

# Greece: A History of Migration



Picture 1 : Greeks in Ellis Island waiting to get permission to enter USA

Countries around the globe have communities that bear witness to the waves of outward migration that once characterized Greece. Over the past 15 years, however, Greece has become a receiver of migrants and a permanent immigrant destination. Most of these new immigrants hail from Central and Eastern Europe, and despite two regularization programs, a good number of them still reside in Greece without authorization. People from Asia (particularly Iraq, Pakistan, and India) have recently been rapidly increasing their share of the total number of immigrants arriving illegally.

As in the past, a complex set of forces are pushing and pulling migration to and from Greece. Today, the government is poised to implement an integration action plan aimed at harnessing these forces to the country's advantage. That process, however, has yet to begin, and considerable public anxiety and political friction is expected to precede the harvest of hoped-for economic, cultural, and political benefits.

## **Greek History: Waves of Emigration**

Two important waves of mass emigration took place after the formation of the modern Greek state in the early 1830s, one from the late 19th to the early 20th century, and another following World War II.



Picture 1 : Currants one of the main export products in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century

The first wave of emigration was spurred by the economic crisis of 1893 that followed the rapid fall in the price of currants - the major export product of the country – in the international markets. In the period 1890-1914, almost a sixth of the population of Greece emigrated, mostly to the United States and Egypt. This emigration was, in a sense,

encouraged by Greek authorities, who saw remittances as helping to improve the balance of payments of the Greek economy. The lasting effect on Greece's national consciousness was the expansion of the notion of

"Hellenism" and "Hellenic diaspora" to the "New World."



Picture 2 : Greeks arrive in USA

Following World War II, the countries of Southern Europe, Greece among them, were the main contributors to migration to the industrialized nations of Northern Europe. However, the oil crises of 1973 and 1980 caused economic uncertainty and a sharp fall in the demand for labor, which in turn led northern states to introduce restrictive immigration policies. As these countries became less welcoming to their former invitees, return migration to Greece soon followed.

More than one million Greeks migrated in this second wave, which mainly fell between 1950 and 1974. Most emigrated to Western Europe, the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Economic and political reasons often motivated their move, both connected with the consequences of a 1946-1949 civil war and the 1967-1974 period of military junta rule that followed. Official statistics show that in the period 1955-1973 Germany absorbed 603,300 Greek migrants, Australia 170,700, the U.S. 124,000, and Canada 80,200. The majority of these emigrants came from rural areas, and they supplied both the national and international labor markets.

Following the oil crisis of 1973 and the adoption of restrictive immigration policies by the European countries, these immigration flows were severely reduced and return migration increased. Other factors contributing to these changes included integration difficulties in the receiving countries, the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974, and the new economic prospects developed following the 1981 entry of the country into the European Economic Community (EEC). Between 1974 and 1985, almost half of the emigrants of the post-war period had returned to Greece.

### **Trading Places: Immigration Replaces Emigration**

Declining emigration and return migration created a positive migration balance in the 1970s. Immigration grew at the beginning of the 1980s when a small number of Asians, Africans, and Poles arrived and found work in construction, agriculture, and domestic services. Nevertheless, immigration was still limited in size. In 1986, legal and unauthorized immigrants totaled approximately 90,000. One third of them were from European Union countries. The 1991 Census registered 167,000 "foreigners" in a total population of 10,259,900.

The collapse of the Central and Eastern European regimes in 1989 transformed immigration to Greece into a massive, uncontrollable phenomenon. As a result, although Greece was at that time still one of the less-developed EU states, in the 1990s it received the highest percentage of immigrants in relation to its labor force.

Many factors explain the transformation of Greece into a receiving country. These include the geographic location, which positions Greece as the eastern "gate" of the EU, with extensive coastlines and easily crossed borders. Though the situation at the country's northern borders has greatly improved since the formation of a special border control guard in 1998, geographic access remains a central factor in patterns of migration to Greece.

Also key have been the rapid economic changes that narrowed the economic and social distance from the Northern European countries following the integration of Greece into the EU in 1981. In step with economic development, the improved living standards and higher levels of education attained by young people have led most Greeks to reject low-status and low-income jobs. Meanwhile, both the large size of the informal, family-based economy, and the seasonal nature of industries like tourism, agriculture, and construction, have created demand for a flexible labor pool, independent of trade union practices and legislation.

### **Greece's Migrants in Context**

According to the latest census, the population of Greece increased from 10,259,900 in 1991 to 10,964,020 in 2001. This increase can be almost exclusively attributed to immigration in the past decade. The census showed that the "foreign population" living in Greece in 2001 was 762,191 (47,000 of them EU citizens), making up approximately seven percent of the total population of the total population. Of these migrants, 2,927 were registered as refugees.

It is estimated that the real number of immigrants is higher; many analysts believe that migrants make up as much as 10 percent of the population. They cite, among other factors, the fact that the 2001 Census was carried out before the implementation of Act 2910/2001, otherwise referred to as Greece's second regularization program. This legislation dealt with "the admission and residence of foreigners in Greece and the acquisition of Greek nationality through naturalization." Because of their illegal status, a good number of immigrants escaped census registration, while still others entered the country specifically to take advantage of regularization.

Immigration is the cause of population increase and demographic renewal in Greece in the period between the 1991 and 2001 censuses. The average number of children per woman in Greece has fallen to 1.3, against a European average of 1.5, and well below the average of 2.1 required for the reproduction of a population. Of the immigrant population, on the other hand, 16.7 percent are in the 0-14 age bracket, 79.8 percent in the 15-64 age bracket, and only 3.5 percent in the over-65 age bracket. The respective percentages for the national population are 15.2 percent, 67.7 percent, and 17 percent, demonstrating the key role immigrants of child-bearing age play in the population as a whole. Albanians, who are mainly married couples raising families, are the youngest population overall. In contrast, immigrants from the United States, Canada, and Australia have the highest percentages of people in the over-65 age bracket, because they are mainly pensioner returnees of Greek origin.

Males and females make up 54.5 percent and 45.5 percent of the total, respectively. However, gender composition varies widely among the various nationalities. Albanians and Romanians show the most balanced picture, because the percentages of males fluctuate just above the average with 59 percent and 57 percent, respectively. Other nationalities show sharp asymmetries, where either males or females far outnumber the other gender. For example, females make up almost two thirds of the immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Bulgaria, as well as approximately four-fifths of the Filipinos. On the other end, immigrants from Pakistan and India are almost exclusively male.

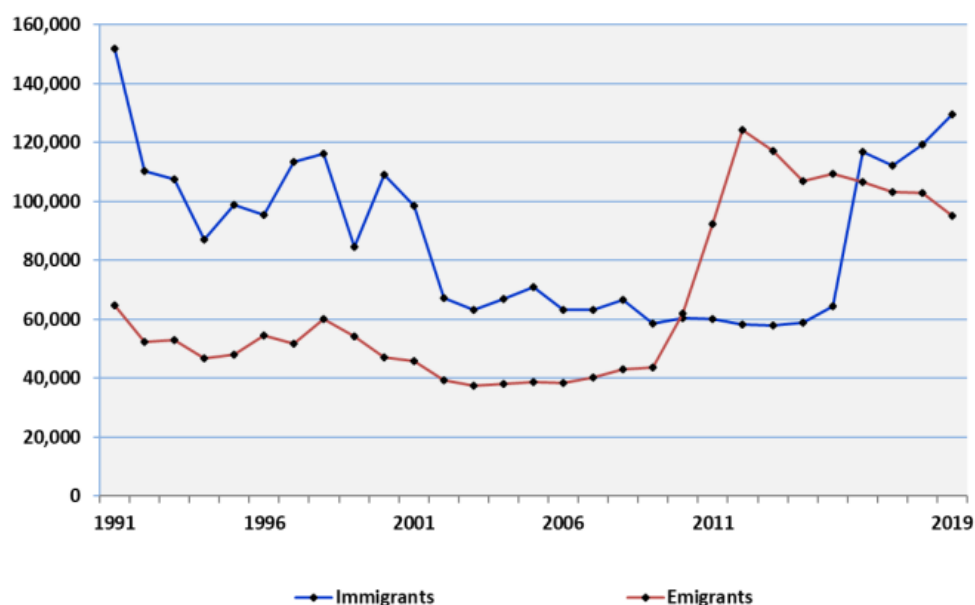
Fifty-four percent of the immigrants enter the country for work. Family reunification (13 percent) and repatriation (7 percent) are other main reasons they give for their arrival. Albanians show the highest level of participation in family reunification and immigrants from United States, Canada, and Australia in repatriation—a confirmation of the Greek origin of these immigrants. An unspecified "other reason" concerns 21.5 percent of the total, while "asylum" and "refugee" status seekers account for 1.6 percent.

### National Origins of Recent Migrants

In the 1990 to 2001 period of mass immigration to Greece, immigrants arrived in two waves. The first was that of the early 1990s, in which Albanians dominated. The second arrived after 1995, and involved much greater participation of immigrants from other Balkan states, the former Soviet Union, Pakistan, and India. The majority of Albanians arrived in the first wave; however, the collapse of enormous "pyramid schemes" in Albania's banking sector in 1996 also spurred significant migration.

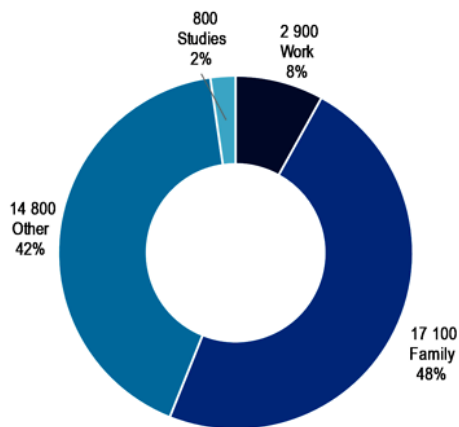
According to the 2001 Census, the largest group of immigrants draws its origins from the Balkan countries of Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania. People from these countries make up almost two-thirds of the total "foreign population." Migrants from the former Soviet Union (Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, etc.) comprise 10 percent of the total; the EU countries approximately six percent. A heterogeneous group of people from places such as the United States, Canada, and Australia (mostly first or second-generation Greek emigrants returning home), also account for around six percent. Finally, a residual group from a wide variety of countries makes up 13 percent. None of the individual countries included in this last group exceeds two percent of the total "foreign population."

Of the main countries of origin, Albania accounts for 57.5 percent of the total, with second-place Bulgaria far outdistanced with 4.6 percent. Common borders with both of these countries have facilitated crossing over to Greece, leading to a cyclical form of immigration.



Picture 3 immigrants – emigrants 1991-2019

**Grants of long-term residence permits  
2018 (Source: Eurostat)**



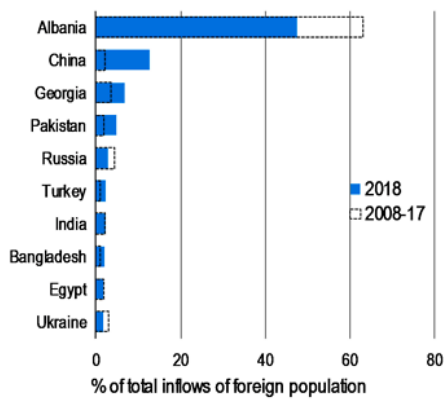
**Temporary migration  
(Source: Eurostat)**

**Humanitarian**

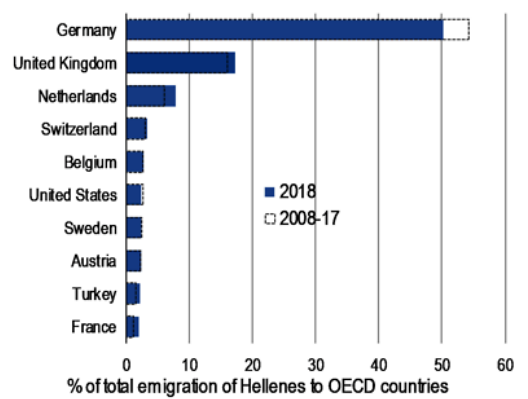
Asylum seekers

	2019	2019/18
Asylum seekers	74 920	+ 15%

**Inflows of top 10 nationalities  
(national definition)**



**Emigration of Hellenes to OECD countries  
(national definition)**



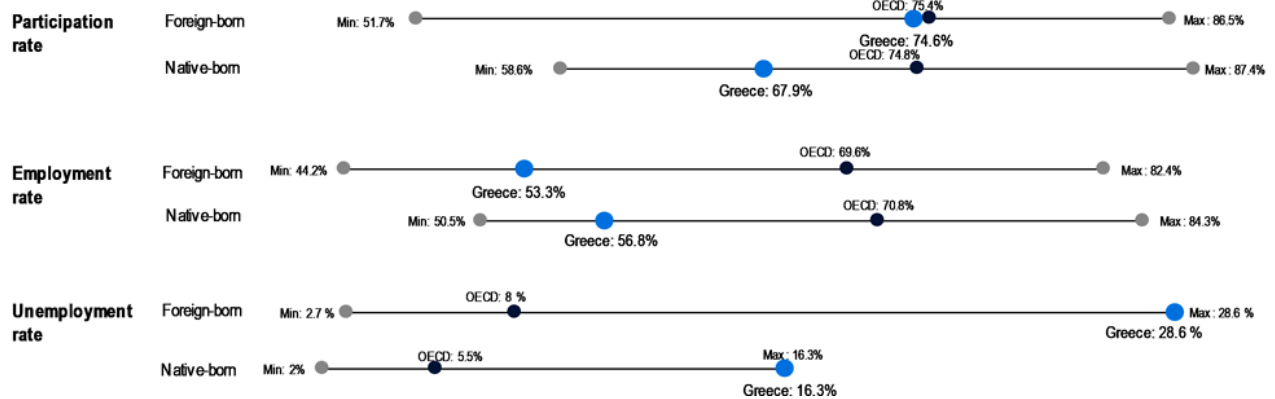
**Components of population growth**

	2019 Per 1 000 inhabitants	2019/18 difference
Total	-1.4	+0.1
Natural increase	-3.9	-0.7
Net migration plus statistical adjustments	2.5	+0.9

**Annual remittances**

	Million current USD	Annual change %	Share in GDP %
Inflows (2019)	544	+11.1	0.3
Outflows (2018)	2 287	+9.8	1.0

**Labour market outcomes  
2019**



# IMMIGRANTS IN GREECE FROM 2018

In 2018, 36 000 new immigrants obtained a residence permit longer than 12 months in Greece (excluding EU citizens), 18.6% more than in 2017. This figure comprises 8% labour migrants, 48% family members (including accompanying family), 2.3% who came for education reasons and 41.7% other migrants. In addition, 11 000 intra-EU postings were recorded in 2018, an increase of 38.3% compared to 2017. These posted workers are generally on short-term contracts.

In 2019, the number of first asylum applicants increased by 15.3%, to reach around 75 000. The majority of applicants came from Afghanistan (24 000), Syria (11 000) and Pakistan (6 400). The largest increase since 2018 concerned nationals of Afghanistan (+12 000) and the largest decrease nationals of Iraq (-4 100). Of the 33 000 decisions taken in 2019, 53% were positive.

Since 2020, third-country citizens entering the country to study Greek can receive a one-year visa, possibly leading to a one-year residence permit, renewable twice. In addition, professionals with a business invitation can enter for short-term stays. Greece transposed the EU Directive on Students and Researchers in February 2020.

From July 2019, Greece has a new National Strategy for Integration. It includes a 'Greek integration model' allowing several institutions to coordinate action plans. The strategy stresses, not only the benefits of interculturalism, but also the need to respect national values, as well as the important role that local government can play in the field of social integration, in cooperation with national authorities.

In January 2020, new legislation regarding the asylum process came into force. Among other provisions, Greece may now detain asylum seekers for up to 18 months. Following massive attempts to illegally enter the Evros region in Greece through the Greek-Turkish borders, submission of asylum applications was suspended for one month in March 2020.

The National Strategy for Integrated Border Management was developed in 2019. In July 2019, Greece introduced changes to the legislation regarding trafficking in human beings. New forms of exploitation became punishable and sentences for accepting the services of a trafficked person were raised. Greece also activated the National Referral Mechanism to identify victims and coordinate action to combat human trafficking.

In 2019, Greece made additional steps to implement its new guardianship system for unaccompanied minors, who receive guardians to represent them in legal matters and ensure their best interest. In addition, a scheme for the relocation of a total of 1 600 unaccompanied minors from Greece to other EU Member States, organised by the EC and the Greek authorities, with the support of UNHCR, IOM and EASO and the receiving Member States, started being implemented on 15 April 2020.

In 2019, a law amending the Greek Nationality Code foresees the replacement of the citizenship interview with a standardised language and citizenship test. The relevant law provision though, has been suspended up to now and the procedural aspects, as well as the content of tests, have not been determined yet. The same law reduced the naturalisation fee from EUR 700 to EUR 550 and facilitated access to Greek

nationality for several groups, such as minors with severe disabilities (>80%) and those not having the capacity to perform legal acts. Since March 2020, refugees may apply for naturalisation only after seven years of permanent stay, instead of previously three.

In July 2019, the responsibilities of the former Ministry for Migration Policy were transferred to the Ministry of Citizen Protection. However, following important developments, a separate Ministry of Migration and Asylum was established in January 2020.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Greece closed its borders but allowed holders of residence permit to enter, including foreign health personnel on condition of inclusion in the National Health System. Immigration and Asylum Services remained closed to the public from 12 March to 15 May 2020, while only pending applications for residence permit or asylum were being processed. Ministerial decisions ensured the legal status of third-country citizens until December 2020. Greece also extended the duration of stay of seasonal workers already present in the country and implemented an ad hoc fast-track procedure for additional agricultural workers. Return and readmission operations, suspended since mid-March due to COVID-19 related restrictions, resumed in July 2020.

## **Where are the Greek communities of the world?**

### **In America**

About 1.3 million people in the United States have Greek ancestry though there are estimations that raise this number to 3 million. 321,144 people older than five spoke Greek at home in 2010. Greek Americans have the highest concentrations in New York, Boston and Chicago whereas Tarpon Springs in Florida was found to have the highest per capita concentration of Greek Americans in the country (11) and the U.S. is home to the largest overseas Greek community, ahead of Australia, Cyprus, Albania and the United Kingdom.

<https://youtu.be/m7kSn32KKpo> ( Greek town: The heart of Hellenism in Chicago)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25EUvdVbG2A&ab\\_channel=GreekReporter](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25EUvdVbG2A&ab_channel=GreekReporter)

( Tarpon Springs : The Greek Island of the United States)

### **In Australia**

There are 505,784 people of Greek ancestry and 99,939 born in Greece living in Australia. The Australian Government's migration schemes had targeted Greeks in the Fifties and Sixties after World War II. 47% of the Greek-Australian community lives in Melbourne and 29% live in Sydney. Melbourne is considered the third-largest "Greek city" in the world

### **In Germany**

There were 296,307 Greek-born citizens in Germany according to the 2011 census, but estimations are as high as 370,000. The first Greeks came during the time of the Roman Empire, however significant immigration started at around 1700 when the Ottoman Empire opened its borders and the first Greek community was founded in Leipzig. The second wave of immigration was when Otto of Wittelbach became King

of Greece and many Greeks came as students to Bavaria. Following WWII, West Germany needed employees for their expanding industry, whereas East Germany took Greek communists as political refugees until 1973.

## Which cities have the largest Greek population outside of Greece?

The fact that there is another little Greece outside of the borders of the country, might sound a little excessive to some, but it is true indeed!

According to the latest estimates of the General Secretariat of Hellenes Abroad, today there more than 5,000,000 people of Greek origin that live outside of the Greek borders, scattered in 140 countries across the globe.

The General Secretariat of Hellenes Abroad reports that the highest concentration of Greek people outside of Greece is observed in the USA, with about 3,000,000 Greeks, followed by Cyprus with 720,000 Greek Cypriots, other European countries with over 1,000,000 Greek people, Australia with 700,000, and Canada with about 300,000 Greeks, while more than 150,000 Greek descendants can be found around the countries of Central and South America, and 100,000 in Asia and Africa.



**Sydney Opera House lights up for Greece's Independence Bicentennial**

**Apart from Cyprus, here are the 10 cities and countries around the world that have the largest population of Greek people:**

1. **Melbourne**, Australia (400,000 Greeks)
2. **New York**, USA (300,000 Greeks)
3. **London**, United Kingdom (280,000 Greeks)
4. **Illinois**, USA (180,000 Greeks)

5. **Florida**, USA (150,000 Greeks)
6. **Sydney**, Australia (130,000 Greeks)
7. **Boston**, Massachusetts, USA (100,000 Greeks)
8. **Toronto**, Canada (60,000 Greeks)
9. **Santiago**, Chile (40,000 Greeks)
10. **Munich**, Germany (30,000 Greeks)

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Greek society finds itself significantly transformed and still undergoing a transition period. It is now fully integrated in the European Union, and while it may still have a significant informal economy, which is difficult to curb, it is a member of the Euro-zone. The country is facing the economic and cultural tensions of globalisation and EU enlargement, and at the same time has become host to nearly a million immigrants in less than a decade. The national education system has undergone important changes but still strives to find a new orientation towards multiculturalism alongside more effective and efficient learning in secondary and higher education. Moreover, during the last decade, steps have been taken for a more open policy towards the country historical minorities - in particular towards the Muslim minority of western Thrace, which remains the largest one. Also Greek authorities and citizens have made some hesitant steps towards immigrant incorporation in Greek society – e.g. the inclusion of immigrant families in state housing for the first time in October 2004. The native population is rapidly ageing, thereby causing preoccupation among other things, for the state welfare system. The relatively high unemployment rate is paradoxically coupled with severe labour shortages in some sectors. Migration policies are necessarily being considered against this background.