

# Why High School Students Aspire to Emigrate: Evidence from Greece

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**Abstract** This paper investigates why Greek high school students aspire to emigrate, in relation to their educational and socio-economic background. Through fieldwork research conducted at three specialist high schools in Thessaloniki, three main conclusions have been drawn. Firstly, potential emigrants are ambitious, with high educational and professional expectations and a clear migration plan. Secondly, they are middle and upper middle class and excel at school—in socio-economic and educational terms, they therefore constitute the most dynamic Greek youths. Thirdly, in a period of recession on a European level, the alarming fact is that student emigration can undermine recovery for a country in crisis such as Greece. That is, middle-class shrinkage caused by the recession can be aggravated by emigration, which in turn might cost the loss of developmental human resources for Greece and a deepening of the recession. This can further stimulate migration, resulting in a vicious circle between crisis and emigration. Furthermore, if potential emigrants do not return because temporary emigration for studies becomes permanent migration for work, the economic crisis is worsened, and Greece's prospects for development are further undermined.

**Keywords** Skilled migration · High school students · Greece · Economic crisis

## Introduction: The Relationship between Students' Migration and Skilled Migration

The first studies in the field of skilled migration (Bhagwati and Hamada 1974; Bhagwati and Parington 1976) focused on the negative effects of brain drain—the

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migration of professionals and highly skilled workers (Constant and D'Agosto 2008) from developing to developed countries (mainly Canada and the USA)—on the home country. A number of subsequent studies argued, however, that under certain conditions, brain drain could be beneficial to the home country. The most recent research utilises detailed statistics to look into a variety of the phenomenon's characteristics (Docquier and Rapoport 2012; Güngör and Tansel 2012).

Globalisation and market integration have shed light on a relatively under-researched migration movement, namely the international migration of students from developing to scientifically advanced countries (Li et al. 1996; Salt 1997). For example, Guo et al. (2014) state that globalisation and subsequent technological improvements meant that middle-class families from fast-developing low-income countries (e.g. India and China) could educate their children abroad. These children became part of a global pool of potentially highly skilled migrants, trained abroad, who might return to help develop their home country. This is a positive aspect of skilled migration.

'Highly skilled migrants' (Zweig 1997; OECD 2002; Becker et al. 2004; Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Docquier and Rapoport 2012) is a broad definition that includes not only skilled workers but also highly educated students. In this paper, we will consider 'potentially skilled migrants' as those with high educational qualifications who strongly aspire to migrate for study or work. Undoubtedly, migration for study is different from migration for work. However, given that Greece has been in a stage of deep economic crisis for almost 6 years, one might assume that emigration for studies is highly likely to develop into a permanent stay abroad to secure employment (see below).

There is indeed a high correlation between international movements for study and work, not only because student migration is a form of skilled migration itself but also because it reflects the internationalisation of knowledge (Salt 1997). It is well documented that students' mobility influences subsequent migration behaviour because young graduates may find work in the country where they studied and are generally more likely to seek employment abroad (e.g. King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003).

Although many young people, from low and high income countries alike, initially migrate to high-income countries to study, their aim is to stay permanently. This process has been termed 'two steps migration' (Hawthorne 2014). The majority of immigrant scientists and mechanical engineers in the USA and France had studied there (Bhorat et al. 2002), and a great number of foreign students—mainly the most successful ones (PhD degree holders)—do not return home after graduating (Straubhaar 2000; Tansel and Güngör 2003; Findlay 2011; Labrianidis 2011; Brădăţan and Kulcsár 2014). Of the Northern Irish students who graduated from a British university, 56 % remained (Cairns and Smyth 2011). During 2001–2006, Australia became an important host country for IT professionals from India, thanks to its study-migration pathway (Hawthorne 2014); employment opportunities in Australia are a major factor for young immigrants to apply for a permanent resident visa (Khoo et al. 2008). Several European countries combine their migration and educational policies to offer foreign students and researchers a permanent stay in their country. For example, Sweden and Finland offer foreign students the possibility of finding a job—either during their studies (Sweden), or after their graduation (Finland)—and central European countries such as Germany, Austria and Belgium offer favourable conditions for researchers to stay. Good provisions for a stay permit also exist in some southern European countries (e.g. Greece and Spain) for professionals, researchers and university professors (Kahanaec and Zimmerman 2010).

On the other hand, in some of the traditional host countries, such as the USA and Canada, it has gradually become more and more difficult to transfer a study permit into a work permit (Hawthorne 2014). The UK is just such a case: the immigration system was overhauled in 2008 by implementing a points-based system, based on five tiers, for immigrants from outside the EU and the EEA, making it more and more difficult to transfer a study permit into a work permit (Kahanaec and Zimmerman 2010).

It is common for international students to choose their country of study according to favourable conditions for finding a job afterwards (Khoo et al. 2008; Hawthorne 2014). Kangasniemi et al. (2007) argue that a significant number of doctors from India have chosen their country of study based, among other things, on job prospects there. Furthermore, half of a highly skilled migrants sample from New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga who permanently reside abroad, also studied in their host countries (Gibson and McKenzie 2011).

International students frequently work in the host country either during or after their studies, which allows them to become accustomed to the local labour market and equip them with a locally specific human capital (Li et al. 1996; Parey and Waldinger 2008). Moreover, the studies themselves may be host-country oriented and may be more useful there (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Docquier and Rapoport 2012).

The concurrent study of these two kinds of migration is also dictated by the increasing number of highly educated student migrants observed during the last few decades. In particular, the number of highly educated migrants in OECD countries increased by 70 % between 1990 and 2000, while the international migration of students in higher education increased from 6.5 million in 1950 to 88 million in 2000 (Docquier and Rapoport 2009; 2012; Bhati et al. 2014).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the education and Socio-Economic Status (SES hereafter) of Greek high school students who go abroad for university. In the past few decades, the emigration of highly skilled young Greek people has been significant and is increasing due to a 6-year recession with particularly high and persistent unemployment rates, especially for graduates. Thus, in Greece, it is possible that the conversion of emigration for studying into a temporary or permanent movement for work are highly correlated phenomena and may be the most significant characteristic of skilled emigration from Greece now and in the near future.

## **What Do We Know About the SES of Skilled Emigrants?**

One of the most important limitations of research on highly skilled migration is the lack of secondary data (Pellegrino 2001; Constant and D' Agostino 2008), mainly from the home countries (Bhorat et al. 2002). Data are even scarcer for the skilled migrants' SES. Consequently, the most readily available data on migrants' social strata come from the relatively few field research studies (Scott 2006), which look at a limited number of the migrants' socio-economic variables (i.e. West et al. 2000; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Tansel and Güngör 2003; Labrianidis 2011) and not at a broad set of social classification characteristics (i.e. income of parents, educational performance etc.). Below, the international literature on the skilled migrants' SES is briefly analysed.

Skilled migrants mainly come from the middle and higher social classes (Guo et al. 2014). Those from lower classes are relatively few (OECD 2004), despite the fact that a

portion fund their education through loans or part-time employment (Baruch et al. 2007; Xiang and Shen 2009; Gibson and McKenzie 2011). Middle-class parents, on the other hand, often finance their children's education abroad to provide them with high-quality cultural capital (i.e. a degree from a Western University) and at the same time the opportunity to transform this cultural capital into economic capital. In this way, the middle class reproduces its own identity (Scott 2006; Findlay 2011).

Looking into the migration of Chinese students and skilled professionals in the USA, Zweig (1997) suggests that they belong economically to the middle and educationally to the higher classes. Similarly, Gökbayrak's (2009) research on the migration of engineers from Turkey shows that they belong to the higher and middle classes, they have studied in prestigious universities and their parents have a high educational level. Labrianidis' (2011) seminal research on brain drain confirms these findings for Greece where the vast majority (more than 80 %) of skilled migrants come from the higher and middle socio-economic and educational strata; they went to 'good' schools and graduated from one of the top 100 universities in the world. It is also worth mentioning that skilled migrants who live in traditional host countries of skilled migration (i.e. the USA and UK) not only possess a high educational level but also have a higher skill level than their compatriots who remain at home (Pellegrino 2001; Saint-Paul 2004; Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Labrianidis 2011).

The results are similar when the focus is only on international students. D' Arca (1994) looks at non-EU students in Italy, and West et al. (2000) at foreign students in British universities. They both agree that the students come from the higher and middle classes, and that their parents, who have high or very high educational levels and emigration experience, usually fund the studies. The Northern Irish students who study abroad share the same socio-economic backgrounds (managerial and professional classes) and have higher entrance grades than those who remain (Cairns and Smyth 2011). Additionally, Xiang and Shen (2009) examine student migration from China and suggest that in comparison to the 1990s, international Chinese students of the 2000s come from increasingly higher professional backgrounds. In fact, the recent trend is for students to emigrate abroad to receive secondary education in high profile schools to increase the chance of acceptance into some of the world's most prestigious universities. Similar conclusions regarding students' socio-economic backgrounds are derived from studies looking at students' intentions to either move abroad for higher education or to stay in the host country after graduation for further studies and/or work (Tansel and Güngör 2003; Baruch et al. 2007).

Therefore, a child's decision to study abroad is determined not only by his/her parents' financial status, i.e. being able to fund the studies, but also by his/her parents' high level of education—expecting their children to excel and encouraging them to do so (Zweig 1997; Baruch et al. 2007; Gibson and McKenzie 2011). As a result, maintaining and perpetuating a high educational capital within the middle class, which can also be transformed into economic capital, encourages skilled migration.

## SES and Causes of Skilled Migration

Researchers do not often consider skilled immigrants' SES when looking at the reasons for migration and predominantly categorise the reasons within a push-pull factors analysis. In this context, the pull factors are considered to outweigh the push factors

(Docquier and Rapoport 2012). Pull factors include economic reasons—although not always the most important—such as high wages and generally a high return on skills in the host country (OECD 2002; Baláz et al. 2004; Güngör and Tansel 2012; Bhati et al. 2014), employment-related reasons, such as a better working environment, job prospects and finding a job in the relevant field (West et al. 2000; Tansel and Güngör 2003; Baláz et al. 2004; Baruch et al. 2007; Gökbayrak 2009), scientific reasons, such as university quality, the overall educational system and resource provision (D’Arca 1994; West et al. 2000; OECD 2002; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Tansel and Güngör 2003; Baláz et al. 2004; Gökbayrak 2009), wider socio-political reasons, such as the organisation of the state (e.g. legal system, security) (Bhorat et al. 2002; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Baruch et al. 2007) and cultural reasons, such as gaining knowledge of a new culture (Li et al. 1996; West et al. 2000; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Baláz et al. 2004; Baruch et al. 2007; Parey and Waldinger 2008; Khoo 2014). For international students, in particular, Findlay (2011) suggests geographical movement is urged not only by demand factors (i.e. social and cultural capital) but also by supply factors, such as prestigious universities that can provide an attractive high level of education in a global market.

Critical push factors in the decision to emigrate or extend the period living abroad are migrants’ high socio-economic position (Tansel and Güngör 2003), economic conditions in the home country (i.e. wages, youth unemployment) (Golub 1996; Tansel and Güngör 2003; Baláz et al. 2004; Khoo et al. 2008; Gökbayrak 2009; Delicado 2010; Güngör and Tansel 2012), the organisational and functional limitations of the educational system (Golub 1996; Li et al. 1996; Becker et al. 2004; Tansel and Güngör 2003; Baruch et al. 2007; D’Agosto and Constant 2008; Delicado 2010), and general problems in the home country (e.g. corruption) (Golub 1996; Baláz et al. 2004; Baruch et al. 2007; Delicado 2010; Güngör and Tansel 2012).

Without devaluing the aforementioned reasons for migration, it should be noted that the lack of a direct link between the decision to migrate and the migrants’ SES does not help us to fully understand who, in socio-economic terms, skilled migrants are. Hence, we cannot know the extent of the consequences their emigration has for the home country. Additionally, and contrary to unskilled migration, significant reasons for skilled migration are not economic (Gibson and McKenzie 2011; Docquier and Rapoport 2012), but mainly relate to better conditions in the host country regarding science, education and the cultural environment. This is relevant to the main hypothesis of this paper: potential skilled migrants are not only highly educated individuals from a higher class but probably have diverse personalities, varied interests and ambitious expectations. If this is the case, then the negative consequences of losing these individuals are very high for the sending country.

## International Emigration of Students from Greece

### From WWII until the recent crisis

During the post-war decades, a series of historical events such as the Civil War (1946–1949) and the Military Dictatorship (1967–1974), as well as the slow development of tertiary education in Greece—reflecting, among other factors, the limited expenditure

on education and the non-existence of postgraduate studies—pushed a significant number of young people abroad, mainly for postgraduate studies (Eliou 1988). After the 1970s, Greece developed significantly, reaping the benefits of industrialisation and EU accession. With the improvement of living conditions and material standards, the focus of the Greek family turned towards education, which became a status symbol and the target for almost all children. A university degree signalled the irreversible exodus of Greek society from its poor agricultural past and gave young educated people the chance to find a desired job—mainly in the public sector. Hence, failing university entrance exams was equivalent to a failure on a social level which could only be rectified by studying abroad (Eliou 1988; Tsoulfidis 2003). As a result, failing university entrance exams became the main reason for young adults to move abroad during the 1980s. Moreover, the social prestige that accompanied university studies encouraged a large number of not only rich but also middle-class families to invest in their children's education abroad. Hence, migrant students come not only from the higher classes but from the middle classes as well.

Since the 1970s, Greece has one of greatest proportion of students studying abroad in the world. During the 1980s, it was first in Europe and fourth globally (Eliou 1988). During the 1990s, it was second in Europe (Salt 1997), and at the beginning of 2000, it was fourth among all OECD countries (OECD 2002). The most popular destination was the UK (Labrianidis 2011).

The rate of student emigration from Greece continued to increase throughout the 1980s. During the 1990s, there was a decrease followed by a small increase at the end of that decade and ever since a gradual decrease until today (Fig. 1). The evolution of these rates can be explained by significant and fundamental socio-economic factors and changes that occurred in Greek society during this period.

Society's turn to education was followed by the exponential growth of higher education in Greece. Private colleges in Greece signed agreements with British or US institutions, and Greeks could obtain a degree from international universities without leaving home. At the same time, there was a significant expansion of public universities in Greece and a significant increase in admissions to Greek universities during the 1990s and 2000s (both at undergraduate and postgraduate level) (Findlay 2011). The abovementioned abrupt increase of students in Greece led to the relative decrease of the share of students abroad (Fig. 1).

### The Ongoing Crisis

The global financial crisis of 2007–2008 had a more severe impact on Greece than any other country in the EU. The effects of the recession have exacerbated the country's chronic structural economic problems. The GDP has shrunk substantially (Fig. 2), and youth unemployment, especially among the highly skilled—which is a structural deficiency due to the low demand for skilled labour (Labrianidis 2011)—is increasing at a significantly higher rate than before the recession (Fig. 3). The decrease in wages across all pay grades in the 2009–2013 period, (i.e. during the crisis), the decrease of public sector consumption by middle income families of 27.1 % (EL.STAT 2005–2014) and the reduction of pensions and other income sources due to increased taxation is reducing Greece's middle class, which has traditionally been the human capital and skills pool for the Greek economy (Tsoulfidis 2003). Young people, in particular, are



Source: 1965-1981: Data processing from Ministry of Education (1977) and ELSTAT (1968-1985). 1987: UNESCO (1987). 1993: Salt (1997). 1998-2010: <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx>

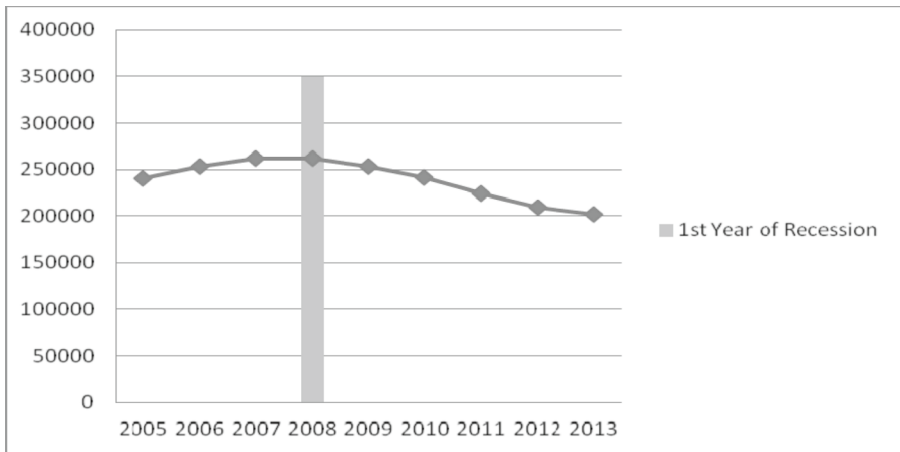
**Fig. 1** Rate of Greek students abroad to the total number of Greek tertiary education students

facing significant hardships—unable to find a job and plan their future—while those who do manage to enter the labour market face low earnings. The combination of these factors has led to an unprecedented migration of skilled individuals from Greece to high-income countries<sup>1</sup> to find employment and better living conditions. Labrianidis (2011) estimated that at the end of 2010, skilled migration amounted to 119,000-139,000 professionals. OECD (2013) confirmed that estimation: in 2010/11 Greek immigrants totaled 655,000 of which 143,000 were highly educated.

New conditions arising from the recession significantly changed the character of skilled migration from Greece in relation to previous decades. The rate of migration among the total number of students actually decreased further during the crisis (Fig. 1). Even so, one might argue that the crisis could also have led to a qualitative change in the drain since those who can afford to study abroad come mainly from the most affluent social strata.

Despite the lack of data on return rates for Greeks studying abroad during previous decades (especially the 1980s), it can be argued that their intention was not to permanently remain in the host country—because the reason for leaving was often failure of the entrance requirements for Greek universities. Additionally, the high labour demand in the public sector and, in general, relatively low unemployment rates and the increased protectionism of the Greek economy were pointing to a favourable working future for young adults. In contrast, the terrible conditions in the current Greek labour market mean the possibility of returning after graduation is significantly smaller. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that the majority of those going abroad to study

<sup>1</sup> The OECD (2002) argues that economic downturns usually lead to skilled migration abroad. Indeed, the recession in Latin America between the 1970s and 1990s led to the mass emigration of craftsmen and professionals mainly to the USA. As in the case of Greece, the impoverishment of the middle class and the devaluation of labour have fuelled the migration movement abroad as a means of upward social mobility (Pellegrino 2001). Similarly, the economic crisis in Portugal had the same effect on skilled migration (Delicado 2010).

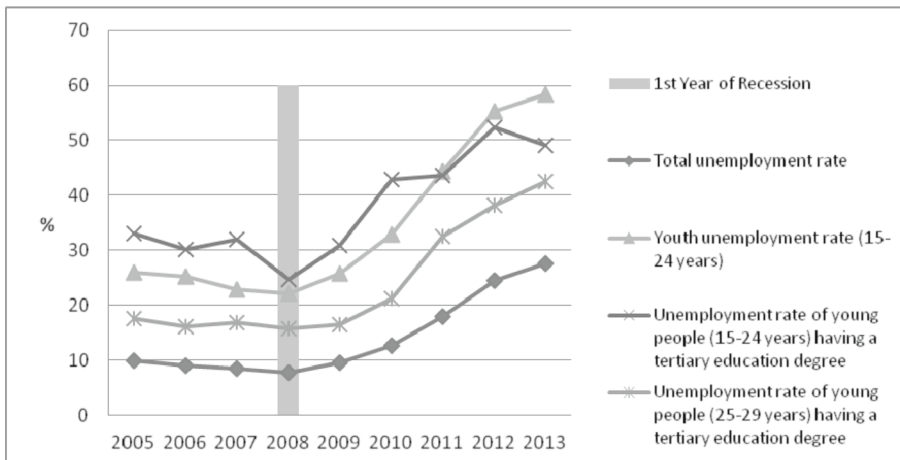


Source: UNCTAD, Statistical Database

**Fig. 2** Real GDP of Greece (mill.\$) (2005=100)

nowadays do not plan on returning and will stay temporarily or permanently in the host country for work.

Below, despite the fact that the available data on the topic are extremely limited, we advance three main arguments. Firstly, 20 years after the massive influx of immigrants from the Balkan states to Greece, emigration is larger than immigration for the first time. Secondly, Greece displays a cyclical migration trajectory; it changed from being a sending country (1960s) to a receiving country (1990s) and has gradually returned to being a sending country while continuing to receive immigrants (2010). That is, unlike the traditional distinction between home and host countries, contemporary Greece is at the same time home and host country. It has also changed from being a country of



Source: Eurostat, Statistical Database

**Fig. 3** Unemployment in Greece



origin for unskilled migrants (1960s) to being a country of origin for skilled ones<sup>2</sup> (2010). Thirdly, since 2000, with the increasing number of Asian immigrants to Greece, the country has received mainly unskilled young immigrants of both sexes and has lost skilled young adults of both sexes. After all, most of the emigrants of this latest migration movement belong to the 25–29 and 30–34 age groups. A significant part of this group is made up of young adults who have finished the first stage of tertiary education and who migrate in order to continue their studies or find a job abroad. Others have finished their second stage of tertiary education and move to gain employment abroad (Figs. 4 and 5). Since the expansion of the recession in 2010, we have observed a gradual increase in emigration in these age groups. Hence, as we mentioned before, while the relative share of those that migrate to study has diminished, due to the increase in the total number of tertiary students in Greece, in absolute numbers they have increased. It is indicative that between 2009 and 2011, the applications of Greek researchers for emigration abroad via EURES increased by 281 %, while the annual increase in the number of Europass CVs after the beginning of the recession is also significant: 2008–09:44.6 %, 2009–10:43.9 %, 2010–11:70.2 %, 2011–12:56.9 % (<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/homav/Statistics.csp>).

As mentioned before, the purpose of this study is to investigate the educational background and SES of secondary education students who plan to continue their studies abroad. The main hypothesis is that the students who intend to emigrate are not just middle-class individuals with a high educational level, but in educational and socio-economic terms, they constitute the most dynamic part of Greek youth and have the best prospects within Greek society. If this hypothesis is proved to be valid, it will probably increase the negative effects of the crisis on Greece and may deepen the economic crisis further.

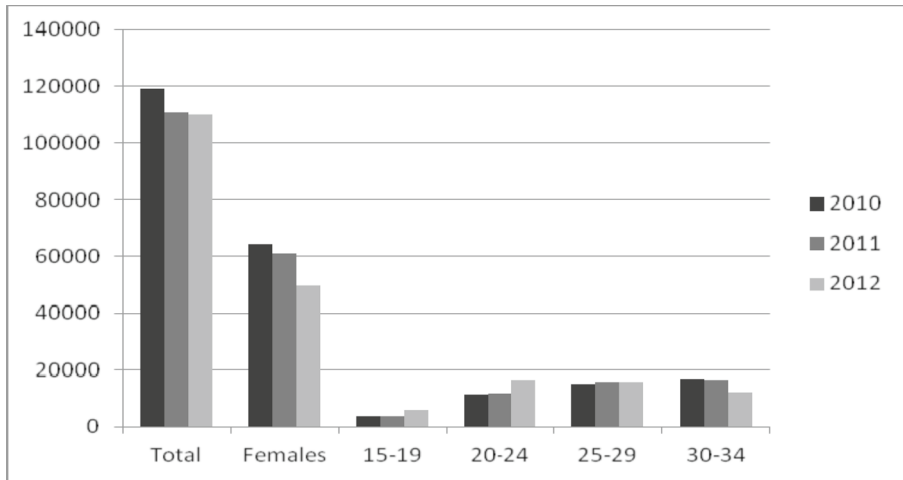
## Data and Methods

The fieldwork was conducted during the first quarter of 2014 and was addressed to all students of three out of the four<sup>3</sup> public ‘Prototype Experimental’ (‘Prototipa Peiramatika’) high schools (Lykeon) of Thessaloniki. High schools provide upper secondary education, which lasts for 3 years and enables entry to tertiary education. The students were 15–18 years old. Thessaloniki is the second largest city in terms of population in Greece, with approximately 800,000 inhabitants (7.4 % of the country’s total).

These ‘Prototype Experimental’ high schools differ from conventional schools because the programme includes a range of extra curriculum activities (academic, artistic, etc.). From the early 1980s until 2013, admission was based on lottery results. However, in 2013 significant changes occurred: teachers were selected after evaluation and are all now highly qualified (Master and/or PhD holders), and students of the 1st grade sat obligatory competitive entrance exams. Hence, part of the sample (1st grade students) consists of top performing students (admission after exams), while the rest of

<sup>2</sup> See also Becker et al. 2004 for Italy.

<sup>3</sup> It was not possible for the fourth school to participate due to relocation within the centre of the city during the fieldwork period.

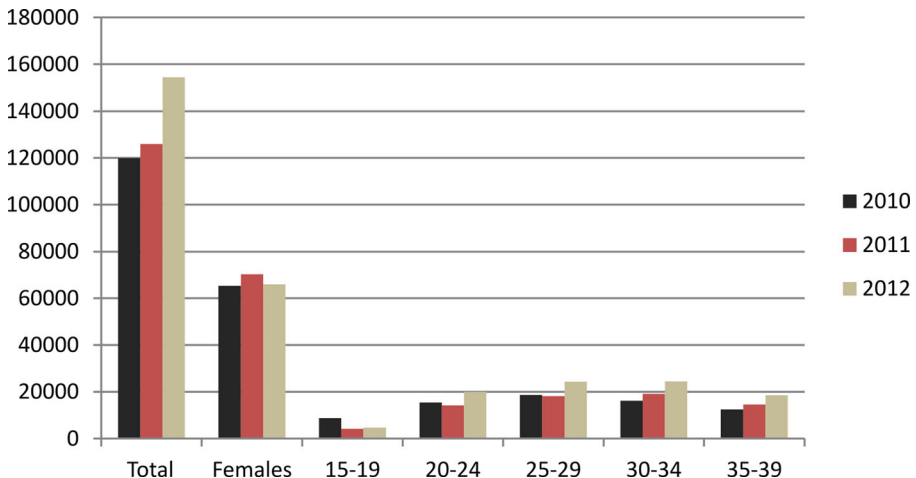


Source: Eurostat, Statistical Database

**Fig. 4** Immigration to Greece by gender and age

the sample (2nd and 3rd grade students—admission based on lottery results) is more mixed. This allows for the comparison of the intention to move abroad and the socio-economic and educational profile between 1st grade students, who display the highest potential (they constitute the educational elite of the city) and those of 2nd and 3rd grade students whose performance is varied and approximates to the average city student.

The sample includes 75 % of the ‘Prototype Experimental’ high school students in Thessaloniki. It is also representative of the city’s whole socio-economic spectrum, as the selected schools are situated across the Eastern, Central and Western parts of the city. Three hundred seventy-three students (49 % males and 51 % females) participated in our study (response rate for all three schools was 82.3 %).



**Fig. 5** Emigration from Greece by gender and age

A sample from this specific type of school has two advantages: firstly, it consists of students whose socio-economic stratification (in terms of parents' income and professional level) is representative of the city's student population<sup>4</sup>, and secondly, it includes two sub-groups of students—both high performance (1st grade) and those whose performance is representative of the average city student (2nd and 3rd grade). This enables us to compare the two groups as to their intention to emigrate for studies. Obviously, these students are not yet highly skilled, but a majority of them will be in the near future (1–3 years), either from studying abroad, or from studying at home, given the high entrance rates at Greek universities.

The authors visited the schools in person and distributed a structured questionnaire to students, which was completed during school hours in the classroom. The questionnaire predominantly included closed questions covering different aspects relating to the aspiration to move abroad (i.e. reasons for leaving, migration background of the family) and their socio-economic conditions (level of education, occupation, income, property and parents' place of residence).

The possibility of leaving the country to study abroad is one of their primary concerns about the near future. One of the methodological constraints regarding the aspiration to move abroad is that it may not materialise (e.g. due to financial constraints, especially in the current period of recession). However, our focus is on the aspiration to emigrate. Moreover, research by Van Dalen and Henkens (2013) for the Netherlands has pointed out that a high percentage of respondents who indicated the intention to migrate in the near future had actually migrated within five years. Behavioural intention is frequently the single best predictor of actual behaviour (theory of reasoned action, Ajzen 1991). Furthermore, given the lack of secondary data on highly skilled migration, this study of potentially highly skilled migrants enriches our understanding of the characteristics and consequences of modern skilled emigration from Greece.

## Intention to Emigrate: Empirical Results

### Potential Emigrants and Causes

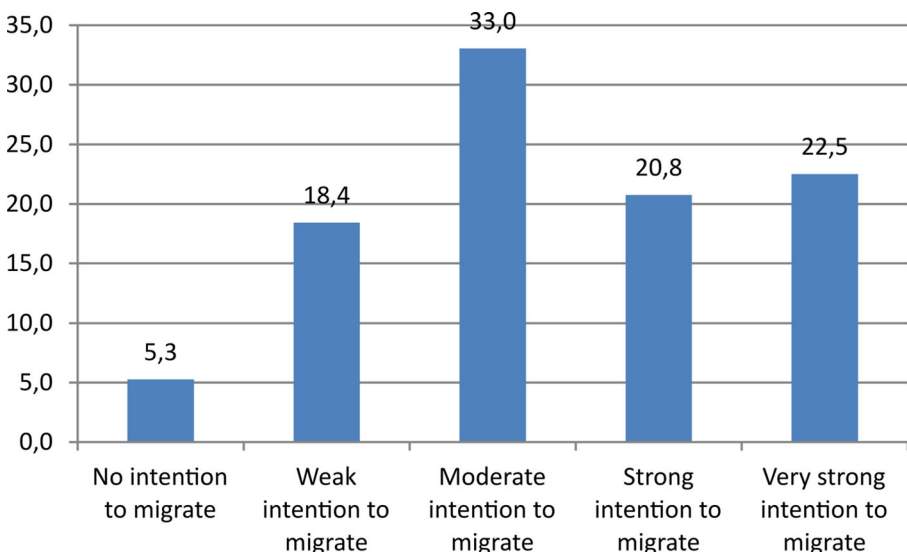
Students were asked whether or not they intended to emigrate in order to study or in order to work and live abroad. For the majority of our sample, and generally for Greek high school students, the decision to study, either in Greece or in another country, usually precedes the decision to work. Thus, the decision to migrate for work is quite distant because it does not relate to the near future, while the decision to migrate for studies is more imminent. Hence, we mainly focus on emigration for studies.

<sup>4</sup> In 2014, 52.3 % of high school students in the Regional Unity of Thessaloniki were males and 47.7 % females (EL.STAT. Unpublished data). In 2012, the per capita GDP was 15,007 euros (EL.STAT. 2012). The average annual labour income of the students' parents of our sample is 14,580 euros. In 2011, the professional stratification in the Regional Unity of Thessaloniki includes: 6.5 % employers, 26.0 % professionals and self-employed and 67.5 % employees (EL.STAT. 2011). The corresponding rates for our sample are 7.1, 28.5 and 64.4 %. However, there is a difference regarding the educational level. In 2011, the rates of primary, secondary and tertiary education graduates in the Regional Unity of Thessaloniki are 23.3, 53.7 and 23 %, respectively (EL.STAT. 2011). The corresponding rates for our sample are 7.6, 22.9 and 69.5 %. It seems that parents who encourage their children to study in the specific type high schools have a high educational level.

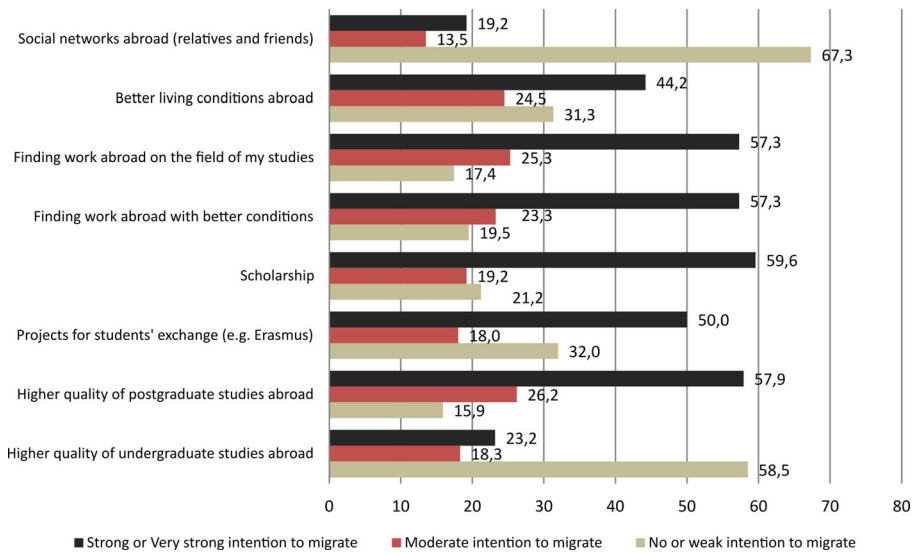
The majority of students (76.3 %) seriously considered emigrating to study (Fig. 6). On a five-point scale, 33 % declared a moderate intention to emigrate, while 43.3 % demonstrated a Strong to Very Strong intention to migrate to study abroad. Only 23.7 % showed a weak or negative intention to migrate to study abroad. While Greek emigrants in the 1960s moved to countries with a high demand for unskilled labour (e.g. Germany, Belgium, Australia), contemporary potential emigrants, as emerges from our sample, prefer destination countries which simultaneously combine high-quality tertiary studies with high-skilled labour demand (mainly the UK and USA).

Below, we have grouped all the students into three groups according to their intention to emigrate. The first group's intention to migrate was Strong or Very Strong (these are the potential emigrants). The second group's intention to migrate was Moderate, and the third group displayed Weak or No intention to emigrate. The following three figures display the impact of main push (Fig. 7) and pull (Fig. 8) factors affecting the decision to emigrate and the factors which would prevent emigration (Fig. 9) from all three groups. The questionnaire, based on existing literature, contained a series of push and pull factors which students were asked to evaluate. Specifically, students evaluated the importance of each factor on a scale of 1 to 5 corresponding with the following answers: Totally Agree to Totally Disagree. Hence, we had the opportunity to compute both the average importance of the total pull and push factors, as well as each pull and push factor separately. These factors were also assessed by students who declared No intention to migrate, so as to understand how they might respond if the possibility to migrate appears at a later stage in their lives.

The main pull factors for students from the first group are as follows: winning a scholarship for studies abroad (59.6 %), having access to better quality postgraduate studies (57.9 %), finding jobs in their field of study (57.3 %) and having access to better working conditions (salaries, working hours, insurance etc.) than in Greece (57.3 %). The most important push factors are the difficulties in finding a job (52.0 %) and the



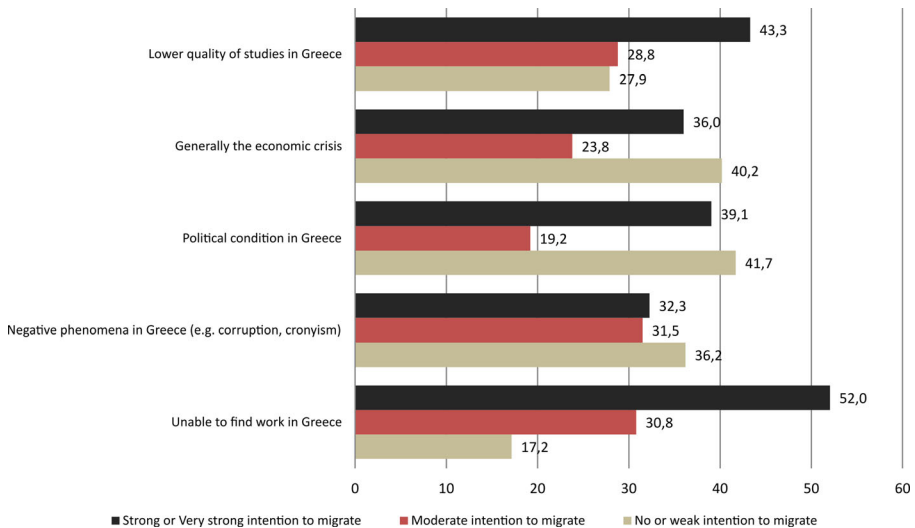
**Fig. 6** Intention to emigrate for studies abroad



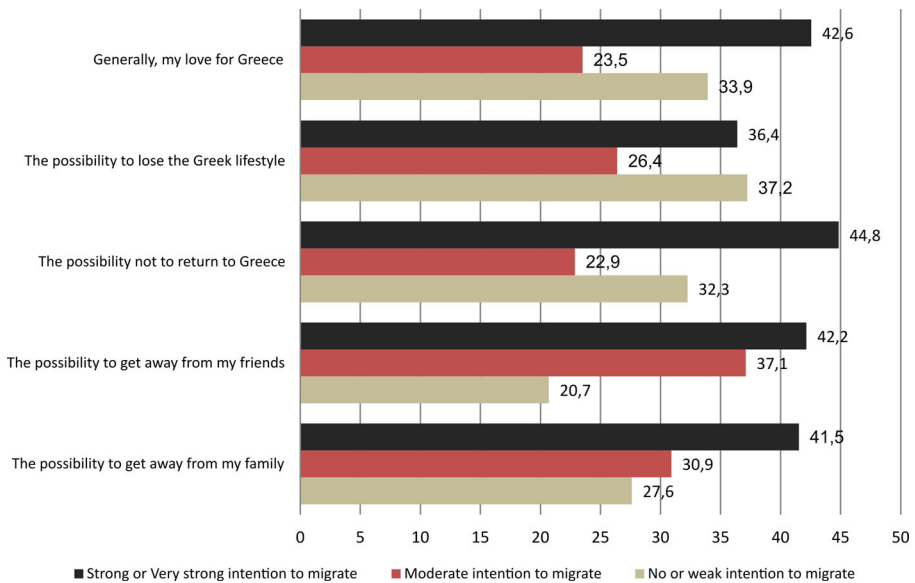
**Fig. 7** Impact of pull factors in the intention to emigrate abroad either for studies or for work and living

low quality of education (43.3 %) in Greece, while the probability of not returning (44.8 %) and their love for Greece (42.6 %) constitute the two main preventing factors.

In the case of the second group, better quality of postgraduate studies (26.2 %), finding jobs in a relevant field (24.5 %) and better living conditions (24.5 %) constitute the main pull factors for emigration. Important push factors are the negative social phenomena in Greece (e.g. corruption) (31.5 %) and the difficulty in finding a job (30.8 %), while preventing factors are the potential loss of friends (37.1 %) and family (30.9 %).



**Fig. 8** Impact of push factors in the intention to emigrate abroad either for studies or for work and living



**Fig. 9** Factors impeding emigration either for studies or for work and living

Furthermore, students in the third group consider social networks in the destination country (67.3 %), better quality undergraduate studies (58.5 %), student exchange programmes (e.g. through Erasmus students get acquainted with different countries and cultures where they might emigrate at a later stage for studies or work) (32.0 %) and better living conditions (31.3 %) as the main pull factors. Critical push factors are political conditions in Greece (41.7 %, meaning the general crisis of the Greek political system) and the economic crisis (40.2 %). Loss of the Greek lifestyle (37.2 %) is the predominant preventing factor.

This hierarchy of emigration factors highlights the difference between the potential emigrants and mainly the third group of students in the way they place themselves against the migratory phenomenon and how they associate migration with their personal plans and ambitions. More specifically, the determinants of the migratory decision (push, pull and impending factors) that arise from the first group seem to be more precise (e.g. scholarships) and individualised, thereby disclosing individually determined choices (e.g. finding jobs in their field of study), matching those mentioned in international literature as the main components of skilled migration (e.g. high level of education and labour specialisation). Therefore, the first critical finding of this study is that potential skilled emigrants not only have a global and comprehensive perception about the causes and objectives of a possible emigration decision but also have high educational and professional expectations for themselves.

The students in the second group appear to be sceptics. Although they realise the study and work opportunities abroad and some of the weaknesses of the Greek economy, they are not convinced about leaving their family and friends by emigrating.

The third group of students depicts more general causes of migration (e.g. political conditions in Greece, Greek lifestyle), which resemble those of unskilled migration (e.g. migration networks in the host country) and reveal a more forced and less individualised character (i.e. their decision to leave or stay is driven mostly by factors

which are out of their hands) of their migration decisions (e.g. political conditions in Greece). Moreover, students in this group seem to have relatively low personal expectations since they do not emphasise postgraduate studies (15.9 %) or finding jobs in their field of study (17.4 %) in the same manner as the first group.

The above differences are also verified by the ranking of each push and pull factor (scale, 1–5). As the intention to emigrate increases, pull factors become more important than push factors and vice versa (Fig. 10). Thus, students who demonstrate a greater intention to leave have a more precise and complete emigration plan, which has a more individualised character (i.e. depending mostly on their personal needs) and is based particularly on pull factors (3.8 for the first group against 2.3 for the third group). Additionally, they are more ambitious and have higher educational and professional expectations.

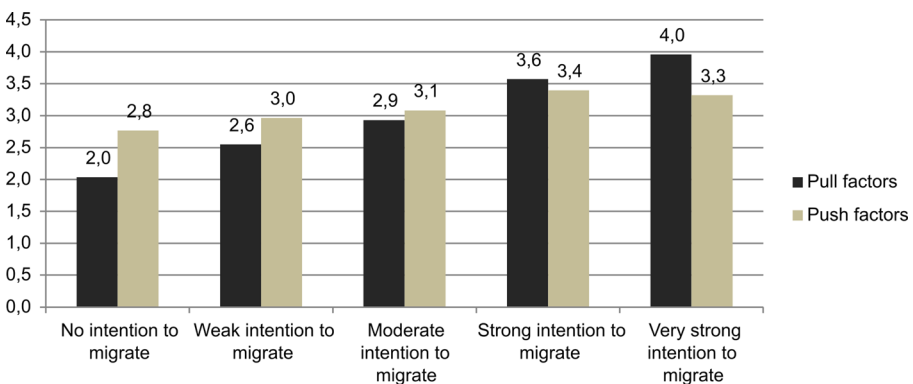
Undoubtedly, it is worth mentioning that the economic crisis has had a major impact on students' emigration decisions: the economic crisis in general and high unemployment rates are the most prominent push factors (3.73 and 3.34, respectively). Regardless of personal expectations and ambitions, the emigration decision is strongly weighted by the present and future negative consequences of the economic crisis.

In this Figure, all 5 categories of students' intention to emigrate are presented separately, in order to display more clearly the gradual increase of the pull factors' significance as the intention to migrate rises.

### Potential Emigrants and their SES

Table 1 shows the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the abovementioned three groups of students and their parents.

The first group of students that is the potential emigrants have the following characteristics: the students mainly come from the 1st grade (we thoroughly analyse the importance of this finding below) have high-mean school performance (scale 0–20) and their parents have a high educational level (postgraduate studies for the father, graduate and postgraduate studies for the mother). Moreover, compared to the other two groups, a higher rate of students' fathers are small employers (<5 employees) and a higher rate of mothers are professionals.



**Fig. 10** Evaluation of pull and push factors in the decision to migrate according to the intention to migrate (Scale: 1–5)

**Table 1** Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of students and their parents per intention to migrate

	Intention to emigrate		Males		Females		Grade		Average school grade		Parents having migratory experience		
	Total						A	B	C				
1) <sup>a</sup>	43,3		48.6	51.4			40.5	31.8	27.7	18.2	53.4		
2) <sup>b</sup>	33,0		49.1	50.9			32.6	32.3	35.1	17.6	33.3		
3) <sup>c</sup>	23,7		59.3	40.7			33.1	32.1	34.8	17.2	29.5		
	Father's Education												
	Primary	Secondary	University degree	Master/PhD	Primary	Secondary	University degree	Master/PhD	Primary	Secondary	University degree	Master/PhD	
1)	10.8	17.6	47.3	24.3	2.7	19.6	56.1	21.6					
2)	11.0	26.6	44.0	18.3	5.5	27.5	48.6	18.3					
3)	10.3	19.2	53.8	16.7	6.2	30.9	45.7	17.3					
	Father's monthly average salary (in euros)												
1)	1380.0	1110.0											
2)	1290.0	1020.0											
3)	1380.0	1110.0											
	Father's position in professional hierarchy												
	Unemployed	Labourer	Lower public or private sector employee	Medium public or private sector employee	Higher public or private sector employee	Self-employed	Professionals	Employer (less than 5 employees)	Employer (more than 5 employees)				
1)	2.4	3.3	4.1	30.9	16.3	8.1	22.8	7.3	4.9				



**Table 1** (continued)

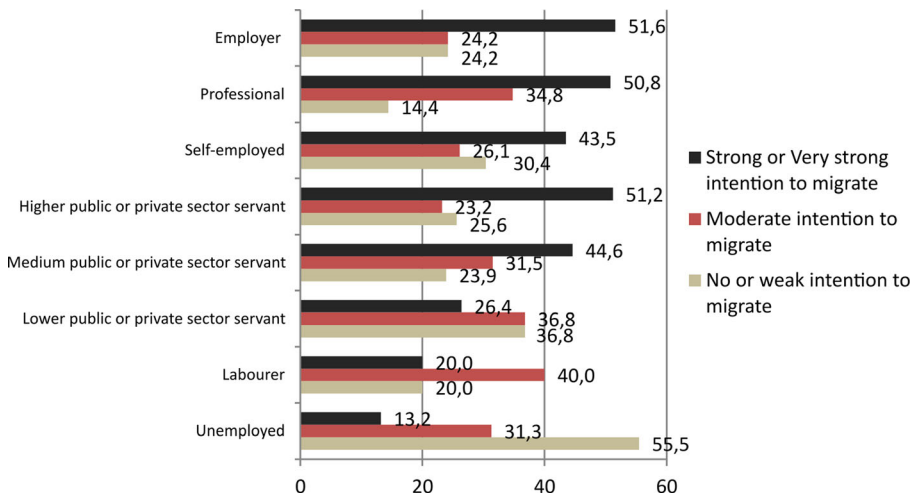
Intention to emigrate	Total	Males	Females	Grade	Average school grade	Parents having migratory experience
2)	1.3	3.9	5.2	10.4	29.9	2.6
3)	8.6	0.0	6.9	17.2	17.2	3.4
	Mother's position in professional hierarchy					
1)	11.4	0.8	7.3	13.0	16.3	1.6
2)	19.5	1.3	5.2	9.1	14.3	0.0
3)	13.8	0.0	6.9	13.8	6.9	5.2

Source: Questionnaire processing

<sup>a</sup> Strong or Very strong intention to migrate for studies abroad

<sup>b</sup> Moderate intention to migrate for studies abroad

<sup>c</sup> No or weak intention to migrate for studies abroad



**Fig. 11** Intention to emigrate for studies abroad according to father's occupational hierarchy

Potential emigrants belong particularly to the middle and upper middle social strata: focusing separately on every occupational category (Fig. 11), we observe that the highest intention to emigrate is expressed by those students whose fathers are from medium size private and public sector employees to employers (mainly small—not seen in figure) in the occupational hierarchy. In contrast, students whose fathers belong to the lowest categories of the occupational strata (unemployed, workers and lower public and private sector employee) do not have high intentions to emigrate, probably, due to the fact that these students already know that their parents cannot afford the financial support for studies abroad. The findings are similar if we focus on the mothers' occupational hierarchy. Hence, potential emigrants come from the middle and upper middle classes, which, as we mentioned before, is critical for the Greek economy—plus they have higher educational performance levels than their peers who do not intend to migrate. It is noteworthy that the main differentiating factor of the 1st group of potentially skilled emigrants from the other two groups is primarily their own and their parents' high educational achievements. It is indicative that the percentage of pupils in the 1st group with both parents employed in education (in the primary, secondary or tertiary level) is 8.8 %, while the relative percentages for the other two groups are 7.1 % for the 2nd and 6.2 % for the 3rd.

In order to evaluate the defining factors affecting a student's intention to emigrate for studies abroad, we estimated an Ordered Logit model with the dependent variable being the intention to emigrate to study abroad. Students gave one of the following answers: No intention to migrate to Very strong intention to migrate (ordering: low to high intention to migrate (see Fig. 6)). As independent variables, we used students' and their parents' demographic, educational and socio-economic characteristics (Table 2). Definitions of all the independent variables are given in the Appendix (Table 3).

The cohort with the highest intention to migrate comprises students who have high-mean school grades, parents with experience of emigration, mothers with high educational levels, fathers and mothers (with a lower statistical significance) with high salaries, fathers who are middle-class employees in the public or private sector (with

**Table 2** Ordered logit: students' propensity to emigrate for studies abroad

Independent variables	Coefficients	Wald	<i>p</i> value
Parents' migration experience	1.265	4.924	0.026*
Gender	0.376	1.504	0.220
Grade	2.162	4.750	0.029*
School performance	0.411	8.921	0.003**
Father's educational level	0.656	0.516	0.473
Mother's educational level	1.234	5.092	0.024*
Father's monthly income	1.881	5.311	0.022*
Mother's monthly income	2.465	3.136	0.077
Father's occupational hierarchy <sup>a</sup>			
Unemployed	-0.296	0.816	0.214
Worker	-1.504	4.076	0.044*
Lower public servant	0.282	0.178	0.673
Medium public servant	1.301	4.622	0.032*
Higher public servant	1.864	1.677	0.195
Lower employee in the private sector	-0.248	0.133	0.715
Medium employee in the private sector	0.760	3.539	0.060
Higher employee in the private sector	0.736	0.540	0.462
Self-employed (e.g. farmer or small business)	-0.310	0.294	0.587
Professional (doctor, lawyer, scientist etc.)	0.112	0.026	0.871
Employer (less than 5 employees)	2.885	4.214	0.040*
Employer (more than 5 employees)	1.672	1.155	0.283
Mother's occupational hierarchy <sup>a</sup>			
Unemployed	-1.003	0.800	0.371
Worker	-1.576	1.011	0.315
Lower public servant	1.210	0.948	0.330
Medium public servant	1.604	5.599	0.018*
Higher public servant	1.820	3.791	0.052
Lower employee in the private sector	0.956	0.032	0.858
Medium employee in the private sector	-0.730	0.522	0.470
Higher employee in the private sector	4.292	7.955	0.005**
Self-employed (e.g. farmer or small business)	0.893	0.659	0.417
Professional (doctor, lawyer, scientist etc.)	3.269	8.351	0.004**
Employer (less than 5 employees)	5.310	4.750	0.029*
Employer (more than 5 employees)	1.212	1.310	0.252

Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> = 0.495, F = 89.451\**p* < 0.05; \*\**p* < 0.01;

<sup>a</sup> We have distinguished the professional hierarchy of employees separately for those in the public and in the private sector, in order to better understand how each of these professional categories affects the dependent variable.

a lower statistical significance) or small employers, and mothers who are medium or higher employees in the public or private sector, professionals or small employers. Two

main findings have emerged: Firstly, the positive correlation between a mother's educational level and the intention to migrate is of great interest, due to the important social role played by women in the Greek family. Bringing up the children still remains largely the responsibility of women, despite the major changes in the social roles of the two sexes in the last few decades. Hence, it is probable that mothers with a good education encourage their children to emigrate to obtain a better education.

Secondly, it is of great importance for the educational and socio-economic background of future skilled migrants that students of the 1st grade are more likely to emigrate for studies than those from the other two grades. In fact, these students are more likely to want to emigrate for their studies (27.8 %) compared with the emigration intentions of students from the second (19.4 %) and third grade (21.6 %). For reasons mentioned above (see "Data and Methods"), students from the first grade tend to be the city's elite students as regards their educational performance. Indeed, compared with the students from the other two grades, these students have the highest school performance of all the students, with 2.3 units higher mean school grades (19.2 instead of 16.9—the mean of the 2nd and 3rd grade). Furthermore, their fathers' notable participation in graduate studies and their likelihood of being small or large employers are about 38.8 and 188 % higher, respectively. The rates of their mothers with Master/PhD degrees, working as teachers and being higher employees in the public sector, are about 48.7, 37.8 and 72.3 % higher, respectively. Although these students are younger than those of the other two grades and are therefore likely later on to face the possibility of a decision to migrate, they already seriously consider the possibility. This is probably due to their high school performance, which on the one hand makes them aware of their own capabilities and on the other hand encourages their parents to show more interest in the educational options for their children.

Moreover, potential emigrants in the 2nd and 3rd grades come from the middle classes and have higher school grades than their peers. Students from the 1st grade come from middle and upper middle social strata and display the highest grades. Consequently, the second critical finding of the present study is that students with the highest propensity to migrate are the most dynamic part of Greek youth in socio-economic and educational terms. The powerful educational and social capital they possess facilitates the emigration decision, their ability to adapt and achieve very favourable living conditions abroad and therefore their ability to transform the above two forms of capital into economic capital.

## Conclusions

The paper investigates the intention of high school students in Greece to emigrate and relates these findings to students' educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The analysis of fieldwork data, conducted at three specialist high schools in Thessaloniki, highlights three main conclusions regarding potential emigrants.

The first, which has not been clearly analysed in previous literature, is that students who show the greatest intention to emigrate to study are ambitious and have high educational and professional expectations, which they have already tried to fulfill from early adolescence. Their migration plan has a highly individualised character (i.e. based on their individual needs and aspirations), and their intention to migrate depends mostly on pull factors (quality of postgraduate studies, finding jobs in their field of study).

The second concerns their socio-economic and educational background. Potential emigrants have high-mean school grades, come from middle and upper middle social strata, and have highly educated parents. This finding is in accordance with arguments advanced in the international literature (Khoo 2014). Furthermore, students from the 1st grade of high school who constitute the educational elite of the city's high school students (as they passed competitive entrance exams and display the highest school performance among all the students in the sample) and come from middle and upper middle social and high educational strata, display the highest intention to emigrate. The additional finding that has not been underlined in literature is that potential skilled migrants constitute the most dynamic Greek youths in socio-economic and educational terms.

If, in the abovementioned two conclusions, we add the characteristics of international migration as described in the first part of the paper, we can more deeply understand the context in which the aforementioned students (potential migrants) may decide to migrate in the near future. In a time when global information and knowledge is easily available, these students understand at an early age the possibilities for future studies abroad. Their potential to migrate is encouraged by their high educational performance, a rich cognitive home environment, and the structural inadequacies of home countries such as Greece where the demand for skilled labour is limited. At the same time, students with the above characteristics constitute a global pool of potentially highly skilled migrants for high income countries who emigrate to find economic amenities as well as a rich scientific, educational and cultural environment which, as literature points out, is the prevailing pull factor attracting skilled migrants. Furthermore, since these students—like the majority of international students—come from the middle and upper middle classes, their parents can afford to finance their studies abroad and thus provide them with high-quality cultural capital (i.e. a degree from a University in the West) and at the same time the opportunity to transform this cultural capital into economic capital, thus maintaining their family's middle/upper middle class status.

The abovementioned two conclusions lead to the third main argument of our study: From the crisis point of view, the middle class shrinkage caused by the crisis can be aggravated by the potential emigration of the most dynamic part of Greek youth, which in turn might cost the loss of developmental human resources for Greece and therefore deepen the effects of the recession. This can further stimulate migratory movements resulting in a vicious circle between crisis and emigration. Furthermore, if we consider that potential migrants choose to study in countries that also offer much better job prospects, it is likely that temporary emigration to study will develop into permanent migration for work, further intensifying the vicious circle between migration and recession. The counter argument is that those with higher odds of returning are the skilled emigrants of higher social classes because their social status allows them to find lucrative jobs in their home country (Zweig 1997; Labrianidis 2011). On the other hand, international students of high social strata tend to prolong their stay in the host country to increase their chance of finding a good job there (Lianos et al. 2004). Future research on emigration from Greece might be more enlightening with regard to the qualifications of emigrants, the degree to which emigration for studies becomes a more permanent migration for work, as well as whether or not there is a possibility for skilled emigrants to return to Greece and what prerequisites that might involve. This paper tries to raise the alarm that Greece might lose the best part of its most dynamic, educated

youth. What is even more worrying is the fact that while highly skilled migration influences the lives of a large section of young people and their families—while undermining the country’s prospects (economic as well as socio-political)—there is so far no government policy, no commitment from political parties and no public discussion to tackle the issue whatsoever.

## Appendix

**Table 3** The list of independent variables

Independent variables	Definition <sup>a</sup>
Parents’ migration experience	0=No, 1=Yes
Gender	0=Female, 1=Male
Grade	1 <sup>st</sup> grade=1, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade=0
School performance	Average grade of all class courses in the previous year
Father’s and mother’s educational level	1=Primary education, 2=Secondary Education, 3=University degree, 4=Master/PhD, ordering from lower to higher educational level
Father’s and mother’s monthly income	1=0–300 euros to 9=above 2101 euros [per month], ordering from lower to higher income
Father’s and mother’s occupational hierarchy	
Unemployed	0=No, 1=Yes
Worker	0=No, 1=Yes
Lower public employee	0=No, 1=Yes
Medium public employee	0=No, 1=Yes
Higher public employee	0=No, 1=Yes
Lower employee in the private sector	0=No, 1=Yes
Medium employee in the private sector	0=No, 1=Yes
Higher employee in the private sector	0=No, 1=Yes
Self-employed	0=No, 1=Yes
Professional (doctor, lawyer, scientist etc.)	0=No, 1=Yes
Employer (less than 5 employees)	0=No, 1=Yes
Employer (more than 5 employees)	0=No, 1=Yes

<sup>a</sup> For all dummy variables “0” is the reference category.

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