

# “Investigating the factors affecting brain drain in Greece: looking beyond the obvious”

Factors  
affecting brain  
drain in Greece

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The study explores the reasons why talented people leave Greece and go abroad using a qualitative approach to data collection in order to get a deep understanding on the actual reasons of brain drain in Greece, which affects the sustainability of domestic businesses and the overall economic development of the country.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative approach was adopted consisting of 80 interviews with business and IT professionals, healthcare professionals and academics of various disciplines that live and work in the United Kingdom, Germany, United States and Australia. Data were collected over a three-year period (May 2015–May 2018).

**Findings** – The results showed that the vast majority of respondents decided to leave their home country due to the prevalent cultural mindset of most Greek citizens, government policymakers and employers in Greece. In particular, 65% of respondents decided to live and work abroad due to the deep crisis of social values in the country and the high political corruption, while just 35% pointed to purely financial and other work-related reasons (e.g. low salaries, poor working conditions, no employment prospects, lack of job security) as the key ones for leaving the country. Essentially, the respondents argued that the individualist cultural values that have been predominant in the Greek society for years now have become evident in political action causing several problems such as social injustice and poverty.

**Research limitations/implications** – The findings have important implications both for those who hold governmental posts and the remaining citizens of Greece. Both government officials and citizens should re-examine their roles, values and ideals. The blame for the extensive brain drain in the country cannot be put only on the political parties that ruled the country during the last decades; the people who elected them are also responsible. The country seems to remain trapped in a crisis of social values that parents and the formal education system in Greece have cultivated for years now. In that respect, formal education in the country should be transformed radically in order to act as an important agency inculcating the new generations with a sense of duty in shaping a democratic political culture that emphasizes equality and condemns egalitarian practices.

**Originality/value** – The scant evidence around this topic is based on quantitative research that fails to explore in much depth the reasons of brain drain in the country. Previous studies revealed that the phenomenon of brain drain in Greece has been predominantly caused by the poor financial performance of the country during the last decade. This has been further supported by the claims of several policymakers who argue that the Greek crisis has been a fiscal one. However, the present study sheds new light and unmasks the root cause of brain drain in Greece stressing that the country essentially faces a crisis of values and a corrupted civic culture.

**Keywords** Greece, Sustainability, Brain drain

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The term “brain drain” appears to have gained wide usage in the late 1960s when growth in the migration of well-educated personnel from developing to developed countries accelerated. Nowadays, brain drain still remains a hotly debated issue that features high in the political agenda of many countries around the world. Brain drain is a phenomenon in which people of a high level of skills, qualifications and competence leave their countries and emigrate in search of a better standard of living and quality of life, which may involve higher salaries, access to advanced technology and more stable political conditions. Brain drain, also known as human capital flight, is a serious issue in many parts of the world, and it is very common in developing nations, as skilled professionals seek out work abroad rather than returning to work in their home country (Beine *et al.*, 2008).



Many are driven away by high unemployment, but issues such as political oppression, lack of religious freedom and simply not being able to earn a generous salary also play a significant role in exacerbating brain drain. The phenomenon of brain drain is not only a serious economic issue both in that the country loses valuable human capital and the money it puts into training the workforce, but a social one since the loss of key healthcare professionals often puts the health of the nation's citizens at risk, creating long-term and potentially disastrous results for countries with high brain drain rates (Adams, 2003; United Nations, 2017).

The scale of brain drain is staggering. As the available data show, nearly one in ten tertiary-educated adults born in the developing world – between a third and half of the developing world's science and technology personnel – now live in the developed world. With demand for highly skilled personnel in the developed world unlikely to diminish soon, that figure is likely to increase (McGill, 2018). However, this migration of highly skilled individuals for better opportunities across international borders has been of growing concern worldwide because of its impact on the economic systems in developing countries (Docquier, 2014).

According to the United Nations' global migration report (United Nations, 2017), the number of international migrants increased from 75m in 1960 to 258m in 2017. The proportion of international migrants residing in high-income countries relative to the total in all possible destinations increased from 43 to 64% between 1960 and 2017. Most of these migrants are coming from non-OECD countries. The available statistical evidence indicates that the growth in the number of migrants was driven largely by emigration from developing countries to developed ones. Furthermore, the limited available data on highly skilled migration also show a significant increase of well-educated immigrants to OECD countries. In particular, during 2000–2010, the growth of migration to OECD countries for high-skilled workers (tertiary educated) reached 70% (Kone and Ozden, 2017).

However, during the last decade this phenomenon has started becoming a major issue even in advancing and developed economies around the globe. For example, in Britain over the past few years, England has seen a large number of its skilled professionals leaving for work abroad, with over 1.1m university graduates living and working outside of the country. This accounts for almost one in ten skilled citizens choosing to emigrate. This mass emigration of skilled professionals may have serious ramifications for the British economy, as professionals add to the workforce of nations such as Australia, Canada, America, France and Spain rather than at home. The aforementioned data make it clear that even advanced economies with high-quality educational provision, public health and lots of resources can be subject to brain drain (Milio *et al.*, 2012).

Although much research has been conducted on the determinants of brain drain from developing countries, yet there is very limited knowledge on the factors affecting brain drain from advancing economies (Commander *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, the vast majority of studies have adopted a strictly quantitative orientation to data collection, thus missing all the rich information that qualitative research can offer in relation to the factors affecting brain drain. Against this background, this study seeks to understand why talented people leave their countries in the advancing world and go abroad using a qualitative approach to data collection. The study is of paramount importance for various advancing and developed economies because it will inform policymakers about the exact reasons that such economies lose valuable human capital so that they could design effective measures to keep talented individuals within their countries. The focus of the study is Greece, which has experienced a very high rate of brain drain during the last decade (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, 2020; Bank of Greece, 2018).

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### Impact of brain drain on social and economic development

Talent plays an important role in helping a country develop. The economy of a country that has a large number of world-class scientists and technicians can be more innovative than those of others that do not. Therefore, the implications for poor sending countries are stark. According to the African Capacity Building Foundation, African countries lose 20,000 skilled personnel to the developed world every year. All the developed world's efforts to increase aid to these countries may not matter if the local personnel required to implement development programs are absent. Every year there are 20,000 fewer people in Africa to deliver key public services, drive economic growth and articulate calls for greater democracy and development (Lindsay *et al.*, 2004).

In many cases, the developing countries are not only losing their investments in the education of highly skilled professionals, but also the contribution of these workers to vital economic sectors such as education and healthcare undermining a country's ability to develop, adopt new technologies or deal with health crises. For example, healthcare expenditure in India is 3% of GDP compared to 13% of GDP in the United States, and the ratio of doctor to patients in India is 1:2083 compared to the United States where the ratio is 1:500. Moreover, in many developing countries, healthcare systems are suffering from years of under-investment, which, for health professionals, has resulted in low wages, poor working conditions and very few incentives (Carrington and Detragiache, 1998).

Another cost of brain drain for the home countries is that high-skilled workers do not pay taxes in their home country once they have left, and this may have a negative impact on the quality of public education in their home countries since education is partly or totally subsidized by the government. This fiscal cost may be reinforced by governments distorting the provision of public education away from certain skills when graduates leave, with the country perhaps ending up educating too many lawyers and too few nurses, doctors or engineers (Docquier, 2014).

While it is easy to identify the ways in which brain drain can hurt economic development, the reasons that it may be positive are not so obvious. Yet, the brain drain may induce positive feedback effects such as remittances and return migration after additional skills have been acquired abroad. However, it is worth noting that a series of surveys indicate that transfers from educated migrants are not necessarily higher than for uneducated migrants; the former have higher earnings potentials, but migrate on a more permanent basis and, hence, tend to remit relatively less than their unskilled compatriots. Also, return migration is not significant for the highly educated (Rapoport, 2002). Another beneficial outcome is that high-skilled migrants can facilitate technology transfers between host and home countries, thus promoting technological advancement in their home countries (Docquier (2014).

Overall, the existing evidence shows that brain drain can be both beneficial and harmful to a country's development. The evidence suggests that there are many more losers than winners among developing countries depending on country-specific factors, such as the level and composition of migration, the country's level of development and so on. As the data show, it seems that above a certain level, brain drain can be harmful to a country's development since it reduces significantly the stock of human capital.

### Determinants of brain drain

The reasons for the brain drain have been discussed in various studies. The existing evidence points to a number of "push" and "pull" factors. "Push" are those factors that occur within the country of origin, motivating well-trained professionals to leave. "Pull" factors on the other hand are the deliberate and/or unintended actions that attract well-trained professionals originating from the recipient country's policies and actions. Examples of "push" factors include low remuneration, poor working conditions and low job satisfaction, political and

ethnic problems, as well as civil disorder and poor security. “Pull” factors on the other hand may arise because of increased demand for highly skilled professionals in developed countries for various reasons. A complex combination of both “push” and “pull” factors leads to a threshold decision to migrate (Dovlo, 2003).

More specifically, in their research around the brain drain of healthcare professionals in developing countries, Carrington and Detragiache (1998) argue that migrant health professionals are essentially pushed by their home countries to live and work abroad owing to de-motivating working conditions, low salaries and very few opportunities for professional development. Similarly, Chang (1992) has also argued that elite emigration in Taiwan is caused by a host of social, economic and personal factors, whereas Zweig (1997) drawing on empirical data from 273 highly skilled Chinese living in the United States claims that concerns about political instability and lack of political freedom along with economic factors (e.g. better US housing and incomes) and professional concerns (e.g. lack of career mobility, poor work environment) are the major determinants of brain drain.

Other studies have revealed some additional variables affecting brain drain. For example, Baruch *et al.* (2007) examined the reasons for international students’ inclination to stay in their host countries in a sample of 949 management students who came to study in the United Kingdom and the United States. The results support a three-fold model of factors that influenced this inclination: students’ perceptions of ethnic differences and labour markets; their adjustment process to the host country; and their family ties in host and home countries. Also, Commander *et al.* (2004) have argued that the emigration of skilled labour from developing countries has increased over the last decade due to the fact that the developed economies have actively and openly set out to poach talent, using a range of incentives and institutional mechanisms for attracting skilled labour. In particular, the use of temporary skilled-migrant visas whether in the United States or, more recently, in Western Europe has been striking. More recent evidence by Ngoma and Ismail (2013) shows that among the main factors associated with brain drain are population size, domestic political instability and distance to destination countries.

### **Brain drain in the Greek context**

Brain drain is a phenomenon that Greece has experienced since late 1950s, which has continued in subsequent decades and intensified over the 1990s. Although there was, in the first decade of the 21st century, a political and economic situation more stable than in the past, the unprecedented economic crisis that Greece is going through since 2009 has caused, and will continue to cause, the increase in brain drain. Holezas and Tsakoglou (2008) estimate that currently the emigration of graduates includes nearly all the scientific fields, while more than 3,000 Greeks work as university professors and about 5,000 as professors or researchers in universities of EU countries. Labrianidis (2011), based on a survey conducted in 2011 in which 2,734 Greek graduates participated, shows that among those who have worked abroad, only 15.9% returned to Greece while 84% preferred to stay out of their country.

Similarly, another recent study by Chatziprodromidou *et al.* (2017) shows that Greek doctors are one of the professional groups that have been greatly affected by the phenomenon of brain drain. According to the particular study, the unfavourable working conditions in the poorly organized national healthcare system along with the very low wages of doctors has led to a significant number of healthcare professionals in search of work in foreign destinations including Germany, France, Great Britain, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates and Australia.

The latest available statistical evidence indicates that 467,765 Greek citizens (i.e. around 4.6% of the total population) have left the country during 2008–2017. Also, it is roughly estimated that around 70% of these immigrants are well-educated individuals that possess a higher education degree (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, 2020). As the data reveal, if this

massive human capital flight increases, it would surely worsen the situation as Greece would continue to suffer depression effects on its economy and to lose precisely the resources it needs for economic recovery.

It has been argued in the past by many Greek policymakers and academics that this brain drain has been caused by poor employment opportunities and strong austerity measures taken by past governments, which depress the level of living standards (Pelliccia, 2013). Some other commentators have argued that the principal cause is not found in the over-education of many Greeks or the severe financial crisis of the last decade but rather in the long-term structural problems of the Greek economy that is unable to generate demand for graduates. Indeed, the Greek economy has never really moved into a model based on knowledge and technology. This has therefore resulted in a low demand for graduates and post-graduates, the inability to absorb qualified personnel into the labour market and, consequently, a high level of unemployment. The lack of competitiveness and innovation and the increasingly widespread unemployment, especially for the young, have essentially increased the brain drain towards more advanced countries (Labrianidis, 2011; Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, 2020).

As the literature review on the phenomenon of brain drain in Greece indicates, the major reasons behind human capital flight in Greece seem to lie in the very poor performance of the Greek economy. The scant evidence on this area shows that most high-skilled Greek immigrants decide to leave the country in search of better financial prospects. In the following sections, the empirical part of the study will shed light on whether the prolonged financial crisis in Greece is the root cause of the excessive brain drain in the country or not.

## Methodology

The present study adopted a qualitative approach to data collection in order to unmask the reasons behind the participants' decision to leave Greece. In all, the researcher conducted 80 semi-structured interviews (via Skype, telephone and personal) during a three-year period with the purpose of exploring the determinants of brain drain. The decision for a longitudinal qualitative research study was based on the fact that the researcher wanted to explore the reasons and motives of a large number of high-skilled immigrants, hence the data collection process extended over a longer period so that a series of interviews could be arranged and conducted.

In particular, interviews were conducted with professionals from various occupational groups including academics, business executives, IT professionals and healthcare staff. The participants were chosen randomly (i.e. random sampling technique) based on their occupational status and their willingness to participate in the study. The sampling frame consisted of all the high-skilled Greek professionals (according to their occupational status) that live and work abroad. The sample of cases was selected through the membership lists of various Greek communities abroad.

All interviews lasted from 40 min up to an hour and their key purpose was to identify the main reasons behind participants' decision to immigrate abroad. All the interviews took place from May 2015 to May 2018. During the data collection process and analysis, full confidentiality was kept. Therefore, no names of participants appear in the present study in order to adhere to research ethics. For the analysis of qualitative data, the approach of template analysis (TA) was adopted. More specifically, TA was used in order to analyse the perspectives of the different participant groups on their decision to leave Greece. Sections of the text were organized according to pre-determined themes considered to be important based on previous research studies in the field. The coding structure was hierarchical with sub-themes emerging within themes.

## Results

### *Background data*

Starting with some key background data, the findings indicated that the vast majority of respondents (70%) possess a bachelor along with a post-graduate degree and have over three years of work experience, whereas the remaining 30% of respondents have a bachelor degree and over five years of work experience. Most of them (60%) completed their studies abroad and stayed in the host country to continue their professional lives, whereas the rest (i.e. 40%) completed their studies in Greece and went abroad either to further their studies and work upon graduation or to find employment directly.

The respondents came from a variety of occupational backgrounds including: business executives and IT professionals (40 participants); healthcare professionals (20 participants); and academics of various disciplines (20 participants). Regarding the geographical distribution of the sample, most participants were living and working in the United Kingdom (53 respondents), with the rest working in the United States (13 respondents), Germany (8 respondents) and Australia (6 respondents). In terms of age and gender, the sample consisted of 47 male and 33 female participants ranging from 25 to 48 years old.

### *Reasons for brain drain*

*Socio-cultural factors.* The first core set of questions concerned the reasons why participants decided to leave Greece and move abroad to continue their lives. Regarding the results around the reasons for brain drain, it could be argued that they were particularly revealing. More specifically, the vast majority of respondents (i.e. 52 out of 80, that is, 65%) mentioned that they left their home country due to the prevalent cultural mindset of most Greek citizens, government policymakers and employers in Greece. Among them, many respondents stressed that the main reason for leaving Greece has been the absence of a meritocratic system in many aspects of life along with the high tax evasion of the rich under the tolerance of the Greek State (i.e. high political corruption). The high taxation, which essentially serves as a tool for politicians to pursue their own interests instead of the public ones, was also mentioned by all respondents as the key reason for leaving the country. The low provision of social welfare along with the serious lack of investment in public education and healthcare was also among the main reasons mentioned. Finally, the prevailing business culture of short-termism along with the cost-cutting strategies adopted by most employers in the country has played a vital role in participants' decision to immigrate. The detailed responses of participants are presented and discussed in the following sections.

Political corruption and lack of State support for social welfare. Most respondents argued that the individualist cultural values that have been predominant in the Greek society for years now have become evident in political and employer action causing several problems such as very high government debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio, poor economic growth, social injustice and poverty. Several participants complained about these issues, which affected their decision to immigrate. More specifically, respondents argued that the lack of State investment in public healthcare and education, the minimal welfare State provision for the needy, the increased income taxation and the limited measures taken by the previous and existing Governments to boost employment were among the key reasons for their decision to leave the country.

As a healthcare professional commented:

I left Greece and I came to live and work abroad because I did no't want to raise my kids in a country that offers jobs only to those who are good at ingratiating politicians. I want my kids to be able to live and work with dignity!

A long-serving business professional also pointed out:

I was earning a good salary in Greece when I decided to leave the country for good, so it was no't about the money. . . it was about being treated in a fair way as a citizen. . . when I pay increased taxes in order to enjoy better healthcare conditions, education, road infrastructure and so on, but in return I get nothing in all these areas, I feel sad. . . I do no't accept it. . . it's simply not fair! Politicians use my taxes to their benefit!

Another healthcare professional further argued:

I decided to leave the country because I could no't stand being surrounded by politicians who steal my income. They impose lots of taxes and they use the money gathered for their own interest instead of caring for the public interest. I simply could no't tolerate it!

A long-serving IT professional added:

Most politicians and rich entrepreneurs are tax evaders. . . they care only about their own financial prosperity. There is no future in a country with such a corrupted political system. You cannot live in that system. . . moreover, there is corruption in each and every public service provision!

Lack of State support for employee well-being. Several other participants pointed to the absence of policy action to support employee well-being at work through relevant regulations and law enforcement in certain employment aspects (e.g. health and safety, overtime work, salary, holiday entitlement) along with the austerity measures adopted during the last decade that have essentially undermined the living conditions of employees while protecting the "elite" classes of the society.

A business executive also explained:

Nothing in Greece is based on meritocracy. . . whether it's about employment or health care provision, it does no't matter what you know or what you deserve but who you know from the ruling party. If you have strong political connections, things at work are fine. . . If not, the working conditions will be very hard! Both government officials and rich employers will take advantage of workers! This is ridiculous for an advanced country!

An IT professional further commented:

The working conditions in the public sector are quite favourable for those whose selection was based purely on political criteria through processes that were not transparent. . . yet, for those of us employed in the private sector, there is no law enforcement around unpaid overtime work, annual leave and so on! There is also a massive informal labour market in Greece that lacks any sort of employment protection!

An academic also explained:

I have seen no difference in policy action during the last 20 years. . . regardless of the ruling party, they all have one primary goal: to get rich at the expense of the rest. . . the taxes have never gone to the healthcare and education system, whereas there is no financial support for innovative business start-ups that could create new jobs for well-educated unemployed young people. . . also, there is no protection for various vulnerable groups of employees who are forced to work overtime. . . all these citizens who vote for that type of government are either ignorant or selfish and greedy since they vote according to the political connections they have in order to pursue their own interests! I do no't want to live in a country where there is a total lack of social consciousness!

Problematic business culture. Some participants also mentioned that the prevalent business culture of short-termism and cost minimization led them to immigrate abroad in order to get an interesting and fulfilling job that would give them increased job satisfaction (e.g. a job that would involve increased skills variety and task significance, job autonomy and flexible working arrangements) where they could actually use their knowledge and skills, as

well as avoid the very poor working conditions (e.g. unpaid overtime work, long working hours, lack of respect from their employer).

As an experienced academic explained:

I used to teach for 7 continuous years at several private colleges of post-secondary education in Greece. . . however, the working conditions were terrible, whereas the quality of services provided to students was also very poor. The owners of these educational institutions had adopted an old-fashioned approach to management that viewed people as a necessary cost of doing business instead of treating them as their most valuable asset!

An IT professional further added:

Employers in Greece do not understand that it's not only about how much money you earn but under what conditions you earn your salary! Most companies in Greece focus on short-term profitability and always strive to reduce operational costs instead of focusing on product/service quality. . . however, this creates lots of problems for employees! I used to work in a small IT company and the salary was satisfactory considering the overall economic climate. . . however, the owner's behavior was very demeaning towards the workforce. . . he did not respect the staff at all and he kept pushing us to work overtime or else we'd get fired!

*Financial factors.* It was rather surprising, considering what the literature indicates so far, that fewer participants (i.e. 28 out of 80, that is, 35%) pointed to purely financial reasons such as very low salaries, no employment opportunities and prospects (e.g. unemployment, no career progression) and lack of job security as the key reasons for leaving the country. In other words, a limited number of respondents argued that the financial aspects of their job acted as a catalyst for moving abroad.

As a business executive argued:

I left my country because I wanted to chase my dreams. I had a job in Greece but with no future prospects. . . there is a very high unemployment rate and even if you manage to get a job it's of the lowest quality in terms of financial rewards and job security

In a similar manner, a healthcare professional mentioned:

You need to have no aspirations if you wish to live and work in Greece. The country offers no work prospects! The public health care sector operates in an old-fashioned manner offering no rapid career development to talented people! It still follows a seniority-based system of promotion instead of adopting a performance-based one.

An IT professional also added:

The employment prospects in Greece are disappointing, whereas the working conditions in most jobs are among the worst in Europe. In my previous job, I was earning 900 euros per month but I had to work 60 hours per week. . . if you think about it, you'll soon realize that the hourly pay rate was very low. . . . I had no choice but leaving the country

A young business professional further mentioned:

To put it simply, the working conditions in Greece are terrible! There is a hectic workload for most of us combined with very poor rewards. . . I want to work for a living, not spending my whole day at work. . . when I was working in Greece I had no life! I was just working! I left the country because many firms in Greece try to make profits by exploiting the workforce!

Overall, the interview findings from the empirical part of this research essentially revealed that the purely financial part of the participants' jobs (i.e. provision of a very low salary) is not the most important reason behind brain drain in Greece. By contrast, the results indicated that the lack of social consciousness by the various ruling parties in the country and their voters, as well as a large part of employers, is the deep-seated reason of brain drain.

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This means that most participants decided to leave the country because they are against the prevalent mentality that surrounds public policy and employer action in Greece, as well as the ethical stance adopted by the majority of citizens around social welfare.

### *Perspectives on repatriation*

The second core set of questions concerned participants' views around repatriation. In particular, respondents were asked to indicate whether they are satisfied or not with their current living conditions and whether they would consider returning back to Greece or not in the near future. The results indicated that most participants (53 out of 80, that is, 66%) would consider returning back to Greece on the condition that there would be radical improvements in all those areas that made them want to leave the country (i.e. either socio-cultural or financial factors). All the rest (i.e. 34%) argued that they would not consider a repatriation package owing to personal family circumstances (e.g. impact of repatriation on their kids).

As an experienced academic commented:

I strongly wish to return to Greece and transform the lives of Greek students! Yet, the conditions in the country are still terrible in several aspects of life. . .the path towards a radical transformation of the Greek society is a long one!

Another long-serving academic also mentioned:

I really want to return back to my home country and make a significant contribution to the Greek society! Yet, the higher educational institutions in the country, both public and private, have serious weaknesses! There is a lack of Ethics, knowledge and infrastructure! Under such conditions, the thought of repatriation remains just an illusion!

It is worth pointing out that when respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they believe that social and economic conditions will change in Greece in the near future, they all expressed the belief that no major changes are likely to take place. According to their views, the deep-rooted causes of the decay of the Greek economy and society are found in the cultural values associated with individualism, short-termism and social injustice that are widespread among Greeks and their transformation is a long and complex process.

As a long-serving academic at a foreign university argued:

Things will never change in Greece. Although this may sound a rather pessimistic perspective, yet my view stems from the fact that the deep-seated problems of the Greek society are closely related to the value system adopted by Greek citizens. Changes of that nature require the radical transformation of several inter-related mechanisms within the country. This is complex and takes very long time. . .things in Greece have remained pretty much the same for a century now and there has been no major improvement in any of the variables associated with a complete transformation of a society!

Essentially, the aforementioned findings indicate that although most participants expressed their desire to return back to Greece, yet they are not willing to do it unless radical changes take place in the areas discussed in previous sections. This means that there should be significant progress in relation to the socio-cultural dimension of the country. The findings further indicate that changes in just one or two elements of the socio-cultural context (e.g. more transparent and fair recruitment practices in the public sector) will not be sufficient for a brain gain. As it will be explained in the next sections, there should be a radical transformation in several areas of the socio-cultural context.

### **Discussion of findings**

Although this is a purely qualitative study that aims to explore the underlying reasons for brain drain in Greece, yet it would be interesting to "quantify" the interview responses since the sample size of this research could lead us to some insightful general conclusions. In

attempting to quantify the interview findings, it occurs that 65% of respondents indicated that the most significant factor affecting their decision to immigrate abroad was the absence of ethical and social values that leads to high political corruption in the country with the remaining (35%) pointing to better job opportunities and prospects as the major determinant.

The aforementioned results seem to shed new light around the determinants of brain drain in Greece. As mentioned in the literature review, it is suggested by various authors that the phenomenon of brain drain in Greece is essentially caused by the poor financial conditions in the country compared to other host country destinations. However, the analysis of the interview findings indicates that this may not be true and that other variables may come into play. It seems that there is a general public dissatisfaction towards the predominant political culture and the values in Greek society, which acts as a catalyst for immigration for many highly skilled Greek workers.

The central argument of the study is that the current socio-political culture should be reconsidered if brain drain is to come to a halt in the country. Greece seems to face not only a severe financial crisis but essentially a crisis of values and a corrupted civic culture, which arises when the ruling value system and institutional structure of a society become alienated from citizens' need to feel that they belong to a socio-cultural whole which values their contributions to its reproduction and development. Although many commentators keep talking about the Greek crisis as it is predominantly a fiscal one, it seems that its roots are to be found in the social and civic culture surrounding the country.

However, this argument has important implications both for those who hold governmental posts and the remaining citizens of Greece. Both government officials and citizens should re-examine their roles, values and ideals. The blame cannot be put only on the political parties that ruled the country during the last decades; the people who elected them are also responsible. In a similar vein, "bad" employers are not the only ones to blame (along with politicians) for employee exploitation; employees themselves (and their collective voice mechanisms) who tolerate various unfair work practices are also to be held accountable for such poor labour conditions. Essentially, the country seems to remain trapped in a crisis of social values. This means that even if any external creditors in Greece impose various sophisticated measures in order to fight corruption, they are unlikely to change an anti-social value system that parents and the formal education system in Greece have cultivated for years now. Therefore, corruption is likely to remain a key feature of the Greek State.

In that respect, formal education has a major role to play since the school should act as an important agency inculcating the new generations with a sense of duty in shaping a democratic political culture that emphasizes equality and condemns egalitarian practices. It should become clear that high-quality civic education is not a luxury but a necessity for Greek schools. Value education is also critical for the country. Value education is that form of education that stresses the acquisition of living values by learners. It teaches them universal and ethical values (e.g. compassion, courage, honesty) and creates balanced and mature individuals with social consciousness, thus creating a humane society. Therefore, a radical transformation of the educational system seems to be the first step in changing the future of Greece for the years to come. In this context, further research is needed to explore the "path" towards achieving that goal, since such investigation is beyond the scope of the present study.

### **Conclusion**

The study explored the main determinants of brain drain in Greece in order to understand the main reasons that individuals immigrate from an advancing economy to other more advanced nations. The findings shed new light in an area that is under-researched. In particular, the results revealed that most Greeks decide to immigrate owing to the high

political corruption in the country and the pervasiveness of corruption at all levels of society. As the interview findings indicated, most Greeks decide to live and work abroad because they believe that the country essentially faces a severe cultural crisis for decades now and not a purely financial one. This implies that the country's political culture must be changed by a new philosophy that involves a deep sense of responsibility towards the common good.

The majority of participants seem to be convinced that the political culture is indeed primarily responsible for the catastrophic crisis currently facing the nation – although it is uncertain to what extent they all understand, or accept, the idea of political culture as a reflection of the customs and mores of a society. The study argues that the financial reasons (i.e. high unemployment, low salaries, lack of job security) are not the main factor affecting participants' decision to immigrate, as it is assumed in the current literature. By contrast, the high level of social and political corruption features as the main variable, which calls for a series of radical changes in the formal education system of the country in order to transmit new values to the next generations and act as a catalyst for change.

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