

Size, profile and labour market analysis of immigration in Greece

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This book documents and analyses migration in Greece since the early 1990s. The 1990s were marked by dramatic developments in international migration flows, which affected Europe as a whole and Greece in particular. The massive migration flows that resulted from the socioeconomic and political transition of the former socialist countries triggered drastic structural transformations in migration. Since the early 90s, a relatively large number of illegal immigrants from the neighbouring Balkan countries, most notably Albania, have entered Greece. This dramatic structural change went on throughout the first decade of the 21st century and has been extended to Asian and African countries of origin.

This mainly empirical study is intended to fill some of the gaps in migration research in Greece. It is organised in five main chapters and concentrates on the following key objectives. It critically reviews the development of migration legislation and policy during the early 90s and analyses the size and characteristics of legal and illegal migration through the use of all available statistical data on immigration. Then, the study examines the labour market performance of different groups of immigrants with respect to that of the native population. Finally, it attempts to assess the impact of immigrant employment on the labour market position of natives, by exploring whether immigrant and Greek workers are substitutes or complementary factors in the production process.

The book is well-written and provides a comprehensive examination of the aspects affecting immigration in Greece. It has several advantages over other books on immigration and has some interesting characteristics which I would like to emphasize: First, the study utilises almost all of the available official data sources (i.e. data from the Population Census, Labour Force Survey, the Ministry of Interior, the former Ministry of Public Order etc.) and makes use of the latest available data, thus covering a significant information gap regarding immigration in Greece. Second, it covers

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a considerable time period, extending from the beginning of the 1990s until the late 2000s, during which unprecedented (inter)national political and economic changes influenced migration movements, as well as European and Greek migration policies and legislation. Third, the study confirms previous findings on migration in Greece, while stressing recent characteristics and developments which should be taken into consideration when implementing migration policies. Recent characteristics of migration in Greece include the increasing tendency for family reunification (especially among women and the elderly), as well as the rising number of immigrants from certain Asian and African countries of origin. Fourth, the study examines closely the evolution of asylum policy, as well as the stocks and flows of asylum applicants and the new trends regarding their size, features and the main source countries. Finally, a particularly useful distinction is made between illegal and legal immigrants throughout the book.

The study yields a number of interesting findings, some of which I would like to mention: First, successive attempts to eliminate illegal immigration through relevant legislation and legalisation were not successful in resolving the specific issue in the long term. Continuous legalisation programmes increased the number of legal immigrants and improved their working and living conditions. However, legalisation increased rather than curbing the influx of illegal immigrants over time and it appears to have contributed to the delay in framing long-term migration policies or a sustainable admission system for migrants.

Second, the scale of illegal migration has varied under the influence of domestic legislation and policies (i.e. legalisation programmes), as well as developments in the immigrant countries of origin. Data show that legalised immigrants have a greater tendency to fall back into illegal status, thus contributing to the subsequent increase in the scale of illegal immigration. Although a strong statistical relationship exists between illegal and legal immigrants by country of origin, the number of illegal migrants from Asian and African countries is on the rise.

Third, the vast majority of deportation decisions issued for certain Asian countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, which relate to illegal immigrants entering Greece via Turkey (Evros, Aegean Islands and Dodecanese) are systematically not executed. The large number of these illegal immigrants also exerts severe pressure on the overall scale of illegal migration, since deportation decisions to Turkey are rarely executed.

Finally, the study scientifically shows that the presence of immigrants in Greece increases employment possibilities for the native population, thus suggesting that the immigrant population is a complementary and not a substitute factor in the production process. Moreover, the probability of the native population moving from unemployment to employment is not particularly affected by the presence of immigrants, even if the analysis is limited to younger people. In general, the participation of im-

migrants in the regional labour market does not affect the unemployment probability of the Greek population, while this likelihood is reduced when there is an increased presence of immigrants in the labour market with the same qualifications as the natives. In other words, negligible labour market competition was found between the native and immigrant population, while in some cases there was cooperation rather than competition among both groups of workers, which may be attributed to the differentiation between them in various labour market dimensions.

The last finding of the study, I believe, is the most important as it scientifically refutes outdated perceptions, according to which immigrants are often blamed for all negative developments in the Greek labour market and society in general. However, this conclusion must be re-examined by use of the latest data and in light of the subsequent fiscal and economic crisis.

In conclusion, the authors have presented a well-documented and analytically developed study of immigration in Greece, which deserves to be read by academics, researchers and practitioners.