

Migration Profiles of Asylum Seekers in Greece

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Abstract. We examine the profile of a sample, gathered between 2017-2019, of migrants mainly from Middle East and North Africa region arrived in Lesbos, Greece and then resided in the Reception and Identification Centre. We show that there is an association between the skill set of a migrant and the destination country. In addition to that, the most skillful asylum seekers will eventually leave Greece after granted asylum and live in other European countries. The intention to move to European country remains strong, however unskillful migrants or asylum seekers without relatives will finally stay in Greece.

Keywords: asylum seekers; migrants; skills; labor market; Greece;

1 Introduction

It is difficult to always know exactly the underlying causes of irregular migration. The influx of migration usually implies illegal entry or stay and is linked to several reasons. First, the different opportunities offered in host countries from an economic perspective incentivize irregular migration to rich recipient countries. Second, the lack or lax legal and border constraints also contribute to this phenomenon. Finally, economic and social factors in the origin and the host countries, as well as ill-informed migrants pose additional challenges to irregular migration. (OECD, 2020)

Theories of Migration may combine four analytical dimensions, which are highlighted across: i) the levels of analysis (“macro-”, “meso-”, “micro-”), ii) the spatial context (geographical, regional), iii) the different points of time, and iv) the different social groups (taking into account skills, occupation, ethnic origin, etc) (de Haas, 2014). Also, de Haas (2014) suggests four types of migration based on capabilities and external constraints: “precarious migration”, “improvement migration”, “free migration”, and “distress migration”. The first and last categories actually refer to “forced mobility such as irregular migrants, failed asylum seekers, Internally Displaced Persons” and “refugees possessing the resources to move abroad legally”, respectively. However, research on the field about migrants, mainly focuses on their potential to enter to employment or their potential to different wages in terms of discrimination (Shekhar *et al.*, 2016), and thus in reference to the second and third categories as mentioned above.

“Migrants” are defined as foreign-born or foreigners, along with the acquisition of nationality, while “refugees” are defined as individuals categorized as either “refugees”, “asylum seekers”, or “other” by the UNHCR (Engler *et al.*, 2020). Comparing “migrants” and “asylum seekers”, the second category faces much more challenges to integrate in the labor markets of the recipient countries due to their limited opportunities, impacting upon the macroeconomic situation of the country (Courtney *et al.*, 2020). On top of that, asylum seekers as labor migrants might be motivated by economic purposes, while asylum seekers as refugees or aiming for family reunification might be motivated by social and humanitarian considerations (Schmid and Helbling, 2016). Overall, their perspectives in assimilation to the labor market are dependent upon the language skills, the educational background and skill set obtained from the country of origin, and the network and connections developed in the host country (Kerr and Kerr, 2011).

In the detailed analysis of Ott (2013), a theorization of the main factors to affect refugees' labor market integration is presented, in accordance with findings of both quantitative and qualitative research. Synopsizing such variables, it seems that the profile of asylum seekers is associated with several factors, such as: i) "demographic variables" (gender, age, marital status, household size, country of origin, health and vulnerability situation), ii) "pre-resettlement history" (years as refugee, initial language level), iii) "human capital" (previous work experience, education level, host country linguistic skills, qualifications and recognition to the host country), iv) "resettlement environment" (language opportunities, discrimination, educational opportunities, attitudes towards refugees), v) "social capital" (social networks, feeling member of community, support). Therefore, policy makers and governments upon their decisions to resettlement programs should take into consideration the "refugee gap" in regards to "labor market integration" strategies, to improve migrants' lives and ultimately national economies (Ott, 2013).

This paper emphasizes on large migration waves in the previous years which caused a migration shock in Greece. It is estimated that Greece is not seemed as a country which might attract migrants even under pressure from these waves. However, in practice, the full majority of arriving people immediately apply for asylum so as to stay legally in Greek territory, but it is unknown whether they will finally stay in Greece or move to another country.

The fundamental aim of this paper is to investigate the profile of migrants arrived in Greece during the period 2017-2019, and, based on their skills and educational background, to predict how many of them will stay and ultimately might be integrated in the EU labor markets. One of the main hypotheses here is that the most skillful migrants will eventually leave Greece after granted asylum and live in other European countries with proved capacity to integrate migrants.

2 Statistical Analysis

The irregular migration flows in years 2015 and 2016 from Middle East and North Africa region caused a major political shock for EU countries and their economies. However, it is estimated that Greece was seemed mainly as transit -rather than destination- country.

My research was based on data collection from primary sources, which include structured interviews with a significant number of asylum seekers residing in Greece having arrived from 2017 and onwards, as well as from official publications. The model of structured interviews was adopted, which included specific questions, so as to interpret and compare the data for future use through quantitative methods. It is pointed out that during 2017-2018 the population of migrants in Lesbos island was close to 20,000, i.e. 1/3 of those stranding in Greece after the refugee/migration crisis, thus suggesting a representative sample, as well as its randomization for further quantitative analysis.

In Lesbos island there used to be the largest Reception and Identification Center in Greece. The author assumed that the majority of them resided in the Reception and Identification Center and opted for observing the life of the migrants passively, but without actively getting involved in their daily life for reasons of prejudice and privacy. The full majority of arriving people immediately applied for asylum so as to legally stay in Greek territory, but it is unknown whether they would finally stay in Greece or move to another country.

2.1 Descriptive Statistics

In total, 994 interviews of adult migrants who arrived between 2017 and 2019 were obtained. Explaining why only these 3 years, it should be mentioned that the number of arrivals in Greece in years 2015 and 2016 were beyond normality due to large inflows, while in year 2020 the number of migrants has been totally minimized due to pandemics and the changing dynamics of Greek-Turkish relations. The main countries of origin of the migrants are Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the Democratic Republic of Congo followed by several other countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The majority of the interviewees were males (n=898, 90.34%), while few females accepted to participate in the survey (n=96, 9.66%). Also, of the 994 migrants, 94.16% (n=936) aged 18-34 years and 5.84% (n=58) aged 35-50 years. Moreover, of the 898 males, 656 (66%) aged 18-34 years and 338 (34%) aged 35-50 years, while of the 96 females, 89 (92,70%) aged 18-34 years and 7 (7,3%) aged 35-50 years. There were no minors or elderly interviewees, and thus reference is done only to these two age groups. Of the 994 migrants, 86.3% (n=834) were Muslims, while 10.1% (n=98) were Christians and 3.5% (n=34) belonged to some other religion.

Indicatively, in terms of education, it is stated that of the total sample, 6.1% are illiterate, 25.7% completed primary education, 43.8% completed secondary education and 15.8% completed tertiary education, while in terms of skills, it is reported that of the total sample, 84.2% reported that they possess professional skills. After all, the majority of migrants desires to move to another EU Member State (85.4%).

Of the 994 migrants, 90.95% (n=904) mentioned that they had never stayed in Europe before, while only 9,05% (n=90) admitted previous stay in Europe. Out of 90 migrants, 21 stayed in Germany, 21 stayed in Greece, 4 stayed in Finland and the rest elsewhere in Europe, including Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The results also show that only 13.7% (n=858) of the migrants had the necessary travel documents while 61% (n=606) of them were travelling alone. The predominant reason for leaving their country was to find better living conditions and prospects (n=955, 96.1%).

Furthermore, a significant portion of the migrants speak European languages (n=294, 29,6%), and mostly English (n=279), French (n=80), German (n=12), Greek (n=12) and Spanish (n=10). Other European languages spoken are: Portuguese (n=4), Italian (n=3), Norwegian (n=3), Swedish (n=2) and Dutch (n=1). There were also other migrants speaking non-European languages apart from their mother tongue, such as: Turkish (n=43), Russian (n=5), Hebrew (n=1), Hindi (n=1), Chinese (n=1).

Table 1 provides data a synopsis of the characteristics of migrants by year between 2017 and 2019, which in turn shows the potential of the statistical analysis as follows.

Table 1. Descriptive results for the entire period 2017-2019

		n	%
Religion	Muslim	834	86.3%
	Christian	98	10.1%
	Other	34	3.5%
Travelling document	No	858	86.3%
	Yes	136	13.7%
Travels alone	No	289	39.0%
Education	Illiterate	59	6.1%
	Primary/ Elementary,	250	25.7%
	Secondary	426	43.8%
	Tertiary	237	24.4%
Skillset	None	157	15.8%
	Something	837	84.2%
Job in Turkey	No	164	16.5%
	Yes	830	83.5%
Relatives in Europe	No	553	55.6%

	Yes	441	44.4%
Previous stay Europe	No	913	91.9%
	Yes	81	8.1%
Asylum Granted	No	928	93.4%
	Yes	66	6.6%
Left Greece	No	969	97.5%
	Yes	25	2.5%
Final Destination	Greece	145	14.6%
	EU	849	85.4%

2.2 Inferential Statistics

Multiple regression model (logit analysis) was used to predict: i) whether migrants were granted asylum; ii) whether migrants left Greece; and iii) whether migrants had a final destination in a European Union country.

The results in Table 2 show that a significant predictor of whether migrants took asylum was their level of education (tertiary vs illiterate: $b=0.216$, $z=-2.500$, $p=0.012$, 95% CI= [0.065, 0.718]) and whether they had some kind of skills ($b=2.935$, $z=2.210$, $p=0.027$, 95% CI= [1.129, 7.629]). Overall, the logit model correctly predicts 93.4% of whether migrants were granted asylum.

Table 2. Results for predicting whether migrants received asylum

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Religion						
2	0.905	0.455	-0.200	0.843	0.338	2.423
3	0.451	0.466	-0.770	0.440	0.060	3.412
Document						
Alone	0.930	0.276	-0.240	0.807	0.520	1.663
Relatives	0.662	0.184	-1.480	0.138	0.384	1.142
DaysGreece						
Members	1.064	0.059	1.120	0.264	0.954	1.186
Education						
1	0.963	0.475	-0.080	0.938	0.366	2.533
2	0.678	0.330	-0.800	0.424	0.261	1.758
3	0.216	0.132	-2.500	0.012	0.065	0.718
Skillset	2.935	1.430	2.210	0.027	1.129	7.629
JobTurkey	0.805	0.322	-0.540	0.587	0.367	1.763
Previous	0.633	0.343	-0.840	0.399	0.219	1.832
Constant	0.062	0.051	-3.390	0.001	0.012	0.311

The results in Table 3 show that a significant predictor (at 10% level, $\alpha=0.10$) of whether migrants left Greece was the existence of some kind of skills ($b=5.655$, $z=1.670$, $p=0.095$, 95% CI= [0.741, 43.180]). Overall, the logit model correctly predicts 97.5% of whether migrants left Greece.

Table 3. Results for the prediction of whether migrants left Greece

	Coef.	Std. Err.	Z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Document	1.634	0.937	0.860	0.391	0.532	5.025
Alone	1.199	0.549	0.400	0.692	0.489	2.940
Relatives	1.107	0.468	0.240	0.809	0.483	2.537
DaysGreece	1.001	0.001	1.030	0.305	1.000	1.002
Members	1.105	0.087	1.260	0.206	0.947	1.290
Education						
1	0.999	0.826	0.000	0.999	0.198	5.050
2	1.104	0.867	0.130	0.900	0.237	5.143
3	0.248	0.254	-1.360	0.173	0.033	1.845
Skillset	5.655	5.865	1.670	0.095	0.741	43.180
JobTurkey	1.160	0.713	0.240	0.809	0.348	3.869
Previous	0.393	0.408	-0.900	0.368	0.051	3.007
Constant	0.003	0.005	-3.830	0.000	0.000	0.063

The results in Table 4 show that significant predictors of whether migrants' final destination was a European Union country was their educational level (tertiary vs illiterate: $b=2.591$, $z=2.430$, $p=0.015$, 95% CI= [1.201, 5.590], secondary vs illiterate: $b=2.371$, $z=2.390$, $p=0.017$, 95% CI= [1.169, 4.809]) and whether they have relatives in Europe ($b=6.906$, $z=7.230$, $p=0.000$, 95% CI= [0.752, 1.255]). Overall, the logit model correctly predicts 86.22% of whether migrants' final destination was a European Union country.

Table 4. Results for predicting final destination choice (Europe vs. Greece)

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Religion						
2	0.669	0.190	-1.420	0.157	0.383	1.167
3	0.873	0.450	-0.260	0.793	0.318	2.400
Document	0.919	0.266	-0.290	0.770	0.521	1.620
Alone	1.091	0.241	0.400	0.692	0.708	1.683
Relatives	6.906	1.847	7.230	0.000	4.089	11.664
DaysGreece	1.000	0.000	1.190	0.234	1.000	1.001
Members	0.946	0.043	-1.220	0.222	0.865	1.034
Education						

1	1.875	0.702	1.680	0.093	0.900	3.905
2	2.371	0.855	2.390	0.017	1.169	4.809
3	2.591	1.017	2.430	0.015	1.201	5.590
Skillset	1.200	0.306	0.710	0.475	0.728	1.977
JobTurkey	1.063	0.316	0.210	0.837	0.594	1.903
Previous	1.025	0.357	0.070	0.945	0.517	2.029
Constant	1.304	0.713	0.490	0.627	0.447	3.806

3 Key Research Questions and Objectives

Economics of Migration is a prominent discipline with plenty of rigorous studies, both with qualitative and quantitative approaches. By applying the statistical analysis, we endeavor to compare profiles of interviewed migrants with real data and extract basic points regarding the labor market integration of asylum seekers in Greece and in EU in total. Based on official data published from Ministry of Migration and Asylum and interviews with migrants, an inference of data to the total number of such people residing currently in Greece might contribute to the overall picture of skillful and non-skillful migrants in country with intention to continue their life in other EU countries, rather than stay in Greece.

The most important conclusions derived from the previous analysis and the logit model used are the following: i) migrants who have completed tertiary and secondary education, have a skill set, and have relatives in the EU, are more likely to arrive in a European country; and ii) there is a positive association between migrants who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection and have a skill set framework, which further strengthens the first conclusion. To sum up, the above-mentioned concluding propositions verify our very first hypothesis.

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