the notorious Greek bureaucracy, as well as the general sense of lack of meritocracy in Greece, have altogether formed a repulsive status for highly skilled Greek women and men. It is them who chose during this past decade of continuing Greek crisis to seek out a life of more chances, personal evolvement and career evolution, outside of the Greek borders (Pelliccia, 2013; Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2014; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016).

### **Major Reasons Making Greeks Emigrate After 2009**

In a research conducted back in 2012 among 400 undergraduate and postgraduate Greek students living and studying in Greece, Theodoropoulos et al. (2014) tried to investigate attitudes, intentions and reflections towards the perspective of leaving Greece. The majority of the sample (37%) disagreed with regards to the idea of optimism for their future. A 24% of the sample strongly disagreed and another 24% expressed relevant agreement. Only a 9.3%

expressed a clear agreement and the rest of the sample did not agree or disagree (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014). The majority of the participants were open to the perspective of leaving Greece in search for better job opportunities. One in three students who participated in the research was employed at that time, with the 67% of them working without insurance cover. Almost eight in ten of the participants had their families as their main sources of income, even some of those who were employed. The majority of the students considered Greece's environment in terms of employment, a greatly insecure one. Also, they evaluated Greece as inferior to other foreign countries in terms of career potentials. Hence, pursuing a career abroad and making there the most of their qualifications seemed the best choice for them. They also expressed disappointment by the Greek state, and thought their qualifications were devalued in Greece (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014). 20.3% of the respondents had already decided to leave Greece and 46.3%, were considering the option. Those considering it, would do so for a well-paid, stable and relevant to their qualifications, job. If that was not the case, they would emigrate for a job with at least one of these features, something they considered unlikely as a possibility in their home country (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014).

Labrianidis (2014) conducted a research back in 2013 concerning Greeks who were either living abroad at the time of the research or they had lived and worked abroad in the past for at least 1 year, but had also lived in Greece until the age of 18. The participants were 2.734 but those who completed the questionnaires to a sufficient scale (at least more than half of the questions included) were 1,821. Most of the factors that made them chose a life abroad were about employment. From most to least common those factors were: better career prospects, better chances of finding a job related to their specialization and increasing their knowledge in their field, satisfactory income, experiencing working abroad, as well as an inability to find a job in Greece relevant to their studies and in the field of expertise. Apart from the factors related to employment, other 'very important' factors were related to their studies abroad since many of the participants stayed abroad after graduation (Labrianidis, 2014). 60.9% of the respondents did not search for a job in Greece before deciding their stay abroad in order to work. "What is apparent is that the longer the length of studies abroad, the fewer the chances for the participants to look for work in Greece: 91.1% of those who acquired all of their degrees abroad did not look for work in Greece, while the respective share among those who undertook part of their studies abroad falls to 58.9% and to 47.3% for those who received all of their degrees in Greece. Almost all (90%) participants hold a postgraduate degree from abroad while 29% undertook all of their studies abroad. There is only a small percentage (14.3%) that has worked abroad despite the fact that they didn't study abroad at all. When these individuals first started working abroad, 80.6% had at least a postgraduate degree." (Labrianidis 2014, p. 322)

### **What could be done for Greeks to Repatriate?**

Important prerequisites for the repatriation of Greeks, according to Labrianidis and Pratsinakis (2017), seem to be the modernization of the Greek economy, the simplification of bureaucracy, the improvement of the effectiveness of the state structures, as well as the implication and utilization of social policies. The continuous and uninterrupted development of the Greek economy is also required for the return of skilled Greek workers. Therefore, the policies of the Greek government should be focused on bettering the current infrastructure, thus attracting more foreign investors. However, attracting Greeks who have settled abroad would still be a difficult task. Strategic collaborations between settled emigrants, the government, and transnational enterprises seems to be another, perhaps more realistic approach to the problem at hand. Ultimately, as stated earlier, the lasting development of the economy, the attraction of foreign capital, and the creation of a viable and fertile business environment are paramount for the sustainable repatriation of Greeks. It is essential to remember the importance of a universal and holistic approach to the issue of repatriation. The policies and strategies used should not marginalize any economic or social class of Greek emigrants. They should be inclusive and

focused on the entirety of the Greek diaspora, regardless of time-spent-abroad. Finally, both the public and private sectors need to be involved in this matter if the repatriation is to be successful. Every tool at the Greek state's disposal is to be utilized, including long and short-term measures, as well as small and large-scale solutions with long-lasting, deep effects on the Greek society at large (Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2017).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Method**

The research took place in the summer of 2020 during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The method used is a qualitative one. Semi-structured personal interviews were used so that the informants' views, reflections and thoughts on the issues under question, could be clearly brought to light (King, 1994; Sarantakos, 1998; Mason, 2002; Robson, 2011). According to King (1994), an interview is appropriate for a social research when the participant's personal perception of a phenomenon is significant for the research, as is in the case of these research questions. Robson (2011) recognizes semi-structured interviews as a method of predetermined questions in the use and application of which the interviewer can always change the order, set and row of the questions, or even omit a question that she or he finds inappropriate for the responder. More questions can also be added by the interviewer if it seems necessary for the research. Some semi-structured interviews can vary in terms of structure, as they lie somewhere between traditional structured and unstructured interviews (Sarantakos, 1998; Mason, 2002). The semi-structured interviews used in the examined study came to be more similar to a structured interview. The use of the interview as a method offers flexibility which is useful in acquiring information and knowledge (Robson, 2011) in the social sciences. Language, and other, non-verbal signs and expressions can also be leveraged to extract messages that can prove helpful in understanding oral spoken answers, by shifting or even reversing their meaning (Robson, 2011). In general, a qualitative approach and perception of the information is needed when personal and deeper subjects are concerned, investigated and examined (King, 1994; Mason, 2002; Robson, 2011), such as the issues related to personal and family decisions to migrate from Greece to Germany, whether to repatriate or not, and to display one's thoughts and perceptions for their own present and future.

### **The Sample**

11 people consisted the sample. All of them were Greek citizens who emigrated from Greece to Germany after the year 2010 and were still living there until the end of August 2020 (when the research had ended). 7 of them identified themselves as females and 5 as males. All of them were adults. The youngest was 19 years old, and the oldest 52. Their background back in Greece varied, as they came from villages, large towns, and cities too. Almost all of them lived in major German cities. Their educational background varied, from a junior high school graduate to a Primary Education PhD. Candidate. 8 of the participants did not hold a university degree, while 1 of those did not hold a high school diploma either. As Labrianidis and Pratsinakis (2016) acknowledge, Germany is a country which attracts more migrants with lower qualifications rather than higher. The family and marital status of the subjects varied, with 7 of them being single, 3 being married-parents of at least 2 children, and 1 divorced-mother of 3. The working status of the informants also varied, from unemployment to job positions of increased specialization and expertise.

## Sampling Method

It is accurate to say that the sampling procedures in qualitative researches 'correspond to the philosophy of this type of research, are less structured, less quantitative and less strict than the techniques quantitative researchers usually employ' (Sarantakos, 1998: p.154). As noted by many scholars who engage with social research methodology, design and techniques (Lamnek, 1989; Berger, Wolf and Ullmann, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994), the sampling procedures in qualitative research have and need to have elements like those mentioned below:

- Respondents do not have to be in large numbers, but rather fewer and more typical
- The sample needs to be flexible in size and type
- Purposive sampling is more useful
- The sample may change during the study process
- The numbers of respondents can be adjusted during the study procedures
- More suitable rather than representative sample is needed (Sarantakos, 1998).

According to Sarantakos (1998) and Robson (2011), snowball sampling is mostly used in social researches in which the sample is rather difficult to approach. During the employment of this sampling method, the researchers begin their research with a few respondents who are available (Robson, 2011). After interviewing them, the participants are asked to recommend more individuals who meet the research's criteria and who are possibly willing to participate in the study. These new individuals, after being approached and after taking part in the research are also asked to recommend other individuals who might be fitting for the research, and so on (Sarantakos, 1998).

## Research Procedures

The research was not funded so there was no budget available for traveling to Germany where the interviewees live. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated to minimize any physical contact between the researcher and the participants. So, all of the interviews were conducted online, via video-calls, with the use of the Messenger messaging application provided by Facebook. The interviews were conducted in Greek, as it is the native language of the researcher and the participants as well, and after the later were asked, they all chose to proceed in Greek. They were informed that parts of their answers were to be made public for the needs of the study by using pseudonyms for each and every one of them, safeguarding this way their absolute anonymity. Also, it was made clear to them that they were free not to answer/skip questions, or even quit the interview without any subsequence at all. It is important to mention at this point that none of the participants chose to skip any question, instead, they chose to share thoughts and reflections all the way.

## Findings and Discussion

### Interviewees' Background

At this point to make everything even clearer, it is important to present the interviewees' pseudonyms along with information about the gender, age, educational background, occupation, marital/family status, place of origin in Greece, and year of migration:

**Sonia**, female, 19, General High School graduate, part-time cleaner, single, large town, 2015

**Riley**, female, 21, Technical High School graduate, working at a kitchen of a branch of a multinational fast-food restaurant, single, large town, (January) 2020

**Mike**, male, 23, Technical High School graduate, unemployed, single, large town, 2017

**Jenny**, female, 24, General High school graduate, working at a restaurant's kitchen, single, large town, 2019

**Mary**, female, 24, General High School graduate, manager at a branch of a multinational fast-food restaurant, single, large town, 2016

**John**, male, 29, Bachelor's Degree in Logistics & Supply Chain Management, Procurement-3rd party management analyst, married — father of 2, large town, 2018

**Ann**, female, 30, PhD Candidate in Primary Education, Primary School Teacher (in maternity time off at the time of the interview), village, 2013

**Tim**, male, 31, Bachelor of Medicine, Doctor (Neurologist), single, city, 2014

**Joe**, male, 35, Technical High School graduate, unemployed (for the last 3 months before the interview), single village, 2018

**Sandra**, female, 46, Junior High School graduate, permanent full-time cleaner at a hospital, divorced — mother of 3, village, 2014

**Sandy**, female, 52, Technical High School graduate, permanent full-time cleaner at a hospital, married — mother of 3, large town, 2015

### Reasons for Migrating

Low income was an important reason for some of the interviewed migrants, while high taxes and their families' debt also played an important role. Sonia was still underaged when her father migrated to Germany, eventually bringing the whole family along:

It was my dad's decision because my mother was not getting paid from her job, and his income was not enough, and we were in dept. [...] He came to Germany alone and one year later my whole family followed him.

(Sonia,19)

Others were more focused on personal debt and prohibitive taxation:

I had come to a point of economic stagnation, being a farmer in Greece. I couldn't have the income that would provide me a living, and I had accumulated some debts, so going abroad was a one-way choice for me [...] The biggest problem was taxation. One could earn a living, but the taxes were absorbing much of my income and created privations.

(Joe,35)

Poverty, according to push-pull theory of migration, has always been a significant factor in making people migrate (Lee, 1966).

Another interviewee got really emotional while narrating how financial problems escalated for her and her family in Greece, before emigrating:

While I was working in Greece there was a period of 7 months while I wasn't getting paid my salaries, because the public hospital didn't pay my employer, at the firm of whose I worked as a cleaner. We had loans and many responsibilities. Things were

getting from bad to worse [...] The situation wasn't viable so we decided to leave for the shake of our children's future [...] In Greece, we were working all day long, we were off home, we didn't have any contact with our children [...] I almost developed depression, I used to return home without listening or feeling anything. (cries) I was feeling like drowning.

(Sandy,52)

Her emotional reaction is indicative of the psychological scars left by the economic problems her family faced. Sandy could not hold her tears while describing the hardships they had to go through. Her family migrated mainly for financial reasons, as Labrianidis (2014) found. Their low family income and increasing debt, pushed them to migrate to Germany. Pratsinakis (2019) chooses to focus on migrating families which left after 2010, and whose priority is bettering the standard of living for their children or at least "restoring the former living standard of the family" (Pratsinakis, 2019: p.2).

By migrating to Germany participants wanted to escape the average standard of living that, according to them, was the best that Greece could provide. A future with better prospects was what they desired:

I came to Germany for a better future for me, economically speaking [...] You can have a life in Greece but only if you're living in average conditions, by earning an average salary, by having an average career, but you cannot advance in what you want to do. I was trained to be a hairdresser, but I would never earn much money in my hometown in Greece.

(Riley,21)

Jenny also saw no future for her in Greece:

I didn't want to leave Greece but I saw that I didn't have any future there and that is why I made the decision to come to Germany.

(Jenny,24)

Although Jenny was not asked about her desire to leave her homeland, she felt the need to explain that leaving Greece was not something she wanted to do. She was forced by the lack of future and made her decision under the weight of reality.

The next interviewee is almost exasperated by the exploitation and the poor labor rights that she faced in Greece:

I wanted to work humanly, because in Greece there was great, really great, exploitation and I wasn't even getting stamps! So, that was another reason to leave, insurance.

(Mary, 24)

This participant wants her labor rights respected, while the lack of stamps provided by her past employers seems to be at least frustrating for her. Career prospects, income and working conditions are some of the main push and pull factors (Lee, 1966), and they seem to be significantly affecting the decision-making of many Greek immigrants post-2009 (Damanakis, 2014; Karli, 2016).

Younger participants find financial dependence on their parents an undesirable necessity that needs to change fast:



What made me emigrate, was Greece's economy. Depending on my parents was something that I didn't like at all. Because I would think twice before asking them for money to go out [...] I was feeling that I was pressing them too much [...] Although I had been searching very much for one, I didn't have a job.

(Jenny, 24)

Financial independence is impossible without employment. Thus, unemployment is a major push factor for many Greek migrants (Damanakis, 2014; Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Karli, 2016; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016).

Moreover, the opportunity to start a family in the future is something that also determines the decision to migrate:

Working at a restaurant's kitchen wouldn't give me the opportunity to start a family and feel secure later in life.

(Mary,24)

Greece seems to be a country where it's difficult to start a family. That is why people who desire or plan to do so, decide to emigrate. They seek security that will, at some point, allow them to start a family under better conditions than those in Greece.

Some informants that have higher qualifications migrate in pursuit of better career opportunities than those that exist in their homeland:

To be honest it was the career opportunities that motivated me to migrate to Germany [...] Thinking pragmatically, as the family responsibilities were growing bigger, and as my wife already had a job in Germany, I chose to pursue better career opportunities on my field of expertise.

(John,29)

John believes that his decision to migrate was pragmatic and a realistic choice given the circumstances. He decided to migrate to Germany and look for work there, although his wife had a job position waiting for her in Germany beforehand. Again, we see the important role of family and how it can affect the decision to migrate as Faist (1997), O'Reilly (2015) and Pratsinakis (2019) also conclude.

The next interviewee is a doctor, a graduate of Medical School who was thinking of moving to Germany even before the crisis, because his parents used to live in Germany for some years in the past. The crisis' impact on Greek hospitals was a decisive push factor for him:

Graduating from Medical School, there was a long waiting list for the medical certificate of professional competence. Even before crisis struck Greece, I was thinking of moving to Germany which wasn't altogether foreign to me because my parents used to live in Munich [...] The way things developed amid crisis in the Greek hospitals and in Greece in general, made emigration a one-way choice for me.

(Tim,31)

Greece has become a country where highly qualified professionals are either underpaid or worse, they are unemployed. Considering how easy it is for European citizens to move within the European Union, migration seems an accessible and reasonable choice.

Meanwhile, Mike shared some other information about the reasons which made him leave Greece; his sexuality:

The second reason was for my freedom. In Greece, I was feeling that I couldn't express myself the way I wanted, according to my sexuality [...] I couldn't express myself at all.

(Mike,23)

Another aspect that comes to the fore, apart from the conventional financial push factors (Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 1993), is the lack of freedom in expressing one's sexuality. Homophobia is a feature of social reality in Greece which exists within people's attitudes towards members of the LGBTQ+ community (Phellas, 2005; Pavlou, 2009; Zervoulis, 2016) making it difficult for non-straight people to express their sexuality openly and forces them to suppress themselves. That suppression of one's sexuality can be reasonably conceived as another push factor.

Unemployment (Labrianidis, 2014; Karli, 2016; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016) which seems to affect younger people disproportionately (Verick, 2009), low income, lack of opportunities and career prospects, exploitation at work, inadequate working and living conditions, high taxation, the great difficulties in starting a family, institutional problems like bureaucracy and lack of meritocracy (Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 1993; Rogerson, 2001; Karli, 2016) seem to be push factors of determinant significance for the informants of this study. Greek migrants consider the opportunities they are provided with in their homeland to be severely limited, and they generally tend to share a sentiment of disapproval and disappointment for the social and economic reality of Greece. (Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016). Furthermore, some other factors might be the increased job opportunities and better career prospects (Labrianidis, 2014; Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Karli, 2016; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016), higher living standards, better social security, a sense of meritocracy, happiness and satisfaction as well as family links with the country of destination (Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 1993; O'Reilly, 2015). The role of social networks, mostly in terms of family connections in the case of the subjects, is of great significance in the decision-making process concerning international migration (Faist, 1997; Haug, 2000; Pries, 2004; O'Reilly, 2015). The existence of kinship, family and friends in a country, makes it more attractive and more likely to become a migration destination (Faist, 1997; Pries, 2004; Castles, 2014; O'Reilly, 2015).

### **Reflecting life in Germany**

Informants share their personal reflections and feelings on their life in Germany either in comparison to their life in Greece, or as a personal assessment of how things function for them in Germany.

Riley was looking for opportunities, and that was what she found in Germany:

Here, there are so many opportunities! I understood it that right when I set my foot in Germany. Because, first of all it is a very hospitable country, and very receptive to immigrants. It was difficult in terms of language, but in terms of opportunities and work it is not difficult at all! If you come here, you are definitely going to find a job, one thousand percent! [...] My brother was here before me and he supports me, I live with him until I can afford a home of my own.

(Riley,21)

Riley is satisfied by her life in Germany, and views the country as an inclusive, warm, and hospitable society. Her brother, who had migrated to Germany before Riley, helped her settle

down and supported her adjustment to her new reality. Once more, the role of family in the country of destination (Faist, 1997; Castles, 2014; O'Reilly, 2015) is clearly observable.

Apart from some difficulties Mary faced in Germany during the first weeks of her life there, she is entirely satisfied by what she has found there. Her salary and the working conditions of her new job are pleasing, and her labor rights are respected:

Now that I work for a multinational company, my insurance is really good and my stamps are really strong. My salary is satisfactory, I'm not going to say 'perfect', but it is satisfactory. I mean, it is enough in order to afford a good life in Germany. And I work for 8 hours, and I return home humanly, and I'm in the mood to do stuff. I'm not exhausted like I used to be... During my first time period here, I was feeling horrible. But I know that in order to achieve something in your life, you have to sacrifice other things. And during that period, I preferred to sacrifice friendships and plenty of other things, like going out and all, in order to become independent. Because I couldn't live any more from my parents' money, and I didn't want to.

(Mary,24)

Ann, who is a mother of two, enjoys the work security and appreciates the social benefits and the welfare state:

My job here is good, and I have been reassured that if I wish I can work here until retirement [...] There are many advantages in Germany like monthly social benefits, welfare, healthcare and so on.

(Ann,30)

Contrary to Greece, Germany seems to be a family-friendly environment where demand for highly skilled workers seems to be high. The welfare state remains functional and can support migrants such as the interviewee, especially those who are parents.

Sandy and her family were able to overcome the obstacles and the difficulties they all faced in settling and adjusting:

I found a job only in one month! [...] I think we were in luck, because we had friends and family here who supported us very much and they do so still [...] Some people back in Greece consider us –the migrants– cowards because we didn't stay to struggle. If you don't experience a migration, I think that you cannot understand how difficult it is for us to adjust! (cries) To try to help your kids, and not to be able to do anything! (cries) Thankfully, we made it, we sought the help of a psychologist and we made it. Our children found their way, but there are families who returned to Greece because their children couldn't handle it. I got a permanent job, thank God, with the help of a Greek lady here who helps a lot of new Greek migrants.

(Sandy,52)

The subjects admit to having difficulties when trying to adapt and adjust to their new environment. These difficulties can sometimes be great, and they are often accompanied by severe psychological trauma, mainly on children. However, the overall benefits of having migrated to Germany ultimately outweigh negatives.

Once more, the importance of social-family networks comes to the spotlight (Haug, 2000; O'Reilly, 2015), as these networks help migrants settle, adjust and acclimate in the receiving country. In addition, Germany –as a receiving society– is viewed by part of the sample as hospitable, inclusive and immigrant-friendly.

Mike states that he is really happy with his new life in Germany:

I am very happy that I am here. I have started over. I live in a house which I try to make it the way I want. Basically, I express myself freely, I am not suppressed by anybody or anything! [...] People here treat me very well. They don't have any problem with who I am, what I am, what I do.

(Mike,23)

According to Mike, the community where he chooses to live respects his freedom of expressing his sexuality without the need to hide his gender or his sexual identity. Germany, with regards to freedom of expression, remains an inclusive social environment.

Participants seem satisfied by the working conditions, by their income, by the social security framework and also by the prospects and opportunities that exist in the German labor market. Feelings of happiness and satisfaction (Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 1993) are also expressed at their decision to migrate, which is something that reaffirms their choice. For some of them, things are not ideal or how they expected them to be, but they are still better-off and more satisfied in comparison to the conditions that they left in Greece.

### **Is Migrating to Germany a Permanent Decision or not?**

For the purposes of the study, participants also attempt another assessment on their decision to migrate and whether that decision will prove to be a permanent one or not.

Mary seems notably determined about how permanent her decision to migrate is:

I am not going to return. No chance! No chance at all! [...] Maybe when it's time to retire, then yes, something could change then and I might return.

(Mary,24)

Mary sees no way for her to return to her homeland, except maybe after she has retired.

Mike also thinks his decision to migrate is going to prove a permanent one as he now considers Germany his home:

At this point in my life, I am not thinking of going back, because here I feel like home... There is no way I am returning to Greece.

(Mike,23)

For Mike, his life has become much more enjoyable, free and more secure after his decision to migrate to Germany. The ability to express his sexuality is very precious to him, and is also the main reason he wishes to remain in Germany permanently. Returning to Greece would expose Mike to a series of challenges and difficulties which are absent from his current life.

Joe, a low skilled worker, finds his decision to migrate permanent:

If the social and political conditions in Greece don't change, if opportunities to live in Greece don't arise, like they do here, there is no reason to return. I see it with the current situation as a permanent, sure and extra safe choice.

(Joe,35)

Staying in Germany is reflected here as a permanent, confident, and secure decision. If the social and political conditions in Greece do not alter, he won't likely return to his homeland. He demands more opportunities for work (Lee, 1966; Damanakis, 2014; Pratsinakis, 2019), like those in Germany.

Tim, who works as a doctor in Germany, does not find his decision to migrate as a permanent one:

I want to return to Greece at some point, I don't want to spend my whole life in Germany. But that doesn't seem possible in the near future [...] The most possible scenario for me is to make an effort to return to Greece after 10 years of working in my field.

(Tim,31)

This interviewee plans to return to Greece after completing a few years of professional, highly qualified work in Germany. He makes it clear that it is not his intention to live his entire life in Germany, no matter the benefits. The issue regarding the professional advancement of Greek highly qualified workers abroad is discussed by Labrianidis (2014). An interesting and relevant observation made by Pratsinakis (2019) is that, prior to the economic crisis of 2010, Greek emigrants planned to return to Greece after a brief period abroad. On the contrary, those who emigrated after the 2010 period of recession did so without any prospects of returning home.

### **What could make them repatriate?**

At this point, informants share their thoughts on what would pragmatically or even ideally make them repatriate; what would make them return to their homeland, Greece.

The first interviewee, Sonia, demands more certainty, security and a higher income:

Ideally, in order to return to Greece, I would like to have something certain and secure, and I would like people to start getting paid better than they are now.

(Sonia,19)

The feeling of certainty, security and better incomes could make up effective motives for Greek migrants to return. These are also discussed by researchers throughout literature (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2016, Pratsinakis, 2019).

Jenny also demands a satisfying income and insurance:

A good salary, enough for me to afford food, a house and insurance –something very important to me– could make me return without a second thought! [...] Otherwise, I will be visiting Greece for vacations, relaxation, the sea, drinks and so on.

(Jenny,24)

If the subject's requirements cannot be fulfilled by the situation in Greece, it will only remain an ideal destination for vacations and holidays.

A PhD candidate in Primary Education would only return to Greece if she could work as a primary school teacher:

If I can work as a primary school teacher near my family's home in my province, or near my husband's family home in Athens, so that he can also find a job in a company in Athens, then I will return.

(Ann,30)

University graduates and high skilled professionals in general are willing to migrate in order to find a job in their field of expertise (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Labrianidis, 2014; Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2017) and that is clear in Ann's case.

Riley, after having worked in many different businesses in Greece from a young age demands better work-ethics, better conditions and organization, as well as less bureaucracy:

If there is going to be more justice, better planning, better working conditions and less bureaucracy in Greece, I might return.

(Riley,21)

Tim, a neurologist, who left Greece in 2014 believes in Greece's potentials but asks for real changes in his homeland in order to return:

Greece has many potentials in terms of human capital and geography [...] I want to see meritocracy and respect towards the workers [...] I want to see some justice, some meritocracy, some equality, so that you can work under humane conditions and working hours [...] Until all these changes, Greece will only be good for vacations.

(Tim,31)

An important prerequisite for repatriation that is found throughout the study is meritocracy. Interviewee Tim is clear when he explains that meritocracy is to rule in Greece before he would consider repatriating. He wishes for society, both the private and public sectors, to function in a just manner for all citizens. If this does not happen, he will continue to consider Greece only as a likely destination for his summer vacations.

John, who works in the wider banking sector, would repatriate only if Greece was to follow and meet the international standards in businesses and investments. He also makes notable suggestions towards this direction:

I would like Greece to have the same opportunities, in terms of investments from multinational companies which offer opportunities to work with meritocratic criteria. Not necessarily in the context of theoretical and academical skills, but also in the context of professional skills and experience that one has [...] In my opinion, Greece should follow international models, similar to other foreign countries. [...] Also, there should be new opportunities for young people to start businesses of their own, to produce. I would like to come to Greece to start my own business. Concluding, I would like to see more stable and sustainable legal, tax, and institutional frameworks, created by the Greek state.

(John,29)

According to John, it is important for more international companies to begin investing in the Greek market, thus creating more jobs which would be filled meritocratically, not only based on academic qualifications, but also on professional skills and prior experience. Furthermore, he expresses his desire to start his own business in Greece should conditions allow it. Finally, John asks to see improvements made in the public sector. Specifically, more stable legal, tax, and institutional frameworks would ensure a fertile and secure market ready to welcome international investors.

### **Desires and Plans for their Future**

The hopes and desires of participants illuminate the importance of repatriation. Whether the interviewees wish to remain in Germany, return to Greece, or choose to live in another country altogether, their plans and dreams for the future paint a much-needed picture that is telling of the actions needed to be taken.

Riley wants to have a home of her own in Germany and later joined by the rest of her family:

I definitely, want to make some money, to have a home of my own here, to be able to support myself, to have a good job [...] I would like to have all my family here in Germany, to have a certain income that would make as live comfortably [...] I would like to stand more confidently on my feet, to become what I want to be.

(Riley,21)

Independence and confidence seem to be main priorities for this interviewee. In addition, she wants the rest of her family (parents and one sister) to migrate to Germany too in order to have a better living, as they are currently facing economic challenges.

In the same pattern, Mary, who works as a manager in a branch of multinational chain of restaurants in Germany, wants her family to join her for the same reasons:

My aim would be to bring my parents here because they worked all their lives without stamps in Greece. And that means that at some point they won't be able to get any pension [...] Here, even if they work for 10 years, they will get pension in the future, and that is what interests me the most. If that happens, I will be in a very good position [...] I will also try to bring my sister here, so that all family emigrates.

(Mary,24)

The migration of the rest of the family (Castles, 2014) appears to be a very important priority of migrants who have settled in their new social environments. Not only this participant is not planning to return to Greece but she also intends to help the rest of her family to reunite with her and settle down in Germany.

Ann, a primary teacher, has plans and dreams that include Greece:

One of my goals is to obtain my PhD degree, and the reason of doing that is to increase my chances of working in Greece near my home or my husband's home [...] And there is a chance that I will emigrate to another country with my family. Ideally, I would like to have a good job and stay with my husband in a small town in Greece.

(Ann,30)

A PhD degree in this occasion is seen as an asset that could make repatriation more likely. If that does not work, migration to a third country is also an option for the participant and her family. An ideal situation for her though, would be a life in a small town in Greece with a good job ensured.

Tim wants to evolve and advance in Germany:

I want to evolve in Germany, not necessarily in terms of income, but in terms of knowledge and personal advancement.

(Tim,31)

Sandra, who originally comes from a village in Greece, expresses the will to return to her homeland:

I would like to make some money, and return back to my sweet home, to my homeland. And to repay my debt to banks back in Greece.

(Sandra,46)

The desire to repay her bank debt and repatriate is clearly stated by Sandra. She expresses an apparent need to return to her place of origin, her homeland.

Mike wants to work in special education, and get married at one point:

I would very much like to work with people with special needs, mostly with kids, as an instructor or something like that [...] I would like to contribute to shifting people's attitudes towards those people [...] I would also like to find a life-partner and get married here in Germany.

(Mike,23)

Mike expresses his desire to help shift the public attitude towards people with special needs, as he is disappointed by the current climate. He wishes to work with people in special need, instructing them and caring for their needs. Ideally, he would like to find a partner and get married in Germany, since same-sex marriages are viewed down upon in his homeland and addressed with many biases (Kantsa, 2014).

Participants gave a plethora of answers regarding their plans, desire, and dreams for their future. A pattern of pursuing better, more secure and stable jobs in Germany quickly forms. Their main goals circle around continuous intellectual and personal development through academic activities, as well as gaining new skills and experience. Most of the participants do not seem to include Greece in their life's future plans.

## Conclusions and Limitations

### Conclusions

Migration from Greece to Germany has been a reality after the end of WWII. After the 2009 crisis struck Greece, outward migration flows have grown and intensified, comparing them to earlier decades. The results of the research are mainly confirming the existing theory and scholarship, at least in respect to the study's sample.

Greek migration has existed since the end of WWII. After the 2009 economic crisis struck Greece, outward migration flows have grown in intensity and frequency compared to previous decades. The results of this research mainly confirm the preexisting theory and literature, at least with respect to the study's sample.

Some push factors, which were identified —through the interviews— as the major reasons for Greeks to emigrate, were economy-related, such as the general feeling of disappointment towards the Greek economic reality, unemployment, low income, and emoluments, lack of opportunities, and career prospects, high taxation rates, extreme difficulties in starting a family and intense exploitation at work.

Some other push factors that were drawn from the research concern the bureaucracy that seems to characterize the Greek State on a large scale. The lack of meritocracy in many sectors of activity in Greece has played an important role in the decision-making process of the informants of the study. Another push factor that became apparent by a participant's testimony is the suppression of sexual identity and the lack of freedom to express one's sexuality in Greece.

Some pull factors for the participants which make Germany attractive as a destination country are job opportunities, career prospects, the better living standards in comparison to Greece, social security, welfare, the sense of meritocracy, the social networks associated with family,



kinship and friends who act as links with the new social environment and can make relocation and resettlement easier.

Moreover, an important pull factor is the expectations of the subjects about Germany, their hopes for happy, satisfactory and full lives, as well as their understanding of the German economy and society.

Reflecting their lives in Germany, some participants admitted that during their first time in Germany they faced difficulties in adjusting and adapting to their new social environment. Those difficulties, however, were finally overcome and outweighed by what Germany had to offer to them and their families. Social and family networks proved of great help for some participants in the process of adaptation and settling in Germany.

In addition, Germany is considered by subjects to be a hospitable, inclusive and migrant-friendly country. Although not everything was as expected by some participants, working conditions, income, the social security framework, career opportunities and prospects in the labor market were mainly characterized as efficient and satisfactory by most of the participants. The German society is also inclusive in terms of gender expression and sexuality, as stated by a participant. All the above spark feelings of happiness and satisfaction to the sample regarding the decision to migrate.

Some participants didn't consider it likely for them to return to Greece permanently. They found Greece to be an ideal destination for holidays, but not a place to live their lives. Some of the interviewees hope to repatriate sooner or later, perhaps during retirement. There are also those who would prefer to return to Greece as soon as possible, after taking care of their debt or other economic responsibilities.

The participants who expressed their desire to remain to Germany permanently expect major changes and improvements in order to reconsider repatriation. They would certainly need to see more job offering higher income, better working conditions and insurance, as well as a sense of financial security. Some of the participants have made it clear that in order for them to return, the Greek public and private sectors need to improve their bureaucratic operations, increase meritocracy, establish new and improved legal and tax frameworks, and attract more international investments.

As for the future, the subjects unilaterally wish to see more security and stability in their personal lives. Most of them plan to stay in Germany and make progress in their social, financial and intellectual statuses.

## **Limitations**

As a qualitative research, the sample is not appropriate for extracting testable results in order to safely confirm or generate theories. Hence why any agreement with the existing theory is only associated with the particular sample, which is the reason why unscientific generalizations are avoided.

The interviews were conducted online with the use of electronic computers and appropriate software applications and platforms. Thus, the sample had to be limited to participants who possess a basic understanding of these electronic means of communication, excluding a priori any other potential participants. The low average age of the participants might be due to the likelihood of younger people to be accustomed with computers and the internet. Also, there is another issue that occurs concerning the informants' answers. As it is possible in any kind of interviews, the cyber -in this case- "presence" of the interviewer can affect participants and unintentionally prevent them from offering totally honest and free answers to the research questions.

## Appendix- Interview Questions

These are the main questions that were asked to the participants:

- What was your motive to migrate from Greece to Germany?
- What do you think of Germany and your life there?
- Do you think that your decision to migrate and your emigration will prove permanent or not?
- What could make you return to Greece?
- What are your plans, desires or dreams for your own future?

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