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“Voting with their Feet”: Highly Skilled Emigrants from Southern Europe

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Abstract

In this paper we present new empirical data on highly skilled emigrants from two southern European countries, Italy and Greece, which have been particularly hit by the global financial and Eurozone crisis. The data has been generated by an e-survey conducted in late spring and summer 2013. Through analyzing the responses of Greek and Italian citizens who have chosen to emigrate, we present new insights on their educational backgrounds, the conditions that have motivated their decision to emigrate, and the way in which they have defined their migration project. It is argued that the decision to migrate is driven by a sense of severe relative deprivation as a result of the crisis and a deep frustration with the conditions in the home country. The crisis seems to have magnified the ‘push’ factors that already pre-existed in Italy and Greece and that now nurture this migration wave. At the same time, however, this migration is also framed within a more general perspective of a vision of life in which mobility and new experiences are valued positively and also seen as part of one’s professional identity.

1. Introduction

Since 2010, citizens from southern European countries that have been severely hit by the economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures have “voted with their feet.” Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese and Italians have faced conditions of rampant unemployment and a dramatic decrease in salaries and welfare allowances. In response, some have left for other countries or continents. While there has been a certain media hype about these new emigration waves from southern European countries, little is known¹ about who is actually emigrating, why they are leaving, where they are going, or for how long they plan to emigrate for. Media reports and first insights provided by recent studies (Focus Migration 2013; International Migration Outlook 2013) suggest that the new southern European emigrants are young and highly skilled. It is also claimed that they are motivated less by purely economic reasons and more by expectations for better career prospects and quality of life at destination.

In this paper we present new empirical data on highly skilled emigrants from two southern European countries, Italy and Greece, which have been particularly hit by the global financial and Eurozone crisis. The data analysed here have been generated by an e-survey conducted in late spring and summer 2013. The study is not representative of the people who

¹ One exception is a study on Ireland by Irial Glynn, Tomas Kelly and Piaras McEinrin (2013), *Irish Emigration in the Age of Austerity*, Dublin: Irish Research Council.

have left Greece or Italy to work or study abroad but rather concentrates on the highly skilled people from those countries. We investigate their socio-demographic profile, the 'push and pull' factors of their migration, their preferred destinations, and the conditions of their employment before and after their emigration. We look at how they use their social and human capital to organise their emigration. We broadly consider whether previous emigration paths of Italians and Greeks abroad have played a dominant role or whether forward looking considerations and job prospects were more important factors driving these migrations. Our study looks also at the difficulties they face upon settling at destination and their future plans for staying there or returning home, or indeed migrating to a third country.

In the next section we present a brief overview of the data and literature on recent emigration from Greece and Italy with a view to placing this study into its empirical context. We then outline some core features of our respondents and introduce the theoretical approaches that have guided our research questions and that bring together the quantitative and qualitative data of the survey. We also investigate whether and how they have tried to mitigate their costs and boost their expected benefits by for instance utilising their social capital (tapping upon previously established networks from prior study or work periods abroad, or family ties) or boosting their human capital (knowledge of the destination country's language, acquisition of further qualifications). Last, based on our analysis of this dataset, we argue that the decision to migrate, even when it has been provoked by the crisis, is framed within the more general framework of a vision of life in which mobility and new experiences are valued positively and also seen as part of one's professional identity. We also argue that the crisis seems to have magnified the 'push' factors that already pre-existed in Italy and Greece and that continue to nurture this migration wave.

2. Unemployment and Emigration Dynamics in Greece and Italy

Recent studies (Focus migration 2013) and the European Commission's overview of the Employment and Social Situation in the EU (European Commission, 2013) suggest that southern European countries have experienced negative net migration rates since 2010. However, this negative net migration is mostly related to outmigration of their EU migrants and third country nationals who have returned to their countries of origin and less so to emigration of their own nationals. A closer look at data on Italy and Greece actually begs the question of why the outmigration of nationals from these countries stands so low if their unemployment rates are steeply rising (particularly those of Greece) and the younger cohorts in particular are faced with very bleak employment prospects.

Indeed, according to Focus Migration (2013) based on data from the Greek national statistical service, Greece registered a negative net migration balance of -15,000 people in 2011, of which only 2,500 were Greek citizens who emigrated. There were some 6,800 citizens of other EU member states who left Greece and another 5,800 third country nationals who also left the country. In 2012, when the average unemployment rate for Greek citizens stood at 21% (and at approximately 55% for young persons under 25 years of age), there was a moderate increase of Greek citizens who live abroad.

According to the OECD International Migration Outlook (2012: 254), there have been important increases of migration from the southern European countries to Germany. Data for 2011-2012 show an important increase of 90% of inflows from Greece to Germany in 2011 compared to 2010, and a 52% increase of flows from Spain in the same period. Data on the first three quarters of 2012 and the first three quarters of 2011 show a 38% increase in flows from Italy to Germany in the first 9 months of 2012, similarly an increase of 48% of inflows from Spain, 49% from Portugal and 64% from Greece, always comparing these same periods.

Triandafyllidou (2012) has surveyed data on Greek citizens residing in countries that have not been hit particularly by the crisis and who have been mentioned in the media as preferred destinations for Greeks, notably the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany and also in the UK a 'traditional' preferred destination for highly skilled Greeks. These presumed main destination countries showed a moderate increase in inflows of Greek citizens although it is difficult to know the reasons of such increases. Greeks living in the Netherlands increased by 10% in 2011 and by 20% in 2012 (however the overall number is in 2012 approx. 10,000 people). In the UK there was an increase of 20% between 2011 and 2012 and in Sweden an increase of 70% from 2010 to 2011.

Italy has experienced relatively low unemployment rates, consistently lower than 10% till 2012² while the average unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2013 rose to 12.5%, a record high of general unemployment with over 40% of youth unemployment (young people aged 25 or less). Net migration has remained positive until 2012, i.e. more people were immigrating to Italy than leaving the country, albeit its net migration has slowed down considerably from 5.2/1000 in 2010, to 4.3/1000 in 2011 (ISTAT.IT 2012a; ISTAT.IT 2012e). Italy appears to have experienced secondary immigration of Romanian and Bulgarian citizens leaving Spain to search for employment in Italy (Migration Focus 2013) as well as continuing immigration from non EU European countries and from Asia and Africa.

The brief survey of relevant data above shows that the phenomenon of new emigration from southern Europe is under-researched and there is a lack of data on the features of these populations. Indeed there is probably a problem of non-registration: people who leave often do not register with their home country authorities (they do not announce to any public authority that they are leaving). In addition, to the best of our knowledge, there has been no study so far on the features, direction and motivations of these new emigrations, especially as regards the younger and more skilled cohorts. The imperfect data briefly surveyed above show a mixed picture of particularly high unemployment in Greece and quickly rising unemployment in Italy, especially among young people, and, at the same time, a rather weak but dramatically rising trend of emigration. This paper therefore explores the dynamics of one set of emigrants from Italy and Greece: highly skilled emigration. Our core research interest aims at understanding the drivers of this wave of emigration against the current context of severe economic and political crisis given the potential consequences of this migration with respect to its brain drain effect and the home countries' potential economic recovery.

3. Data and Methodology

The data analysed here are new and have been generated by a web-based survey designed and coordinated by the authors in 2013. The authors designed a questionnaire with a view to studying high skill emigration from five EU member states in deep crisis. More specifically, the e-survey concentrated on Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, investigating the main features of the emigrants, their experiences, profile and their expectations. The questionnaire was simultaneously launched in English, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish using SurveyMonkey software. A set of articles explaining the objectives of the survey along with the web-address of the questionnaire were disseminated through major newspapers and news websites in each of the country under study (specifically by *Kathimerini* and *To Vima* in Greece, *Il Sole 24Ore* in Italy), and interested readers were

² Overall unemployment was at 9.8% and at 35% for people under 25 years of age, in the third quarter of 2012 (ISTAT.IT 2012f and 2012d).

invited to take part in this survey. We also contacted dedicated blogs and web sites for expatriates, e.g. the AIRE, Associations of Italians Residing Abroad, and grass-root websites created by new emigrants themselves (such as newdiaspora.com) or websites dedicated to the crisis (crisisobs.gr) informing them of our research and requesting that they disseminate the online survey. The survey was also widely disseminated by the institutions that participated in this research through their main or departmental websites, emailing lists and newsletters, namely the European University Institute, Trinity College Dublin, Lisbon's Technical University and Royal Institute Elcano in Madrid. The e-survey was open for three months, from early May till 18 August 2013.

The survey consisted of approximately 70 questions aimed at obtaining information about key issues such as level of education, occupation, earnings, family status, timeframe of emigration, reasons for leaving, family dynamics (spouses and children migrating or staying behind, level of education and profession of spouse), prior experience with migration and mobility, the main problems encountered at the destination country, and plans for return or further migration. It also included four open questions about the reasons for leaving the origin country, the aspects that the migrant likes and dislikes in the origin and the destination countries, and a global evaluation of the migratory experience.

Open Survey Questions:

- Please write a short comment on why you have decided to leave your country of origin / previous country of residence (this time)?
- Please write a short comment on what you particularly like/dislike in your current country of residence
- Please write a short comment on what you particularly like/dislike in your country of origin
- Do you have any comments you would like to contribute regarding your current migration/mobility experience?

In this paper we focus specifically on the Italian and Greek datasets only. Our e-survey gathered 919 valid responses from Greeks and 901 responses from Italians. These “valid respondents” are Greek or Italian citizens who had already left their country to work or study abroad at the time of the survey. This paper combines a descriptive statistical analysis of the main features of our respondents with a qualitative discourse analysis of their answers to the open questions. This material sheds light on the role of corruption, nepotism and mistrust in the political system as push factors, the impact of the current economic crisis, the rationale for choosing specific countries of destination, as well as the role of networks and other pull factors in the migration strategies of migrants.

The written textual material included in the answers was analyzed following the method of qualitative discourse analysis. We looked at the discursive strategies that they used to explain their decisions. The analysis of these discursive strategies enables us to understand how their discourse over reasons for leaving, issues related to employment prospect and conditions, issues related to public and social life in the countries of origin or destination, and prospects for the future are organised in the decision making process of the respondents.

We are aware of the constraints and shortcomings associated with the reliability, sampling and generalizability of data collected through e-surveys. Internet based surveys face the same challenges that ‘pencil and paper’ surveys may face, but these can be intensified by the special conditions of the Internet context that include perceived anonymity, less control over respondents selection and transmission errors (Roztocki 2001). We wish to highlight

three main disadvantages of data collected by open e-surveys such as ours as these are also applicable to our dataset. Survey fraud is a common challenge associated with e-surveys so in order to control it as much as possible we included open ended questions and we included a number of interconnected questions that also tested for consistency (to ensure that respondents did not just randomly provide answers to the questions). Moreover, before analysing the responses collected we thoroughly ‘cleaned’ the datasets and kept just ‘valid’ responses, i.e. individuals who had indeed migrated to another country (not individuals who were considering migration) and who completed the entire set of questions. Finally, as this was an open survey there is a bias in the sample that was collected, not least in that it targeted only internet users as there was no other way to participate in the survey (i.e. by phone or completing a paper questionnaire).

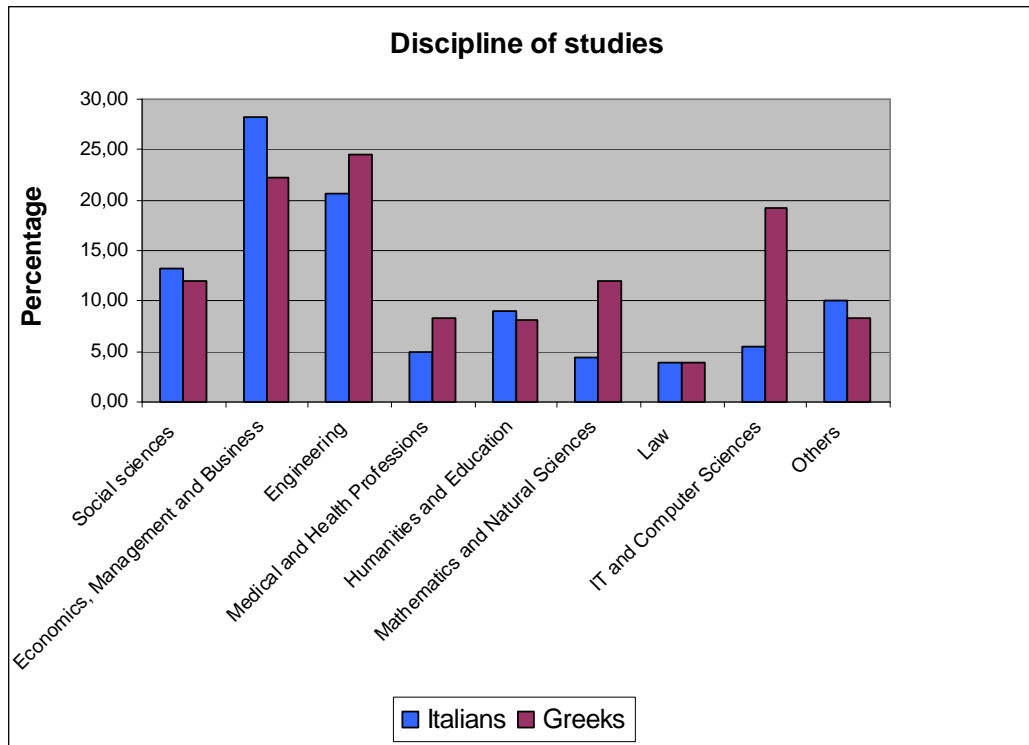
Nonetheless, in spite of the drawbacks we consider that the material collected through this survey is rich and insightful. It was a cost efficient way to provide some data on a tranche of migrants that is not easy to collect information, particularly in the case of high skilled individuals who move to another EU member state who may not necessarily register with the local authorities (at least for the first period). Moreover, we were able to capture the development of the migration wave as close to its actual time-frame as possible, and in as wide a geographical range as possible. In effect, data provided by statistical services have an unavoidable time lag whereas our data registers individuals who migrated up to June 2013. We received responses from Italians and Greeks who had moved to completely different parts of the world, from Switzerland to the UK, and from Canada to Australia. This geographic range gave a variety to our dataset that is only possible through the use of an internet based survey. The advantages of internet based surveys, which include the low cost of this option, the higher response rates and faster response times (see Jansen et al 2007), led us to prefer this methodology.

3.1 The education profile of our respondents

Our respondents are predominantly men and under 45 years of age. Over 68% of the Greek respondents and 76% of the Italian respondents were men, while about half of respondents from each country were in the 30-45 age range. Among Greeks, the other half of the sample are aged 30 or under while among Italians only 35% are under 30 years of age, and approximately 12% are in the age range of 46-60.

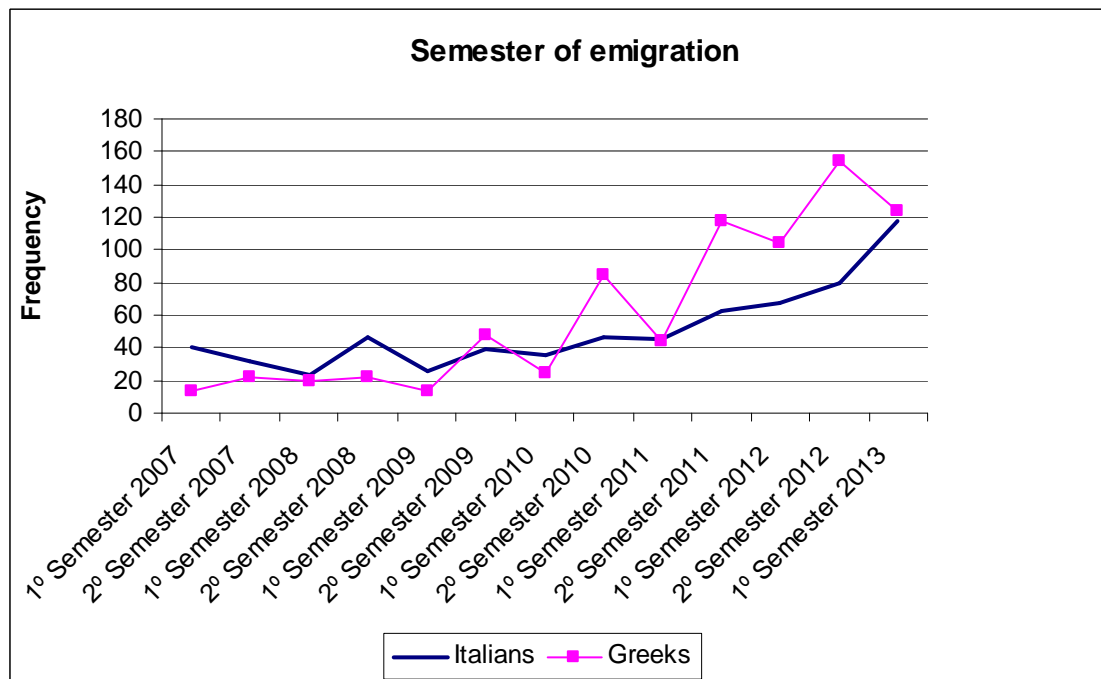
The respondents to our survey are all in their overwhelming majority highly educated: 89% of the Greek respondents and 87% of the Italian respondents hold a higher education degree. Business and economics majors, engineers, computer and IT specialists and social scientists formed the largest groups. Among the Greek respondents, 53.7% had completed post graduate studies and 14.5% held PhDs. For the Italian sample the percentages were 46.3 and 17.9 respectively.

Figure 1: Discipline of studies of Italian and Greek respondents



Note: the percentages tally over 100% as some selected more than one discipline/ area of study

Figure 2: Distribution of date of emigration of Italian and Greek respondents 2007-2013 (per semester)



The trends with regards the emigration flows during the past five years differ between the two countries. More than half of the Greek respondents left between January 2011 and June 2013 while only one third of the Italian respondents left during the same period. In addition, the survey sample of Italians is distributed relatively evenly through the years till it

picks up in 2011. By contrast outflows from Greece among our respondents are particularly low till 2010 when they dramatically increase. This suggests that the crisis dynamics had a stronger impact on the Greek outgoing high skill migration. Its increasing trend seems to follow the rising levels of unemployment: the general unemployment rate in Greece stood at just under 10% in 2010 and was over 25% in the summer of 2013. By contrast, the data on Italy suggest a constant propensity to emigrate among our respondents and an increasing trend for the last two years.

Before analysing further the motivations for leaving of our respondents and the ways in which they sought to increase benefits and mitigate costs, it is important to present in some more detail our theoretical framework and the resulting research questions that we are posing in this paper.

4. Migration theories: costs, benefits, networks and perceptions of relative deprivation

Migration theories remain rather fragmented and there is, to date, no fully developed theory on high skilled migration. Some of the existing theories may however be insightful as to the drivers and direction of high skilled migration; in this paper we therefore refer to some economic and non-economic migration theories from the 'supply-side' perspective. First, taking into account the high level of qualifications of our respondents and their age we have assumed that they are informed and that they engaged into a cost-benefit calculation including not only with regards the economic gains that they expect from emigration but also the related social benefits (e.g. increased status, better career prospects, better quality of life) and the economic (e.g. costs of moving to another country) as well as social and emotional costs (family and friends left behind, nostalgia). Our related theoretical framework borrows from the neoclassical economics micro-level theory (Borjas 1990). It is important to note that the cost and benefit analysis is made by the migrant from his/her perspective and is therefore absolutely subjective and defined by personal preferences. In effect, human capital theory has suggested that migrants may be motivated by what has been referred to as 'occupational upgrading' rather than just taking up a job with higher wages in another country. What this essentially suggests is that migrants may be attracted to a country on the basis of its educational facilities, high-standard training schemes and overall long term professional prospects (see Liebig 2003). Human capital theory is therefore the second core theoretical background from which we draw in the analysis.

We also draw on network theory (Massey et al. 1993: 448-450). This theory points to the importance of networks, notably of sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination countries through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared origin. These are considered to increase the likelihood of international migration because they lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns of migration (Massey et al. 1993: 448). In our study such networks encompass also professional and business networks both at home and at destination. Network strategies of high skilled migrants are however quite different from economically disadvantaged migrants. We have thus assumed that our highly skilled respondents will have used their social and cultural capital, notably their professional and other social networks including contacts established during prior stays abroad (for study or work purposes) and their skills (language knowledge, etc) to find work, accommodation and integrate at destination. We asked them to identify the difficulties that they faced in order to integrate into the country of destination, and not only why they left their country of origin but also why they chose that particular destination country. We thus aim at capturing the complex motivations and dynamics of this

highly skilled emigration in the current phase of the crisis that is still unfolding in Italy and Greece in 2013.

Last, we tapped into the notion of relative deprivation. The notion of relative deprivation originates from the new economics of migration theory (Massey et al. 1993; Stark and Taylor 1991) which argues that when the local social hierarchy changes, those who used to be better off and who see their relative standards of living declining, may feel their “relative deprivation” more strongly than those who are actually the poorest in a community. This relative deprivation may be perceived internally (i.e. with respect to their society of origin), it may be perceived internationally (i.e. with respect to other countries), and it may be perceived in absolute terms (see Czaika and de Haas 2011). In this study, we consider all three of these dimensions as well as a fourth dimension which is personal. In other words, it is not only about assessing one’s situations against how other people in their society are doing but rather with regard to their own expectations and plans they had for the future based on previous conditions, how this has impacted their decision to emigrate and the way they frame their migration project in their mind.

4.1 Reasons for leaving

A first obvious hypothesis is that emigration is motivated by unemployment. However, the responses we received suggest that the motivations for leaving are less economic (in the strict sense of the term) and more related to future prospects, opportunities for career and professional development as well as an overall disillusionment and lack of hope with regard to the overall prospects in their country of origin. In effect, more than half of our Greek respondents and approximately 60% of our Italian respondents were employed in the last six months before leaving. This suggests that it was not sheer necessity because of unemployment that prompted the decision to emigrate.

When prompted to choose among a number of reasons for leaving, unemployment was indicated by 21% of the Greek respondents and 14% of the Italian respondents (see Table 1 below), while low wages was chosen only by 19% of respondents in Greece and 17% of respondents in Italy.

Table 1: Main reasons for leaving declared by Italian and Greek respondents

Main reasons for leaving	Italians		Greeks	
	%	N	%	N
My company sent me abroad/ offered me work abroad	10	90	2	19
I was unemployed	14	122	21	194
My salary was very low	17	151	19	175
No opportunity for further profession	25	221	25	229
To improve my academic/ professional training	37	334	51	472
My quality of life was overall rather poor	16	148	28	255
My spouse/ partner left for professional reasons and I accompany	5	41	6	56
I saw no future for me in the country	37	330	50	458
I wanted a better future for my children in a new country	11	97	14	127
There was political unrest in the country	9	78	11	103

To try a new experience, a new adventure	32	286	31	282
I could find better business opportunities here	37	329	47	428
Other reasons	7	65	7	63
Note: Respondents were offered the choice to tick multiple reasons to emigrate				

For both groups, the four main reasons for leaving were the following: I saw no future for me in the country; to improve my academic and professional training; I could find better business opportunities; and to try a new adventure and live a new experience. A poor quality of life was chosen by 28% of Greek respondents and only 16% of Italian respondents indicating that the grip of the crisis had affected more the living conditions of Greek rather than Italian citizens.

A closer look at the open ended questions and the written answers of our respondents suggests a more multifaceted and complicated different picture. Unemployment, poor job opportunities and even poorer pay at the home country clearly come out as ‘push factors’, while the quest for higher salaries and job security are mentioned by Greek and Italian respondents in their open ended answers as an important incentive for settling abroad. Two quotes, one by a Greek respondent in Ireland and another by an Italian respondent now living in Britain, are telling:

My trainee salary was higher than my monthly salary in Greece (Greek male, social scientist currently working in Ireland and planning to move to Turkey due to the country’s economic growth (1357)).

After high grades at University, I was “employed” as an intern and I was earning 300 Euro per month, with no possibilities of earning more in the first year. I felt the need to be autonomous from my family and sustain myself with my all means. I couldn’t have done this if I stayed in my native country” (female, under 30 years of age, Italian, with an MA in Philosophy who moved to Britain because her husband found a job and she is now also employed in a management position (1246)³

The perception of relative deprivation of income and of opportunities comes across in the overwhelming majority of comments and responses to the open-ended questions. The recurring theme is that their home countries offer “poor opportunities” and “no future”. The main obstacles to the opportunities and the future that they would like to see in their country seem to be caused by the wider culture of corruption and nepotism and lack of meritocracy that is repeatedly referred to in both sets of data. In effect, the following list of ‘What do you dislike in your country?’ that was identified by one of the Italian respondents is typical of the majority of responses:

“1. Political disruptions 2. No meritocracy 3. ""Mafia"" behaviour in all fields 4. Salary level too low (only if you do not have ""protector"") 5. poor opportunities in general” (male, engineer working in Germany since mid 2012 who was employed in Italy before leaving (716))

Similarly, a Greek respondent noted:

³ The quotes are translated by the authors when they were in Greek or Italian. Oftentimes the answers were written directly in English. We have not edited the text for syntax or grammar as this would alter the ‘genre’ of this document.

“Meritocracy, in Greece there is no meritocracy, salaries and possibilities to grow as a professional” (male, with graduate studies in economics and business currently working in the UK (4039))

In this sense, wide-spread corruption and nepotism are identified as being at the root of their migration project given that these cause conditions that lead to both internal relative deprivation (since those who have the right ‘connections’ advance professionally), and international relative deprivation (since there are creative opportunities in other countries that do not suffer from the same plights). The ongoing crisis has magnified these and has added the personal relative deprivation dimension since it has changed the socio-economic and political conditions in their home country so dramatically that it has effectively wiped out the potential for professional development and achievement that existed prior to the crisis in spite of widespread corruption and nepotism.

As one Greek respondent simply, yet powerfully states:

“There is no future for anyone” (male, electrical engineer, between 31-45 years of age, who left Greece for Sweden in the first half of 2013 because he was unemployed (3756))

4.2. Choosing the destination country

Our survey data show two main features of this new high skill emigration from Italy and Greece. First, this is predominantly an intra-European migration rather than an emigration towards other continents. Second, there is a variety of destinations: indeed our data included very different countries accounting for 1-2% of our respondents which we have regrouped as “rest of Europe” (tallying between 36-38% overall). These are spread evenly across all other EU member states, Norway and the countries of Southeast Europe.

Table 2: Main destination countries among Italians and Greek respondents

Destination country	Italy (% of respondents)	Greece (% of respondents)
United Kingdom	14	24
Germany	9	12
Netherlands		8
Belgium	8	6
Switzerland	7	4
France	6	
United States	5	3
Rest of Europe	38	37
Rest of America	3	1
Asia	4	2
Africa	1	0
Oceania	1	1
No data	4	1

Total (N)	100 (901)	100 (919)
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Unsurprisingly, the larger European economies, notably Britain, Germany and France, come up as major destinations for both groups of respondents. Particularly among Greek respondents these two countries account for more than a third of all cases (36%), while in the case of Italians they gather approximately one fourth of all respondents (23%). Belgium emerges as an important destination for both Italians and Greeks, while Switzerland and France are poles of attraction for highly skilled Italians. The Netherlands emerges as an important destination for our Greek respondents.

Table 3: Choice of destination country among Italian and Greek respondents

Did you choose specifically this country	Italy (% of respondents)	Greece (% of respondents)
Yes	74	84
No	26	17
Reasons for choosing this country		
Because I can work here (no visa restrictions)	24	54
Better career opportunities	63	69
I speak the language	33	46
Better income	46	61
Better quality of life	40	54
I have friends here	9	15
I have family here	4	9
My spouse lived here /found a job here	10	11
I had studied here	8	20
I had always wanted to live here	11	10

Note: The percentage is over 100 because respondents were offered the choice to tick multiple reasons to emigrate

Interestingly, 17% of the Greek respondents but also over a quarter of all Italian respondents declared that they did not choose the specific destination country (see Table 3). They were seeking for a chance to emigrate abroad and the country was probably an acceptable or even good destination but not one that they had specifically in mind. Looking more closely however at the reasons for choosing a specific destination country among those who did chose one, three main reasons emerge for both groups, in this order: better career opportunities; better income; better quality of life. Among Greek respondents the no visa restrictions comes in as an important decision factor with over half of the respondents noting that that was important too while among Italian respondents, knowing the language was the fourth most important reason for choosing the specific country.

Respondents had the possibility to insert a short comment in addition to their closed questions and 7 % of all Greek and all Italian respondents actually did. Among those, several specified that they had found a job in that country before moving there. That was a prevalent reason for both Italian and Greek respondents expressed in their written comments. Only a handful mentioned kinship or family ties and when they did these specifically consisted of having a spouse with citizenship of that country. Several specified that the reason for choosing that country was the quality of its graduate education system.

Unfortunately these answers do not provide sufficient information on the role of social capital, e.g. networks before migrating as our respondents do not explain how they found the job offer that led them to that specific country (regardless of whether the destination country was their preferred one or not). The quantitative data however as well as the open answers point to the fact that this new emigration does not rest on family or kinship ties except for very specific cases (of mixed marriages for instance). This is an interesting insight as it appears that this migration wave does not follow earlier established post World-War II migration patterns of Greeks or Italians towards North America, northern Europe and Australia (see Fakiolas and King 1996). None of our respondents mentioned such a connection with any Greeks or Italians living abroad as an important reason for choosing that specific country. This finding is, on the one hand, surprising because it contradicts network theory that would have assumed that any existing ethnic network resources would have been tapped into. It is contrary to findings on East to West migratory movements within Europe which document that more recent East European migrants would connect with earlier emigrants from the pre-1989 period (e.g. Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2004; Triandafyllidou, 2009). On the other hand, this result suggests that this is a qualitatively new migration from southern Europe. Indeed, people who left in the post war era were coming from rural areas, were less educated, motivated by unemployment and poverty, they took up jobs in the growing industrial sector of northern and western European countries. Current new emigrants are highly qualified, pushed by a mixture of motivations within which the career prospects are the most important (both from leaving the home country and for choosing the specific destination country), and income comes second.

4.3. Framing the migration project

We have analysed the specific argumentation strategies that the respondents adopted to explain their decisions and express satisfaction or indeed regret about having emigrated on the basis of the grid of argumentation strategies proposed by Meyer and Wodak (2009: 18). Meyer and Wodak identify four types of discursive strategies that people use to negotiate their national identity: constructive, preservative, transformative and destructive. Borrowing from these four types, we have tried to discern how they “constructed” their own self-understanding and their decision-making process, notably their reasons for leaving. We have also examined how they were “destructive” towards their decision expressing regret and affirming the difficulties of migration and doubtful as to whether the benefits of this migration compensated the associated costs. Transformative strategies concerned the future of the respondents and their families as well as their indirect resistance towards becoming part of a certain system in the country of origin which they resented. We also looked for preservative strategies notably the elements that our respondents appreciate about their country of origin and which they would like to keep as they are.

Constructive discursive strategies

The main constructive discursive strategy of our respondents centred on the notion of *agency*: on the individual's capacity as a rational actor to make a cost-benefit calculation, take a decision, make a plan and implement it with a view to improving her/his life:

Paradise does not exist anywhere unfortunately. Neither in Greece nor abroad. But as an immigrant you have the possibility to reach for the ideal situation. *Everything is a matter of priorities, you get them right and make a plan. If you follow the plan you can be happy with your life.* In Greece it is impossible to set priorities and make plans for the future. Abroad you do have this right. (male, Greek, IT graduate under 30 years old working and planning to stay in Sweden long-term (3799), emphasis added)

The high skill emigrant thus presents her/himself as a rational actor that has set clearly her/his priorities and pursues a set of goals. Indeed this view of having a plan to make it work is emphasised by another respondent:

Always move to a country with a purpose (studies, already agreed job). Moving without a plan and without knowing the local language are the worst things to do (male Greek law graduate, under 30 years old, working in France and planning to stay there long term (1400))

Our respondents thus also distinguish themselves from others who either would not be able to do it if they tried or actually tried but did not manage. In effect, one Italian graduate in international business who relocated to Brazil through the company he was working for (692) noted that "many sacrifices have to be made, it [migration] is not for everyone". The emigrant constructs themselves as an achiever of the goals s/he sets to her/himself, through careful planning and realistic expectations. Thus, the constructive argumentation strategy of agency is qualified with two elements: realism and careful preparation. While agency and preparation are crucial ingredients in the comments of many respondents, some also add to it a sense of maturity and reflection on past decisions, as well as courage. This is especially the case of those who have emigrated in the past for work or study purposes but went back to the home country, only to leave again more recently:

I am sorry that it took me so long to take the decision and immigration. I would have had better opportunities if I had stayed [in the previous host country] the first time round. It just needs guts and desire to be better. If you have that, everything else is easy. (male, Greek, under 30 with a graduate degree in e-commerce and working in Britain (3988))

Agency is also constructed in a positive vein: migration is an opportunity or actually offers opportunities but again these have to be pondered:

I feel that mobility is not about "escaping" but about finding the best opportunity where it is available. Having no more borders in the EU, it is normal that people move more and I don't feel it's a problem. (Italian woman under 30 years of age, working in Britain 1246)

The decision to migrate is framed within the more general framework of a vision of life in which mobility and new experiences are valued positively and also seen as part of one's professional identity:

I have had a great career so far, with interesting jobs, decently paid and I have seen the world. Sadly, this hasn't happened to those I left in Italy. (Italian woman between 31-45 years old, currently working and pursuing her PhD in Australia on a scholarship offered by the host country 56)

If you are a professional in engineering it is normal to be on the move. Moreover if you want to learn about the world you have to see and experience it (Italian male with a PhD in Engineering working in Germany 718).

Transformative strategies

An important element in the open ended answers of our respondents were the implications of their decision for their own *future and the future of their children*. Indeed, considerations about the future were sometimes seen as a decisive factor that made them take a decision that they would not have otherwise taken. In other words, they presented their decision as 'forced' due to lack of opportunities, but this has been re-constructed in a positive manner with regard to its current outcome and future prospects:

It was not a choice but I am very happy to have left for the future of my kids, I am sure they will have more possibilities to develop their skills and to enjoy life, although I am aware that they will also have problems because of their status of immigrants (Italian woman with a PhD in economics, married and with two children, working in Finland 308).

Isolation, difficulties in everyday life, adaptation, insecurity, worrying for the future are some of the negative aspects of emigration. Unfortunately for Greece however as time passes we realise that this choice of emigrating to Australia was more than right, especially for the future of our children (male, Greek engineer, who migrated to Australia with his spouse and two children in the second half of 2012 (4476))

Destructive and preservative strategies combined

Several respondents argued that emigration was not a choice but a necessity and they would very much prefer living in Greece/Italy:

I love my country of origin, and I would love to contribute to its development. Unfortunately, I can't find any job matching my professional profile (Italian woman with graduate studies in international development cooperation working in Austria who was unable to get a job in Italy 660)

If there were jobs and good salaries in Greece, I would never have left (male, Greek, under 30 years old, IT specialist who studied in Athens and London and moved to France in the second half of 2011 because he was unemployed 4096)

While the list of things that people disliked in the country of origin was long, the list of the things that they cherished and would not change was also long. Among both Greek and Italian respondents there was a lot of emphasis on the good weather, the nice food, the social

relations that were informal and warm, their own family and kinship networks that they missed. The following excerpt of a young Italian who lives in Belgium (4895) is particularly eloquent of the constructive discursive strategy of his own self identity but also of how much he cherishes his home country:

At 27 years of age, I am considered a young boy in Italy, while at my job I deal with marketing and business in an international environment, travelling often outside Europe, and I am considered for what I do and say and not for my age. I do not like and I will never like the fact of living outside Italy. I do not like the climate and despite everything [the advantages of the destination country and disadvantages of Italy] I keep thinking that I will soon return to Italy (..) I like my country because Italy is the most beautiful place in the world, despite Italians.

This preservative discursive strategy of cherishing many elements of life in the country of origin almost comes at opposition of the constructive discursive strategies analysed above which present the emigrant as an agent, capable of changing the course of her/his life, making plans and reaping the benefits of her/his efforts, while looking down upon the lack of opportunities in the country of origin. Making sense for one's self of why one has emigrated from her/his country of origin when the decision was not guided by the mere fact of poverty or absolute necessity is a complex task. Our respondents engage into several, complex and often contradictory discursive strategies to explain their decisions and actions. While a strong sense of agency dominates the discourse, and a notion of rational cost benefit calculation, the preservative and destructive discursive strategies also show that after all the cost benefit calculation involves a high sense of nostalgia and an attachment to the country of origin. In addition, a sense of responsibility and concern for the future for one's self and one's children is an important element that complements the reasoning.

5. Concluding remarks: migrants driven by relative deprivation and cosmopolitanism

We have presented here the features and dynamics of new emigration from Italy and Greece, during the last five years based on the data of an original survey designed for the purposes of studying high skill emigration from southern Europe.. A striking feature of this highly skilled migration is a multiplicity of destinations. While traditional receiving countries like Britain and Germany occupy the first positions as most popular destinations, a number of other European countries including Belgium or Switzerland for instance are emerging as important destinations, particularly for Italians. Overseas destinations form a small part of our sample. This sample is neither representative of the entire emigrant population from Italy and Greece of the recent years, nor of the entire highly skilled emigrant population. It does however point to interesting dynamics in the choice of destinations. This finding has to be qualified given that the e-survey may have been disseminated more and reached more people in some countries rather than others. This can be identified as one of the drawbacks of using an e-survey in that it is difficult to control from which sites information referring to the survey may be provided and what sort of readership newspapers, news platforms or other sites may attract, and from where.

Our analysis of the reasons that guide the choice of the destination countries shows that the choice was guided by employment offers or study opportunities and an overall appreciation of the quality of life (including respect for the citizen, security and a good health and education system) in that particular country on the part of the migrant. Kinship and

family networks only marginally affected the emigration plan and there was no connection with earlier southern European emigrations to northern or western Europe from the post war period. This finding is evident across all the responses leading to the conclusion that it is the migrant – and not the receiving country – that is the selecting agent. From a policy relevant perspective, the implications of this are that though governments may pursue stricter or more lenient immigration policies, it may be a completely different set of factors, unrelated to migration policies – such as quality of democracy, social justice, the quality of higher education, or the openness and flexibility of the labour market – that function as strong ‘pull’ factors in the decision to immigrate for high skilled migrants

As regards the motivations for leaving one’s own country, the things they appreciate most or they dislike at home and at destination and the ways in which our respondents make sense overall of their emigration experience, the study highlights complex patterns. Decisions were not guided by the mere fact of poverty or absolute necessity. Our respondents engage into several, complex and often contradictory discursive strategies to explain their decisions and actions. A strong notion of agency dominates their discourse; they construct their self-image as people who are rational, wilful, strong, organised and motivated. They emphasise a rational cost benefit calculation in line with our interpretative framework based on the micro-level neo-classical economic theory.

This is an exploratory study that casts some light to the dynamics of the high skill emigration flows from crisis ridden Italy and Greece. It provides first insights as to the complex motivations behind the decision making of the respondents, and points to a sense of relative deprivation that they experience. The notion of relative deprivation is particularly well suited to discuss the emigration of young and highly skilled people from Greece and Italy at times of acute economic crisis. Their relative deprivation concerns not so much how other people in their society are doing but rather with regard to their own expectations and plans they had for the future, as well as with regards to the opportunities they perceive to be available in third countries. They feel most strongly the fact that their local or national socio-economic context has changed, for the worse, and they cannot come to terms with such downgrading. They thus put their human capital (more than their social one) into action and seek employment and better life opportunities elsewhere. The core problems and obstacles that they identify in their national context are not new – in fact they are characteristics that are perceived as deeply engrained in their home countries and responsible for the way in which the current crisis has developed. Thus, corruption, nepotism, lack of meritocracy in particular are flagged out as ‘push’ factors in their migration decision. Even more so, the fact that these conditions have been magnified in their home countries during the crisis rather than addressed seems to have triggered more determination to accept the costs associated with this migration project in their new host countries and an even stronger desire to demonstrate resilience and success.

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