

The Refugee  
and Immigration  
Phenomenon in Lesvos  
(Greece) and the  
Attitudes of the Local  
Community



# The Refugee and Immigration Phenomenon in Lesvos (Greece) and the Attitudes of the Local Community

By

Kostas Rontos, Nikolaos Nagopoulos  
and Nikolaos Panagos

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



The Refugee and Immigration Phenomenon in Lesvos (Greece)  
and the Attitudes of the Local Community

By Kostas Rontos, Nikolaos Nagopoulos and Nikolaos Panagos

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2019 by Kostas Rontos, Nikolaos Nagopoulos  
and Nikolaos Panagos

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without  
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-3085-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3085-0

# CONTENTS

List of Illustrations .....	ix
List of Tables .....	xi
Preface .....	xv
Introduction .....	1
Chapter One.....	7
Theoretical Approach To The Phenomenon	
Aspects of the problem and the humanitarian dimension.....	7
Solidarity and support .....	9
The risks of changing public opinion .....	10
Chapter Two .....	15
Documentation of Research	
Determination of population surveyed – Geographical coverage –	
Restrictions .....	19
Scheduling, timeframe and conduction of the research.....	20
Research budget.....	21
Chapter Three .....	23
The Research Methodology	
Data collection method and researchers’ training .....	23
Preparation of the questionnaire – Instructions for completing	
the questionnaire .....	24
Sampling plan .....	24
Sample size .....	24
Sampling method .....	25
The lack of sampling frames and their importance in research .....	25
The use of population data from the 2011 census .....	26
Background mapping .....	28
Determination of the sampling error .....	30
Diffusion of research.....	30
Pilot research.....	30

Chapter Four .....	33
Data Collection	
The way the researchers worked .....	33
Adjusting the conduction of research to research ethics .....	34
Problems during data collection and solutions .....	34
The response rate and representativeness of the sample .....	35
Investigation of non-response bias .....	35
Public reaction to the research, the topic of research and the location's economic situation .....	36
Chapter Five .....	37
Data Processing	
Data processing for improving data quality and inclusion –	
Logical and completeness checks .....	37
Electronic processing – Database.....	37
Methods of analysing the research findings .....	38
Chapter Six .....	41
Presentation of Data Results	
The demographic, social, political and economic characteristics of the population of the city .....	41
Demographic characteristics .....	41
Gender.....	41
Population age.....	42
Social characteristics.....	44
Marital status.....	44
Level of education.....	44
Economic characteristics.....	46
Income .....	46
Employment status.....	46
Political characteristics .....	47
Political views.....	47
Awareness of the refugee-migration problem .....	49
Awareness .....	49
Reasons leading to mass arrivals of migrants and refugees.....	49
Who does the recent warfare in their country relate to? .....	51
Knowledge of the protection regime based on international conventions .....	51
Knowledge of the purpose of Hotspots .....	52
Estimations for reducing migration and refugee flows based on the April 2016 agreement.....	53
Number of refugees and immigrants who arrived on Lesvos in 2015 .....	55
Sources of the causes .....	56
Who is mainly responsible for the refugee problem? .....	56
Who is responsible for the deterioration of the refugee–migration problem over recent months? .....	57

Opinions about NATO's presence in the region .....	58
The impact on the local population .....	59
Everyday life.....	59
Economic Effects .....	61
Impact on income.....	61
Impact on the island's economy.....	62
Impact on tourism and other key sectors of the island .....	63
Sense of threat.....	63
Attitudes of the local population towards refugees and migrants.....	64
Attitudes.....	64
Humanitarian treatment.....	64
Diversification of feelings towards immigrants and refugees .....	65
Active participation – attitudes .....	67
Expressions of active solidarity .....	67
Kinds of offer .....	68
Views about the more permanent residence of refugees on the island.....	69
Views about the more permanent residence of immigrants on the island.....	69
Potential for the absorption of immigrants and refugees.....	70
Intent of hosting at home .....	71
Relationship between cultural and religious characteristics of refugees and migrants with their social inclusion in local communities .....	71
Frequency of contact.....	72
Relationship between the frequency of contact with refugees and immigrants with the degree of sympathy shown towards them by the population .....	73
Attitudes towards officials .....	75
Effectiveness of actions .....	76
Prospects .....	81
Prospect of solving the problem.....	81
Time needed for A resolution .....	82
Relevance of the refugee issue TO the economic crisis in Greece .....	83
 Chapter Seven.....	 85
Discussion of the Results	
Degree of accomplishing the objectives.....	85
of the study.....	85
Problems and constraints during the research process .....	86
The reliability of the results .....	87
The demographic and socio-economic situation of the local population .....	88
The degree of problem recognition by the local society.....	89
Attribution of responsibility.....	91
The effect of migration and refugee flows on local society .....	93

Attitudes, behaviours and practical contributions of the population towards refugees and immigrants.....	95
Contact with migrants and the prospect of being assimilated on the island.....	97
Local population's evaluations of agencies involved in the confrontation of the issue.....	99
Citizens' opinions regarding the prospect of solving the problem .....	100
Chapter Eight.....	103
Conclusions	
Epilogue and Future Research .....	107
Appendix A .....	109
Questionnaire	
Appendix B.....	127
Publicity	
Workshop titled "Research on the refugee-immigrant issue regarding the attitudes and perceptions of the local society of Mytilene" .....	133
Bibliography .....	135
Foreign bibliography.....	135
Greek bibliography .....	137
Index .....	141



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 3-1 Building blocks in the city of Mytilene..... 29

Fig. 3-2 Sample of building blocks with street names in the city  
of Mytilene..... 29



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 6-1: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by age groups .....	43
Table 6-2: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by Marital status. ....	44
Table 6-3: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by educational level and age group .....	45
Table 6-4: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by monthly personal income.....	46
Table 6-5: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by political position and age group .....	48
Table 6-6: Somers' D between age group and political position .....	49
Table 6-7: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by gender and their views about the root cause triggering the mass arrivals of immigrants and refugees from 2015 until today .....	50
Table 6-8: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their views regarding the question "Who does the recent warfare in their country relate to?" .....	51
Table 6-9: Residents' of municipal district of Mytilene by their views regarding the question "For whom is the distinct protection regime in effect, based on international conventions?" .....	52
Table 6-10: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by gender and their opinion regarding the foreigner group that special arrangements for protection under international conventions are applied.....	52
Table 6-11: Residents' of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "What are hotspots used as?" .....	53
Table 6-12: Residents' of municipal district of Mytilene views regarding the usage of hotspots.....	53
Table 6-13: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their views regarding the effectiveness of the agreement between the E.U. and Turkey.....	54
Table 6-14: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by gender and their views regarding the effectiveness of the agreement between the E.U. and Turkey.....	54
Table 6-15: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their opinion regarding the number of refugees that arrived to the island during 2015 .....	55

Table 6-16: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their views regarding the liability for the deterioration of the problem.....	58
Table 6-17: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their degree of agreement regarding NATO's presence in the region.....	59
Table 6-18: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their views regarding the domain of their everyday life that has become intolerable, difficult or relatively difficult?" .....	61
Table 6-19: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "In general, what do you believe the impact of the migrant and refugee flows has been on the island's economy?" .....	62
Table 6-20: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "Which sectors of the economy have been affected?"....	63
Table 6-21: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "Do you feel that public goods or values are threatened because of the arrival of immigrants and refugees?" .....	64
Table 6-22: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "If Yes, which one (or more than one) of the goods or values below do you feel are threatened?" .....	64
Table 6-23: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "Do you consider that, in the context of humanitarian treatment, discrimination should be made between immigrants and refugees based on international conventions?" .....	65
Table 6-24: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "Do you feel sympathy for the plight of refugees?" .....	65
Table 6-25: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "Do you feel sympathy for the plight of immigrants?" ..	66
Table 6-26: Somers' D test between political position and attitudes towards Refugees .....	66
Table 6-27: Somers' D test between political position and attitudes towards immigrants.....	67
Table 6-28: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "Have you actively expressed your solidarity towards the above mentioned populations?" .....	68
Table 6-29: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by gender and their expression of their solidarity .....	68
Table 6-30: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers regarding the type of the offer provided to refugees-immigrants.....	69
Table 6-31: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question "Would you agree with the permanent residence of refugees on the island?" .....	69

Table 6-32: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question “Would you agree with the permanent residence of immigrants on the island?” .....	70
Table 6-33: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their views regarding the number of refugees (a) and immigrants (b) the island could absorb .....	71
Table 6-34: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the question “Would you host people from the above groups in your house, even temporarily?” .....	71
Table 6-35: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the questions “Do you feel sympathy for the plight of refugees” and “How often is or was your contact with immigrants and refugees” ....	74
Table 6-36: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their answers to the questions “Do you feel sympathy for the plight of immigrants” and “How often is or was your contact with immigrants and refugees” ....	74
Table 6-37: Somers’ D test between the feelings of the of municipal district of Mytilene residents towards refugees and the degree of their contact with refugees and immigrants.....	75
Table 6-38: Somers’ D test between the feelings of the of municipal district of Mytilene residents towards immigrants and the degree of their contact with refugees and immigrants .....	75
Table 6-39: Residents of municipal district of Mytilene by their perceptions regarding the question “Do you consider that there is a prospect of solving the problem?” .....	82
Table 6-40: Percentage distribution of the perceptions of citizens regarding a nexus between the refugee issue and debt relief .....	84



## PREFACE

The movement of populations occurred in very early human societies and remains a key factor in shaping today's world.

In modern societies, human flows are a complex demographic and socio-economic phenomenon with enormous consequences for both origin and destination areas.

Movements which occur for financial reasons are aimed at improving the working conditions and the financial status of the immigrants, and they are part of the total migration flows which play a crucial role in the shift of the distribution of human and material resources.

Economic migrant groups usually consist of young people with higher levels of social capital and the flows are mainly directed from the less developed or developing to the more developed regions. Hence, migration is characterized by selectivity, whereas this phenomenon has an impact on the regional, in the broad sense, imbalance.

Since the beginning of the modern era until nowadays, such basic flows have been directed from the poorer to the richer countries or, inside the borders of a country, from rural to urban areas, leading to the rampant growth of the latter and the deforestation or the degradation of the former. It must be noted that this process consists of a dynamic procedure which, unless it is reversed by a change in conditions or through the implementation of appropriate policy measures, will lead to the multiplication of the influxes and to an intertemporal widening of inequalities.

Greece has been a protagonist in migratory flows for over a century, with mass movements to the U.S. in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and to the U.S. and the developed European countries (e.g. Germany) during the first decades after WWII. Recently, during the last 25 years in particular, due to political changes in the neighboring Balkan countries and the growing period of "affluence" in Greece, there was a change, turning Greece, which was previously primarily a country of origin, into a host country for a large number of immigrants.

In addition to people who migrate for financial reasons, a large part of the immigrant population concerns refugees. An influx of refugees is caused by the inability of people to stay in their country of origin because of warfare or political events which put their lives and well-being in jeopardy.

Greece experienced an influx of thousands of refugees of Greek origin, mostly from Turkey, during almost the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which peaked with approximately 1,200,000 refugees being admitted in 1922.

The recent refugee and immigrant inflows from the Middle East, Northern Africa and Asia have become massive and concern millions of people who are attempting to be channeled into Europe through specific gateways in Southern European areas.

Among these gateways are the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios in the Eastern Aegean Sea, which serve as the main entrance points and received the biggest waves of refugees and migration flows. In consequence, they had to cope with difficulties, complex situations and problems concerning both the survival of the refugees themselves as well as the everyday life of local communities.

This book outlines this exact situation regarding daily life and the general effects of migration on the life of the island of Lesbos, which hosts the greatest flow of refugees and migrants of all the islands of the Eastern Aegean, through the way the residents recognize, comprehend and face the problem.

In particular, the aspects which are outlined are the attitudes and behaviors of the inhabitants of the island's capital, Mytilene, towards incoming populations, the degree of actual solidarity shown to them, their perspectives towards potential permanent residence and integration into the island and, finally, their perceptions as the "eyewitnesses" regarding the effectiveness of the actions taken by various public and private organizations involved in helping incoming people and, more generally, in confronting the issue.

What is notable is that the residents of the island are the descendants of the 1922 refugees mentioned above. Thus, they are well-aware of their immediate ancestors' life of toil, and they therefore comprehend the problem from the refugees' side as well.

The contributors to this study are mentioned extensively in the main chapters of the book. At this point, the participation of students from both postgraduate programs of the Department of Sociology at the University of the Aegean, namely "European Societies and European Integration" and "Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion", is gratefully acknowledged with regard to the organization of the research and data collection. The postgraduate students who contributed to the research, in alphabetical order, are the following:

Vasiliki-Taksiarchoula Chamalelli, Nikolaos Chatzilamprou, Dimitra Chrysopoulou, Eleni Dagielli, Ioanna Deligeorgiou, Paschalis Devranis, Panagiota Diamanti, Eleni Drossa, Michail-Taksiarchis Galetsellis, Anna



Karteri, Iraklis Katsaris, Thekla Kikini, Eirini Koutrelli, Asimina Koutroumpila, Konstantinos Leros, Stratoula Loupou, Errika Mattheaki, Elizaveta Mourzidou, Stavroula Mpampatsikou, Vasiliki Panagiotidou, Marina Papanikolaou, Dimitrios Papoutsis, Amalia Patelida, Christos-Marios Pontikas, Xristina Stamatellou, Foteini Thalassinou, Alexandros Theodorakoudis, Ignatios-Raphael Tzannidis, Anastasia Tsakaloglou, Charalambia Vairami, Fotios Vasilaras, Ioannis Vasileiou and Panagiotis Zikos.

Last but not least, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Efstratia Karagouni, the research associate of the “Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure” research laboratory of the Department of Sociology, for her assistance in conducting research as well as to the Directors of the two postgraduate programs of the department, Michalis Psimitis and Ioannis Kallas, and the members of the Coordinating Committees, who supported the fulfillment of this difficult research. Finally, we would like to thank the chairman and the executives of the Hellenic Statistical Authority who provided us with cartographic material and statistical data, which were absolutely indispensable for planning and conducting this research.



# INTRODUCTION

## Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of the inhabitants of Mytilene regarding the massive migrant-refugee flow which Lesbos received over 2016.

The study was combined with the educational needs of the postgraduate programs of the Department of Sociology at the University of the Aegean for the academic year 2015-16, namely “European Societies and European Integration” and “Social Research on Regional Development and Social Cohesion”, in order that students could enhance their knowledge and skills in research design and the analysis of results of scientific works.

In fact, the study was conducted within the framework of the common subject “Quantitative Methods with Applications in Social Development and European Trends” for both postgraduate programs, where students were involved at all stages of research and applied the theoretical knowledge they had been taught. The workload of the students at every stage of the research was divided into groups of 5-7 people.

The need to draw reliable conclusions led to the close monitoring and guidance of the work at all stages of the study, in addition to the correction of methodological and other choices regarding the research implementation, by the supervising professors and undergraduate associates. In this way, every possible effort for a completely scientific treatment of the study was made, in order that, as will be seen below, the produced results can be considered reliable for the research and treatment of the immigrant-refugee issue.

At this stage, it should be pointed out that the material collected also has the potential for multiple analyses of both a quantitative and qualitative nature in order to deduce complex, specialized conclusions about many aspects of the issue. However, for the objectives of this book, we will limit ourselves to the presentation and analysis of the core results, which are primarily quantitative, in order to obtain the brief overview necessary for policy action so as to address this urgent and burgeoning problem, taking into consideration the views and attitudes of the local population.

In addition, by applying specialized statistical methods, a variety of findings and conclusions will be drawn for deeper investigations of the

issues involved. Also, the fact that further explanations about the opinions expressed by the inhabitants of Mytilene were requested makes it possible to examine in detail, interpret and give prominence to various aspects of the issue.

### **The research orientation of the study**

The study is research-oriented based on data collected from a primary statistical survey, which was conducted during the year 2016 and will be presented thoroughly below.

The conduction of empirical research, based on the appropriate theoretical framework, is an essential tool for the objective study of social phenomena and a unique way of investigating the perceptions and trends of large and heterogeneous populations, like the case of the city of Mytilene.

The contribution of empirical research is crucial in this case due to the unprecedented tension of the phenomenon, not only at the local and national levels but at the international level as well, and consequently the need for information and knowledge is indispensable to investigate and cope with it.

The need to acquire the means, tools and expertise necessary for the realization of this relatively large-scale primary research led to the involvement of the “Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure” laboratory of the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean in order to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the successful completion of the research, processing and analysis of the collected data.

Also, the contribution of the Hellenic Statistical Authority must be stressed, as they provided the digital backgrounds and demographic elements per block, with the use of which the sampling plan was executed, given the lack of other means available for the realization of this critical quantitative research. Over the course of the study, the shortcomings which characterize the research infrastructure in Greece will be highlighted as a key obstacle in undertaking primary research subjected to sampling and non-sampling errors during research execution.

### **The stimulus for the study**

Although the objectives of the study are clear, as discussed above, the stimulus for undertaking such a demanding, time-consuming and costly project was the obligation of the University of the Aegean’s Department of Sociology to the local population, as well as Greek society in general, to examine the sociological aspects of the major repercussions manifested as a result of this phenomenon on the island of Lesbos, where the University

of the Aegean and its Department of Sociology are located. Interest in the research investigation into the phenomenon was expressed not only by Greek officials but by foreign officials as well, who formally requested answers from the department regarding major research questions. These were, namely, the impact of mass arrivals on the local population, the effect on tourism on the island, which had suddenly become the gateway for massive refugee and migration flows, as well as the prospects of tackling or perpetuating the problem in addition to the possible means for alleviating it.

Based on the above research questions, the concern of the international community on the matter is evident, not only for the island of Lesbos, but also for other areas of (Southern) Europe that could contain shelters for immigrants and refugees on a large scale.

Therefore, the duty and the challenge was great, while the research effort was, once again, based on the private initiative of a group of people with limited research funding, only adequate for strictly necessary expenditure, and which was allocated from the budget of the Department of Sociology's postgraduate program "European Societies and European Integration".

It is expected that, after this research initiative, local and central government agencies shall be motivated to finance similar research activities in the near future, so that the research conducted will be expanded to the whole island of Lesbos or even across the North Aegean region to the associated islands that face similar conditions regarding the influx of refugees and immigrants.

### **The importance of empirical research in highlighting and solving the problem**

Within the framework of the scientific investigation of the various phenomena that occur in human life, empirical social research elaborates on the collection, organization and sorting of items of the phenomena or events, which are highlighted as data. In this project, it raises questions and offers suggestions regarding their internal connections on the basis of knowledge about diversity, organization and the coherence of empirical facts (Schnell, Hill and Esser, 2015). In addition, the results of this activity and their accuracy should be accepted; they should be transparent, understood in the same way and be offered for review to all those involved in the scientific process.

The choice of those social facts offered for research is made depending on the importance given to them by the researcher and the consequences they provoke, so as to explore their manifestation more systematically as well as unknown or invisible aspects of their content. To achieve the best possible research approach, two conditions are necessary: on the one hand,

the description and explanation of a social situation or a social event and the proper and systematic organization of the empirical material; on the other hand, the conceptual clarification of these situations, as the events themselves can be interpreted and evaluated through the language, concepts and procedures followed by researchers to capture that particular reality. At the same time, the assumptions and formulations used should become more widely understood and accessible and the meaning of the terms employed should be recognized as commonly accepted in order to render, as far as possible, the same conceptual content.

In relation to the above prerequisites, the reasons regarding the specific choice of research and the significance of the issue under investigation are obvious. The crisis that arose in response to the armed conflicts in a number of countries of the broader region of the Middle East created mass migration inflows to Europe through its maritime boundaries, mainly of Greece, which received the largest number of migrants and refugees. A critical social issue was caused as a result of the mass increase of immigrant and refugee influxes, with particular emphasis on the island of Lesbos, which hosted the greatest number of these people. Insecurity increased when the “open border” policy that Europe maintained, which facilitated their access and reduced risks, ceased to exist.

A fundamental research question was raised concerning the way the island’s residents perceived this volatile situation, as they experienced its implications first-hand. Furthermore, the research interest was expanded in order to designate the correct dimensions of the matter related to concepts and views, which were presented by the intervention of the mass media. Therefore, highlighting the issue in the best possible objective way – and ensuring that the associated results arise from valid and reliable research methods – may allow the various aspects to be placed and assessed in the right way and, at the same time, allow a search for policy solutions at the micro level at least.

In order to reach policy conclusions, it is necessary to investigate the degree of recognition of the problem and the special characteristics of the groups, along with the degree of acceptance of cultural diversity as the basic and non-negotiable democratic principle and inextricable condition of integration policies. In the spirit of tolerance, the conduct of this research is expected to facilitate policies related to social protection and social rights as well as pertinent policies that ensure social cohesion in local communities and a sense of security for inhabitants.

In the spectrum of tolerance and ensuring normality, the margins of a multicultural society can be explored in the context of research and integration policies. These are eventually reflected up to a point on the basis

of the common acceptance of social rights which can be enjoyed by culturally diverse populations living in a single social and political environment. In particular, in the case of refugees, issues that arose after the borders were closed and the problems of people who were trapped within the Greek territory were confronted were facing the risks of cultural retrenchment and the inability to claim social rights.

In any case, beyond the existing differences concerning the refugees' status, social integration refers to the gradual equalization of the rights and duties of migrants and refugees, as well as their access to goods and services that apply to the rest of the population with equal opportunities and equal treatment. The integration process is also a two-way, active process of rights and obligations pertaining not only to the host country but also to the full social and political presence of foreign populations (Koff, 2002; Economic and Social Committee ESC, 2002: 1, European Commission CEC, 2003: 4, 17; Nagopoulos, 2013a).

### **The significance of the opinions of the local community**

In dealing with problems arising from the mass migration inflows of refugees and immigrants in host countries, the residents of these countries play a critical role, mainly in areas that are entrance gateways. In addition, with the institutional recognition and service delivery on behalf of the host state, the role of civil society itself is becoming more and more important for the substantial, effective and smooth integration of these people at different levels of organizing social life.

The perceptions and intentions of local society determine, in a decisive way, the (lack of) effectiveness of integration policy measures that are imposed by the state, as well as the success of certain integration programs that are put forward for public consultation in order to consider the prospect of their implementation. The research results in this case are very important in order to highlight individual parameters of the problem, which are not widely known and express the collective will of the island's residents. In addition, the utilization of certain data aims at the dissolution of presumably false impressions and misconceived conclusions concerning the attitude of the local population towards immigrants and refugees.

This new reality, in which refugees are hosted in reception centers as well as screening (hotspots) and administrative detention centers, is unprecedented for the local society, and consequently, in the context of values of tolerance and solidarity in addition to personal values, family security and social cohesion, their feelings and opinions are constantly tested. It should be noted that, due to the seriousness of the issue and the

immediate social consequences caused, the attitude of local community is of major importance, not only for managing impressions, but also for the purpose of shaping and implementing policies concerning the immigrant-refugee issue.

Furthermore, it is important to point out, as is often attempted when analyzing the results of this research, that the views of local people do not remain steadfast. On the contrary, for crucial questions at least, they vary and are affected mainly by the degree of the active presence of state structures and bodies regarding matters of institutional and legal protection in order to facilitate further policy interventions in the sectors of social care and inclusion.



# CHAPTER ONE

## THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE PHENOMENON

### **Aspects of the problem and the humanitarian dimension**

Europe changed in the year 2015: over 1 million immigrants and refugees arrived in the Mediterranean countries, the vast majority of which (approximately 860,000) came from the Turkish coast to the Greek Islands, while there were nearly 4,000 dead and missing in the waters of the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea and hundreds of thousands of people flocking to border crossings. On the one hand, people expressed unprecedented solidarity, humanism and compassion, whereas, on the other hand, there was also behavior characterized by suspicion, bigotry and xenophobia.

Regardless of how the social phenomenon is perceived by citizens in the regions where these populations arrive, the harsh realities in the refugees' countries of origin cannot be ignored. The brutality of the conflicts and the lack of access to basic means of nutrition and survival paint a gloomy picture of everyday life and are important to ensure the unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid to people who are trapped in destroyed and decadent areas as well as to secure their safe transition through borders in terms of aid and food supply.

On the other hand, for people who have managed to cross the borders of their country, there is no return if the conflict does not end, if security conditions do not prevail or if the concepts of democracy and respect for human rights are not restored. In this sense, being a refugee involves situations which may be encountered by people from different countries, and they move not by choice, but by necessity. They are forced to move from countries which are devastated and ruined. People are subjected to continuous trials.

Conflicts relate to a chain of complex factors, which may be historical, political, ethnic, economic or religious, and as long as they are intensified, refugee flows will inevitably proliferate. It is also historically confirmed

that a combination of the above factors is responsible for the mass displacement of people, and it is rarely just one of these factors.

The crisis that appeared in Greece in 2015, amid multiple other crises, and which was experienced mostly by the inhabitants of the island of Lesbos, is, first and foremost, a crisis concerning people who are fleeing their home country because of war, persecution or serious violations of their human rights. In this case, it mainly concerned Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi (at a rate of over 90%) men, women, children, families, couples, siblings, unaccompanied minors, elderly people, people with disabilities and people with war trauma, who were not only seeking a better life in Europe but were also saving their own lives and those of their families.

European countries, including Greece, were confronted with the responsibility and the moral obligation to receive and help these people. However, it is not only a matter of moral duty but of compliance with the international human rights agreements for the protection of refugees. And while it is true that neither Greece nor Europe had ever faced such a crisis in modern history, for some countries, especially the “poorest”, this “state of emergency” has been a daily routine for years. This applies to countries neighboring Syria which currently host almost 5 million Syrian refugees, which is a much bigger number when compared with those who have arrived so far in Europe.

These refugee populations are trying to cope with a double-faceted situation that encapsulates insurmountable problems. On the one hand, they cannot return to their homes, as wars continue with vehemence, and they have lost hope of the possibility of finding a political solution soon. On the other hand, there is the struggle to survive in the host countries, since it is almost impossible to find work, and most have spent any savings they might have had to cover the expenses for their basic needs.

This difficulty of surviving in the first host countries is the main factor that causes many refugees to migrate for a second time and to seek refuge in Europe, which is mainly reached through maritime routes to Greece. Both Europe and Greece seemed unprepared and uncoordinated to face this phenomenon. The effect was to increase the pressure on the small island communities that lacked the basic infrastructure and services to meet the growing humanitarian needs. People who arrived on those islands had to withstand further inconvenience even though they were already physically and mentally wounded.

What has caused the situation described above to deteriorate further is the addition of a large number of economic migrants, caused as a result of economic hardship in their countries of origin and of their choice to migrate through Greece to other European countries.

## **Solidarity and support**

Host issues revealed strong feelings of solidarity that have been accompanied by corresponding acts of compassion and support to those people on behalf of the residents of local communities and various institutions and organizations. These initiatives, followed by assistance from NGOs and volunteers from around the world, even from tourists, who were quick to respond, succeeded, to a certain degree, in meeting the basic needs of newly-arrived refugees and immigrants, mainly on the island of Lesbos. In some individual cases, however, it is true that there were some tensions and criticism of inconsistent initiatives and amateurism, as well as some isolated incidents of the exploitation of refugees.

Along the way, and after a period of uncertainty, intensive efforts were made to build appropriate reception conditions for new arrivals and to strengthen the procedures of recording their arrivals as well as the effectiveness of the coordination of all the bodies involved, both nationally and locally.

Of course, the ultimate destination of the vast majority of newcomers was not Greece but some of the countries of Central and Northern Europe. This can be confirmed by the limited number of asylum applications filed by these people with the Greek authorities.

The European Union was expected to follow a plan in the context of a more coherent and comprehensive approach to the refugee issue in order to strengthen the urgent and effective support in Greece and, most importantly, to promote solutions which were targeted at the allocation of responsibilities among the member states, as well as to cope with the reluctance of several member states to participate in the relocation program.

Legal measures for the refugees' movement in Europe were deemed equally necessary, so that refugees were not forced to resort to traffickers and to risk their lives at sea due to having no other choice. Legitimate travel routes include the resettlement programs in countries from which people have fled (e.g. Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon) to the E.U. countries, family reunification, visas granted for humanitarian reasons, study or work, and private sponsorship programs.

In other words, refugees who would move to Europe anyway were required to do so in a coordinated, legal manner in order to avoid further risks deriving from traffickers who would exploit them for economic benefits and to prevent either first receiving or final destination countries from being burdened by the problems posed by irregular entry and movement.

What is interesting to investigate in the case of economic immigrants is the possible differentiation in the attitude of the local population towards them in addition to the exploration of issues that will give perspective and a solution to this category of incoming population.

### **The risks of changing public opinion**

It is a fact that the burst of irregular entry and massive flows of migrants combined with the occurrence of terrorist acts in Europe – many grabbed the opportunity to connect themselves with the refugee and migration flows – led to an abrupt shift of public opinion in several European countries, as a lot of social classes were adversely affected and concerned about safety issues, and they expressed xenophobic feelings.

In addition, one of the reasons invoked by member states of the European Union, which eventually led not only to the closure of borders but to xenophobic attitudes as well, was the rapid increase in irregular entries and movement within European countries ran aground on the fact that the acceptance of a number of refugees in these countries was inextricably linked to screening and identification processes and the immediate implementation of social inclusion policies under the control of the official mechanisms of the state. A failure to safeguard these conditions makes each admission measure impractical, even if this is imposed by agreements at the European Union level.

In this sense, the humanistic dimension is associated with inclusion, and when this relationship is disrupted, it is presented as a major problem for social cohesion. In addition, there are problems with and criticism of the poor screening procedures in Greece, as reflected in the relevant evaluation reports of the European Commission.

Furthermore, it was, at least to a certain extent, understood that, as regards the migrant and refugee populations, solidarity can be founded on supportive interventions and the provision of humanitarian aid. Integration in the institutional and social context of the host countries must be treated with caution. Although the situation has evidently improved, the points related to management weaknesses in the Greek migrant-refugee plan made particular reference to those immigrants who do not qualify for asylum without having scheduled and activated their return process in their countries of origin. Instead, Greece is their passage to continuing their journey to Europe. It is also stated that, despite the intensification of the phenomenon, no plans for creating identification centers (hotspots) were made, even though Athens was legally obligated to do so.

Of course, the professed inability of integrating a larger number of refugees only concerns a limited number of European countries, which had already received a high number of migrants before the closure of their borders (Germany, Sweden, Austria). Herein lies the big problem: the vast majority of the other European countries have shown a reluctance and strict rigidity to accommodate even a limited number of refugees in compliance with E.U. agreements.

By promoting a new strategy to address the crisis through a preventive operational policy towards the increasing migration and refugee flows, the E.U. was presented as weak in relation to the sovereignty of strong nation-states, which ignored the common policy measures for dealing with the “refugee crisis” and invoked their rights to control the entry and presence of non-natives in their territories as well as the priority to maintain social cohesion and safeguard security in their interiors.

Faced with the reluctance of its member states, the E.U. was presented as submissive and too timid to impose, as a transnational organization, the principles of law that in any case prohibit the denial of entry to persons who are at risk of persecution or other serious harm and ensure their non-refoulement (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014: 30). It also seems to be failing to impose the values on which it was built, i.e. the principles of humanism, solidarity and respect for human rights.

Nevertheless, for the citizens of local communities in the immigrant and refugee reception areas such as Lesbos, human values that define cultural identities have been highlighted in numerous ways to maintain fundamental principles, such as tolerance, respect for diversity and solidarity with those in need. These are values which can be useful for facing current and future challenges.

However, with the overturn of the European “open border” policy and after the closure of the borders, Greece was asked to manage and try to meet the needs of the refugee population, for which it was no longer an intermediate destination, for an unknown timeframe, and as a result there needed to be planning for permanent residences and social integration. Consequently, the context of managing the refugee issue changed; on the one hand, trapped refugees expected the activation of readmission policies for entrance to other European countries, whereas, on the other hand, there was a need to implement integration policy measures.

The scenes of people crowding in hotspots and detention centers, together with the tragic living and hygiene conditions, especially in detention centers, are a representative example. It is a reality that reflects the inability to respond to the need to confront the problems posed by the large number of newcomers.

It should be noted that refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to ask for the protection of the host country, based on international and Greek law. It is clearly an obligation of the Greek state to consider asylum requests and to provide refugee protection and rights to those who are entitled to them, while it has no legal basis upon which to expel them. Furthermore, regardless of national integration models and priorities concerning integration policy, there are the common and fundamental principles of the European Union to ensure the democratic principles of equality. It must be clarified that these principles, in the form of community directives, are incorporated into national legislation, and the member states must comply with European policies (Nagopoulos, 2013a; 2013b). The legal character of social inclusion must also be noted. These principles relate to the advocacy of social rights and the elimination of discrimination (the principle of non-discrimination).

In connection with the above and regarding the conditions that were prevalent during the conduction of the research, the needs of the refugee and immigrant populations were related to safe and decent living conditions for as long as it took to be relocated or reunited with families, and the implementation of programs to facilitate the social and economic integration of the people who would stay in Greece as recognized refugees.

There are already hosting centers today but, although living conditions have improved, the shortcomings remain. On the other hand, delays in procedures for granting asylum have long been due to the limited capabilities of the service to meet the growing needs of thousands of people who finally decided, although it was not their original choice, to claim asylum in Greece.

Finally, as regards the E.U.'s agreement with Turkey, the compatibility of the agreement which guarantees the existing asylum system and the level of protection of human rights that have been mastered within the international and European legal framework is being tested. On the other hand, difficulties have already appeared in the execution of the agreement because there have been an extremely limited number of cases that have been resolved in the context of its implementation. Another issue involves the level of safety in Turkey, which needs to be resolved in order to carry out the refolement process according to the agreement. Nevertheless, the E.U. dissociates the facts that confirm the political and social instability in Turkey from the agreement that has been reached, considering the criterion of mutual interest which prevails and, on the other hand, the fact that the number of deaths in the water passages have been drastically reduced. All things considered, this is a crucial moment for the future of this agreement, although there is no formal infringement. However, there are doubts as to