

3.2. The Special Eurobarometer on the integration of migrants and the case of Greece

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3.2.1. Introduction

In April 2018, refugee and migration flows to Greece increased significantly, not only to the Aegean islands from the coast of Turkey, but also to the mainland of Greece across the land border with Turkey formed by the Evros River. This new development created great concern that the flows might once again take on the massive proportions of those observed in 2015, before they were radically reduced subsequent to the common declaration of the European Union (EU) and Turkey issued in March 2016.

The public authorities, the mass media and public opinion focused once again, as in the past when migrant and refugee flows increased steeply, on the short-term, and specifically, on measures to meet emergency needs, such as border controls and the preparation of reception centers. Unfortunately, the long-term perspective has been overlooked. Issues of utmost importance for the future of Greek society and economy have been neglected, such as the design, in collaboration with the EU, of effective policies for the management of refugee and migrant flows and for the successful integration in Greek society of the migrants and refugees who will remain, despite their initial aim to move on to other countries of Europe.

The results of the Special Eurobarometer “The Integration of Immigrants in the European Union” that were published in April 2018 provide indications of the long road Greece must travel to achieve the smooth integration of those who will remain. The Eurobarometer data allow the comparison of attitudes in Greece about migrant integration with views prevalent in other EU countries. They point to areas where targeted Greek policies could contribute to the formation of more positive stances towards the migrants and refugees who will need to be integrated, as well as to various integration measures which appear to enjoy widespread approval in Greece.

As has been repeatedly noted (e.g. Jacobsen and Fratzke 2016; Papademetriou, Benton and Banulescu-

Bogdan 2017), the effectiveness of policies for migrant integration depends not only on the economic conditions and opportunities in reception countries, but also on the perceptions prevailing amongst their populations. The design of suitable integration policies should take these perceptions into account as well as the wider economic and social landscape of the country where integration is being attempted.

3.2.2. Goals and topics of the Special Eurobarometer

The continuous migrant flows to the EU over the last decades and the near certainty that these will remain a reality in the 21st century, thereby rendering the development of effective migrant integration policies a major priority, constituted the impetus for the European Commission and the General Directorate of Migration and Home Affairs to request the Special Eurobarometer on the integration of migrants. As noted in the report presenting the results of the Eurobarometer (European Commission 2018), migration and migrant integration have become sensitive political topics, especially subsequent to the massive refugee flows into Europe observed in recent years. In many surveys of public opinion carried out in various European countries, migration proved to be the topic mentioned by the greatest numbers of citizens as the most pressing issue facing the EU. The achievement of successful migrant integration poses major challenges, and it was therefore considered advisable to systematically examine the views of EU populations, in order to facilitate the design of appropriate strategies and policies through the collaboration of European institutions with the member-states and other bodies. The field study of the Special Eurobarometer was conducted in the autumn of 2017, and specifically, between October 21 and 30.

It should be noted that at the beginning of the interviews, the respondents were informed that the questions about migrants referred to individuals who were born outside the EU (third countries) and moved from their country of birth and are presently residing legally in an EU country. In order to ensure that all the respondents had the same understanding of the individuals meant by the term ‘migrants’, this definition was repeated several times during the interview. Additional clarification was given that the term does not include migrants who have become citizens of the EU, or the children of migrants who have acquired

citizenship of the EU country where they reside, or migrants who are residing in the country illegally. In order to provide yet further clarification, the respondents of each country were told the top source countries of migrants in their country, which means that in Greece, Albania was mentioned as the main source country of migrants.

Because the refugee crisis, the difficult conditions experienced by newly-arrived refugees and migrants, and the problems faced by local communities where they have concentrated, particularly in the Aegean islands, have predominated in Greek news over the last few years, it is very likely that when Greek respondents of the Eurobarometer were asked about migrants, not only the older, settled, legal migrants suggested by the given definition were considered, but also the newly-arrived refugees and migrants. The Eurobarometer results for Greece should be interpreted bearing this in mind.

The Eurobarometer focused on the following topics:

- perceptions towards migrants and knowledge of the extent and characteristics of migration to their specific country,
- personal experiences and relations with migrants and comfort in interaction with migrants,
- evaluation of the success of migrant integration and the factors affecting it, and
- views about the roles and responsibilities of various institutions in migrant integration.

In what follows, some of the main findings of the Eurobarometer will be briefly overviewed, while noting the convergence with or divergence of Greece from other countries of the EU. Where feasible, the possible repercussions of the Greek findings for the design of Greek policies for migrant integration will be discussed.

3.2.3. Knowledge of migration

In the 28 countries of the EU (EU28), most of the respondents, and specifically, 61%, stated that they are not well informed about migration and migrant integration. In Greece, the proportion reached 69%, indicating that there is a wide margin for public information campaigns.

In order to assess the knowledge of the respondents, questions were posed about the migrant population in their own countries. They were first asked whether they believed most of the migrants in their country are residing there legally or illegally. In Greece, the highest percentage of all EU28 countries was observed

with respect to those believing that most migrants are in their country illegally, and specifically 58%, compared to the EU28 average of 29%. The other country exhibiting a much higher than average percentage was Italy (47%), a country which, like Greece, has been the recipient of large numbers of refugees and migrants since 2014. The recent massive inflows appear to have influenced the formation of responses given in Greece, “displacing” the experiences of respondents with the hundreds of thousands of migrants from Albania and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe who arrived in Greece from the early 1990s and acquired residence permits in the various programmes for legalisation of undocumented migrants.

It should be noted that for the EU28 as a whole, the view that most migrants are residing legally and not illegally is more typical of respondents of younger ages and with higher levels of education. It is worth noting how the view that most reside legally is associated with responses to other questions in the Eurobarometer. More particularly, those who perceive migration to be more of an opportunity than a problem are more likely to believe that most migrants are in their country legally than those who consider migration to be more of a problem. Similarly, those who believe themselves well-informed about migration are more likely to think that most migrants are in their country legally. Furthermore, those who feel more comfortable in social relations with migrants as friends, colleagues, neighbors, etc., are more likely to believe that most migrants in their country are residing there legally.

Next, respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of migrants in the population of their country, with the clarification that migrants are those born outside the EU. When the response “I cannot estimate their proportion” is excluded from the analysis, in almost all countries (25 of 28), the estimates surpassed the actual proportion, while in 19 countries the estimate was at least double their actual proportion. Greece was among these 19 countries, with the average estimate to be about 20% of the population, compared to the figure of 8.4% cited by the Eurobarometer report (European Commission 2018) to be their actual proportion in the Greek population at the time, based on Eurostat data. Nonetheless, the degree of overestimation observed in Greece (2.4) was not among the highest and was close to the average degree of overestimation (2.3) for the EU28. In some countries, all with small proportions of migrants in their populations, the overestimates were much greater – in Romania, Bulgaria and Poland, the

estimated proportion was at least eight times their actual proportion, while in Slovakia, it was fourteen times greater. For the EU28 as a whole, the estimated proportion of migrants was smaller when the respondent had more education and less difficulty in paying bills frequently or sometimes (the variable used in the study to assess the economic security of respondents).

3.2.4. Personal experiences with migrants and comfort in interaction with them

Questions were posed in the interviews as to the frequency of interaction with migrants in different contexts, with the clarification that interaction can be of any type, such as the exchange of a few words or participation in some activity together. It is noteworthy that of all 28 EU countries, the respondents of Greece presented the greatest frequency of interaction with migrants. For the EU28 as a whole, 37% replied that they had daily interaction with migrants, 23% that they had such interaction on a weekly basis, and 37% that their interaction was less frequent. In comparison, 57% in Greece said they had daily interaction, while the other countries with relatively high percentages were Ireland (55%), Austria and Sweden (each 52%), and Spain and Italy (each 51%), while the smallest percentages of daily interaction were observed in Bulgaria (1%) and Romania (3%), countries which have very small proportions of migrants in their populations.

With regard to interaction with migrants in the neighborhood (the respondents were given the examples of interaction in shops, restaurants, parks, and on the street), once again Greece presented the highest percentage, with 45% reporting that they have such interaction daily in their neighborhood, in comparison to 23% for EU28. On the contrary, with respect to interaction with migrants at the workplace, Greece recorded the same percentage (20%) as the EU28 average. Greece also placed close (18%) to the EU28 average (15%) with respect to the reporting of daily interaction with migrants while using public services such as hospitals or mass transportation. Daily interaction with migrants at childcare centers, schools or universities was at similar levels for respondents in Greece (14%) and the EU28 as a whole (12%).

The next topic in the interviews was how comfortable the respondents would feel with different types of social relations with migrants. Given that the level of daily interaction with migrants in Greece was the highest of any EU country, it is surprising that the percentages of respondents in Greece who said they would not feel

comfortable interacting with migrants in various contexts were high compared to the EU28 averages and were close to those recorded in Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

The specific social relations asked about were having a migrant as a friend, a colleague at work, a neighbor, a doctor, a member of the family (including as a partner), and as a manager. Three responses were possible: “totally comfortable”, “somewhat comfortable”, and “totally uncomfortable”.

For each relation, the proportion of respondents in Greece who replied that they would be totally uncomfortable with the specific relation is higher than the corresponding EU28 average. The relations for which Greece exhibits the greatest divergence from the EU average are for having a migrant as a manager and as a family member. For the relation of manager, 47% of respondents in Greece said they would feel totally uncomfortable, while the other countries with high levels of discomfort were Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic. As far as the relationship of family member is concerned, in Greece 51% stated they would feel totally uncomfortable, while other countries with large proportions declaring the same were Hungary (59%) and Bulgaria (55%), followed by the Czech Republic (44%), Cyprus (42%), and Romania (40%). On the contrary, countries where large proportions declared that they would feel totally comfortable with a migrant as a family member are the Netherlands (78%) and Sweden (74%).

Analysis was performed of the responses about comfort levels with various social relations according to social and demographic factors. Lesser comfort with migrants was ascertained of those who are older (55+), have less education (finished their education at age 15 or earlier), and are of lesser economic means (have difficulty paying their bills often or sometimes). A strong association was observed between comfort in interaction with migrants and the view that migration is more of an opportunity than problem. It is noteworthy that precisely this combination was observed in Greece, with a small proportion declaring comfort in relations with migrants and a small proportion considering migration to be an opportunity.

In any case, it should be added that Greece was close to and slightly higher than the EU28 average with respect to actual friendship relations with migrants, with 29% and 27%, respectively, declaring that they have migrants as friends. On the contrary, the proportion of respondents in Greece who have migrants as family members was lower (1%) than the EU28 average (4%).

3.2.5. Views about the impact of migration on society and the economy

In the key question of the Eurobarometer about whether migration from countries outside the EU is more of a problem or opportunity for the respondent's country, in the EU as a whole 38% replied that it is more of a problem, 31% that it is equally a problem and an opportunity, and 20% that it is more of an opportunity. In Greece, as in Hungary and Malta, the highest percentage (63%) of the EU28 was observed with respect to respondents considering migration more of a problem than an opportunity. Correspondingly, in Greece the lowest percentage (3%) was observed for those considering migration more of an opportunity, while the highest percentages were observed in Sweden (45%), Ireland (36%), and the United Kingdom (35%).

It should be noted that for the EU as a whole, the tendency to consider migration a problem increases with the age of the respondent, decreases the greater the age at which the respondent completed his/her education, while it increases if the respondent has difficulty paying bills. Furthermore, respondents who believe most of the migrants in their country are there legally rather than illegally are more likely to consider migration an opportunity. As seen above, in Greece a large percentage (the highest of all EU countries) believe that most migrants are there illegally, and a very small percentage (the lowest of the EU) consider migration an opportunity.

It was also ascertained that countries with large proportions of migrants in their populations tend to have more positive views about the impact of migration. Relevant examples here are Sweden, the United Kingdom and Luxembourg, where the proportion of migrants exceeds 8%, and positive views about the impact of migration are observed, while in Bulgaria and Hungary, where the proportion of migrants is less than 2%, negative views about migration are recorded. Obviously, Greece must be considered an exception to this trend, given that it is among the countries with a large proportion of migrants (8.4% according to the Eurostat data presented in the Eurobarometer report (European Commission 2018)), but at the same time registers very negative views about the migration impact. Greece must also be considered an exception to another ascertained trend that frequent interaction with migrants is accompanied by more positive views about the impact of migration, given that, as seen above, Greece was the country with the highest percentage of respondents declaring that they have daily interaction with migrants. The

negative attitudes observed in Greece as to the impact of migration are undoubtedly related to the inadequate management of the massive inflows observed in recent years, a phenomenon not observed in the aforementioned countries with large proportions of migrants in their midst and positive views about their presence.

Questions were also posed as to the impact of migrants on various dimensions of economy and society, and once again respondents in Greece and a few other countries stood out in terms of their negative views. With respect to the impact of migrants on society, 61% in Greece replied that their impact is negative, as did 64% in Bulgaria and 60% in Hungary, compared to 13% in Sweden and the average of 23% for the EU28. As in most all of the countries, the majority of respondents in Greece (62%) agreed that migrants help by taking on jobs for which it is difficult to find workers. As for the impact of migration on the economy more generally, respondents in Greece had the most negative views of all the EU28, with 67% disagreeing that migrants have a positive impact, followed by Hungary (66%) and Bulgaria (63%). Similarly, a relatively high proportion (67%) of respondents in Greece disagreed that migrants bring new ideas and contribute to innovation. As far as the cultural impact of migrants is concerned, in Greece the majority did not agree that migrants enrich cultural life, contrary to most countries.

In the interviews, respondents were also asked if they believe migrants constitute a burden on the welfare system of their country. Greece once again diverged from most countries, along with Malta, and registered the largest percentage (75%) of agreement that they are a burden, while the average for the EU28 was 56%. Nonetheless, where Greece diverged even further from the EU average in terms of its negative views was on the question as to whether migrants take jobs from others, with 73% replying affirmatively, while the next highest percentage was 65% and belonged to Cyprus, compared to the EU28 average of 39%. As far as criminality is concerned, 70% in Greece replied that migrants worsen the crime problem, compared to 55% for the EU28.

In the analysis of responses for the EU28 as a whole, it was ascertained that those who consider themselves well-informed about migration and migrant integration stated in larger percentages that migration is more of an opportunity than a problem. As noted above, the proportion of respondents in Greece who consider that they are not well-informed was higher than the average for the EU28, and specifically, 69%. Therefore it could probably be expected that respondents in

Greece would negatively evaluate the impact of migration, as indeed was the case.

3.2.6. Views about the success of migrant integration and relevant criteria

In the eyes of respondents in Greece, the integration of migrants is not successful. They were asked about the success of migrant integration: 1) generally, 2) in the city or area where they live, and 3) in their country more generally. On all three questions, the respondents in Greece said in smaller proportions than the EU28 average that integration is successful, while large percentages in Greece said that integration is unsuccessful (49%, 51% and 62%, respectively, to the three questions). Countries where larger percentages of respondents than in Greece (62%) declared that integration in their countries more generally is not successful were Sweden (73%), France (64%), Italy (63%), and Germany (63%).

In the data analysis, it was ascertained that respondents who were older (55+), of lesser education, and were economically insecure were more likely to believe that migrant integration in their country is unsuccessful. As might be expected, those who believe migration is more of a problem than an opportunity were also more likely to judge integration to be unsuccessful. It is noteworthy that those who consider themselves well-informed about migration matters were more likely to believe that migrant integration is successful.

With respect to the criteria for a migrant to be considered successfully integrated into the specific society, the criterion chosen by the largest percentage of respondents (68%) as very important was the ability to speak the language of the host country, while the respective percentage for Greece was 76%. At the EU28 level, it was also considered very important by a large percentage (62%) that the migrant contributes to the welfare system through the payment of taxes, while Greece exhibited the highest percentage of respondents considering this very important, and specifically, 88%. Garnering considerable percentages, but smaller than those for the previous prerequisites, were the criteria that the migrant accepts the values and social norms of the society (56% for the EU28 and 54% for Greece), that the migrant has suitable education and vocational skills to find a job (48% and 59%, respectively), and that the migrant has friends of the country's nationality (34% and 32%, respectively). The dimension along which Greece (47%), together with Spain (47%) and Ireland (48%), presented much higher percentages than the EU28 (34%) was to consider

as very important that the migrant shares the cultural traditions of the host country. This dimension was also ascertained in other studies and surveys (reviewed in Cavounidis 2017) as differentiating Greece from other countries, with respondents in Greece placing great emphasis on the adoption of its cultural customs by migrants.

3.2.7. Views about obstacles to integration and measures to promote it

Finally, respondents were asked to evaluate potential obstacles to migrant integration as well as measures to facilitate it. In Greece, the factor that was considered by the highest percentage of respondents (77%) as a serious obstacle to integration is difficulty in finding work (compared to 63% for EU28), while the next important obstacle according to respondents in Greece is the limited effort made by migrants themselves, cited by 73% compared to 65% in the EU. Other serious obstacles reported by substantial percentages in Greece are the difficulties in accessing long-term residence permits (70%), discrimination against migrants (69%), and their restricted access to education, health care and social protection (68%).

It is interesting that the percentage of respondents in Greece who consider the promotion of migrant integration to be a necessary investment for the future of their country was one of the lowest of the EU28, and specifically 47%, compared to the EU28 average of 69%. The other countries with low percentages believing migrant integration to be a necessary investment were Bulgaria and Hungary (41%), as well as Slovakia (44%), while the highest percentages were found in Sweden (91%) and the Netherlands (89%), along with Portugal and Finland (85%), compared to the EU28 average of 69%. The data analysis showed that those who disagree that migrant integration is an important investment are more likely to be older (55+) and of lower education, and to have difficulty paying their bills. It was also found that the overwhelming majority (90%) of those who believe migration is more of an opportunity for their country rather than a problem agree that it is an important investment while those who believe it is more of a problem agree less (49%).

Turning to the specific measures that residents of Greece think contribute to migrant integration, the measures that gathered the largest percentages of the reply "I agree completely", all with at least 52%, were the provision of language courses to migrants when they arrive in the country, support for registration of migrant children in preschool education, and compulsory attendance of language and integration programs

upon arrival. It should be noted that when the replies “I agree completely” and “I tend to agree” are grouped together, the percentage that agrees with each of these three measures approaches or surpasses 90% of the valid answers. It should also be noted that the proportions in Greece who agree with each of the measures were higher than the respective EU28 averages; lower than average percentages were observed in most of the countries that Greece had been Eurobarometer “partners” with, in terms of their negative attitudes towards migration and specifically Hungary, Romania, and Italy. In other words, Greece parted company with these countries when it came to attitudes about integration measures.

Particularly noteworthy is the very large proportion (89%) of respondents in Greece who agree (completely or somewhat) that the better preparation of local communities, with the provision of information about migration and migrants, would advance integration. Yet other measures that were considered in Greece to promote migrant integration are the introduction or improvement of programmes for migrants upon their arrival (89%) and the provision of measures for finding work, such as vocational education and the recognition of qualifications, etc. (86%).

With respect to the question as to whether they consider successful migrant integration in their country to be a process of mutual adaptation where both the migrants and the specific society have joint responsibilities or whether it is a more a matter for the migrants themselves or for the specific society, the majority of respondents in Greece and specifically 60%, replied that it is a mutual process, compared to 69% for EU28. As far as the role of various institutions in achieving integration is concerned, the overwhelming majority of respondents in Greece, as in the EU28, believe that an important role (either “very important” or “somewhat important”) should be played by many bodies, and specifically the national government (96%), local and regional authorities (96%), and educational bodies such as preschools, schools, and universities. To the question whether the government is doing enough to promote the social integration of migrants, 58% of respondents in Greece answered affirmatively and 37% negatively, compared to 51% and 39%, respectively, for the EU28.

3.2.8. Conclusions

Analysis of the data from the Special Eurobarometer for the integration of migrants identified two main axes which differentiate the responses given in various countries of the EU28. First, there was an important

socio-demographic divide between those who are younger, better educated, and economically secure (based on their reply that they do not have difficulty paying their bills), and those who are older, with less education, and economically insecure, with the former group exhibiting more favorable attitudes towards migrants.

Second, there was striking regional differentiation in the EU28, with countries of Northern Europe together with Portugal diverging from countries of Central and Eastern Europe along with some Mediterranean countries that recently received massive inflows of migrants and refugees, and specifically, Greece and Italy. In the first group of countries, more positive attitudes towards migration and migrants were observed than in the second group.

Even though clarifications were given at various points in the interviews as to which population of migrants the questions referred to, that is, those residing legally in the country, such as, in the case of Greece, the hundreds of thousands of migrants from Albania and elsewhere who arrived from the early 1990s, it appears very likely that the negative attitudes towards migrants observed in Greece were shaped in relation to the unprecedented flows of refugees and migrants to Greece in recent years and the ineffective management of these flows.

Ineffective management of these flows not only has serious negative repercussions for the welfare of newly-arrived migrants and refugees and of the local communities where they stay, but as is apparent in the responses of Greece to the Eurobarometer, may also affect future prospects for successful integration in Greek society of those who remain. When flows are not effectively managed, citizens come to believe that migration is out of control and negative attitudes towards migrants are forged, undermining prospects for smooth integration in the long term. In short, with inadequate migration management, not only are the human rights of the newly-arrived jeopardized along with the social cohesion of local communities where they arrive, but also the prospects for successful integration.

Nonetheless, there are some areas in which Greek responses to the Eurobarometer create room for optimism. It is noteworthy that there was widespread recognition that various measures can contribute to migrant integration (presumably, recognition implies approval of the measures), including the registration of children in the educational system, a measure previously found to enjoy widespread acceptance in Greece (Cavounidis 2017).

The data for Greece also indicate that there is great scope for information campaigns which can contribute to more positive attitudes towards migrants, given that a very large percentage of the respondents stated that they were not well-informed about migration and migrant integration. Furthermore, a large percentage declared that better preparation of local communities, through the provision of relevant information, would assist migrant integration. With respect to the very negative views recorded as to the impact of migration on Greece, it could be emphasized in information campaigns that most of the large migrant population is residing in Greece legally and makes a substantial contribution to the Greek economy through their employment and their contributions to the Greek social security system, and also that most of the migrants who arrived in the past have been successfully integrated into Greek society. It could also prove effective, with respect to reversing negative views about the migration impact, to discuss migration in terms of the serious demographic problem facing Greece due to the ageing of its population, and its dire consequences for the social security system.

The Greek state should focus its attention not only on the short-term, but also on long-term measures for

effective management of inflows and the successful social integration of those who will remain in Greece. Unfortunately, to date, Greek policies have focused almost exclusively on the short term, with the hasty preparation, at the last minute, of temporary measures to handle new inflows. Ineffective management of inflows and of reception facilities for new arrivals seriously damages future prospects for successful migrant and refugee integration.

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