Migration

ADDRESSING MIGRATION CHALLENGES BEYOND THE CURRENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

▶ Greece is facing an unprecedented refugee crisis, with close to one million persons crossing its borders between January 2015 and February 2016.

▶ Labour migration to Greece dropped sharply but did not stop during the economic crisis.

▶ The economic crisis has disproportionally affected migrants' labour market outcomes and poverty has increased sharply among migrant households.

▶ Children of immigrants are more likely to attend a socio-economically disadvantaged school, more likely to perform poorly, and more likely to drop out.

▶ Emigration of young and highly educated Greeks could soon represent a big challenge for the country, but also an opportunity.
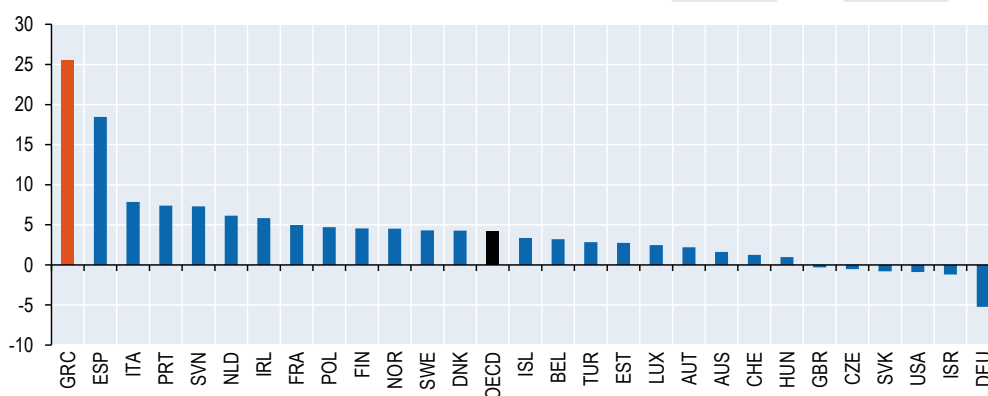
What's the issue?

In the last 25 years Greece turned from an emigration to an immigration country. Today the country is faced with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis with the arrival of close to 950 000 people between January 2015 and February 2016. The vast majority of them cross Greece on their way from Turkey to Northern Europe and so far less than 1% of them have requested asylum in Greece. At the same time, labour migration flows slowed down with the crisis, but they did not stop. In 2012, 23 200 new residence permits were issued to non-EU citizens, compared with 43 000 in 2008.

The economic crisis has had a profound effect on immigrant integration in the labour market. Their unemployment rate increased by 26 percentage points between 2008 and 2015 (see Figure) reaching 33%, against a 17 percentage point increase for natives. Despite some decline in the past 2 years, possibly reflecting return migration or re-emigration to other destinations, the level of unemployment among migrants is the highest in the OECD. Moreover, it is eight percentage points higher than the unemployment rate of Greek natives.

≫ Immigrants' unemployment has risen sharply with the economic crisis

Percentage point difference in unemployment rate of the foreign-born between 2008 and 2015

Source: European Labour Force Survey (Eurostat) Q3 2007 to Q2 2008 for European countries; Current Population Survey Q3 2014 to Q2 2015 for the United States; 2008 and 2015 Labour Force Surveys for Australia and Israel.

Education provides migrants and refugees with a bridge to integrate into Greece. Those who engage and succeed in the education system are more quickly integrated into both the social and economic spheres of Greek society. Currently, 11% of 15 year-old Greek students have an immigrant background. These students may face additional challenges, such as adapting to a new home and culture, and for most, learning a new language. They are at higher risk of low performance than native students: nearly half of the low performing students in Greece have an immigrant background; more students with an immigrant background attend socio-economically disadvantaged schools than in other OECD countries (18.6%, compared to an OECD average of 15.7%). Students with an immigrant background are also more prone to drop out: in 2012, 42% left school early, while only 8.3% of native Greek students did so.

Emigration of Greek nationals increased following the economic crisis. Migrant flows to other OECD countries grew by 160% between 2010 and 2012, while 2013 data show a small decline. More than two thirds of these went to Germany. Although the emigration rate of the highly educated for Greece is low (6%) compared with most other European countries, should it continue, the brain drain may become an issue. More than 27 000 recent Greek emigrants had at least a university degree, representing 60% of all recent emigrants from Greece. If the right policies are in place, emigration can become an opportunity for the country. This will require finding new tools to connect with and mobilise the skills of the Greek diaspora as current policy settings may be outdated.

Why is this important for Greece?

727 000 immigrants are currently living in Greece with a residence permit, accounting for 7% of the population. Integrating these immigrants and offering them the possibility to make a living is fundamental. It increases their contribution to the Greek economy and society and also raises acceptance of immigration. The quicker integration takes, the lower the risks that migrants, or their children, will become alienated from Greece's culture and values. Making progress on integration is particularly pertinent given the poor economic situation of many migrants. The poverty rate among migrant households was 45% in 2012 compared with 20% for native households, and the risk of in-work poverty was 2.4 times higher for migrants than for natives.

What should policy makers do?

- Ensure migrants are not under-represented in active labour market policies.

- Record and assess the skills of humanitarian migrants who stay in the country and ensure their swift labour market integration.

- Integrate language learners in age-appropriate classes as soon as possible, rather than keeping them in separate classes.

- Ensure schools in immigrant-rich areas are adequately resourced to cope with the extra challenges of migrants and refugees.

- Strengthen diaspora engagement through better exchange of information about possible job and investment opportunities and through professional networks and mobilise their skills for the country's economic development.

Further reading

OECD (2015), *International Migration Outlook 2015*, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2015-en

OECD (2015), *Connecting with Emigrants: A Global Profile of Diasporas 2015*, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264239845-en

OECD/European Union (2015), *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In*, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264234024-en

OECD (2011), *Education Policy Advice for Greece, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264119581-en