TSER – Project “Self-employment activities concerning women and minorities: their success or failure in relation to social citizenship policies”

Final Scientific Report.

"The Greek Case: Pontian Immigrants from the former Soviet Union".

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I. CONTEXT KNOWLEDGE.

1. Pontian migration and the Greek state policy of reception and settlement.

A. The research target group and the terms of the migration project.

The target group of the investigation by University of Crete research team are the Pontian Greeks from the former U.S.S.R who migrated to Greece in the last decade. Pontians are people of Greek origin initially living in a wide area along the coast of the Black Sea. Pontian derives from the Greek word “Pontos” which means “sea”. In different historical periods they migrated to the Caucasus and the North Black Sea coast. The biggest influx of immigrants to these areas occurred in the beginning of the 20th century as a result of the persecution of the Greek population of Asia Minor by the Neoturks. From 1937 onwards, a big part of Pontian Greeks living in the Caucasus and the North Black Sea were expelled to Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kazakstan, Kirgisia).

Subsequent generations of Pontians inhabited these Soviet Republics having achieved a high degree of social and economic integration, while maintained their Greek identity. The history of the persecutions and the migrations of the “race,” as well as the ancestral dream of returning to the “real homeland,” were preserved in the reserves of their collective memory through oral testimonies passed on from generation to generation.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, various migration waves of Pontians to Greece came to pass, whenever permitted by the historical and political circumstances. The last wave of migration that transpired after the collapse of the Soviet regime was especially massive: an estimated 150,000 Pontians from the former Soviet Union moved to Greece for permanent residence.

Concerning their migration project, based on the analysis of the interviews, we can note the following points:

- The majority of the newcomers came from areas with ethnic conflict (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaitzan) or from areas with heightened ethnic and/or religious fanaticism (Kazakstan, Uzbekistan). In these cases, the conditions for the flight of the Greek Pontians were set by the momentous event of the collapse of the soviet regime with the attendant intensification of nationalistic pressures and confrontations, together with the economic recession that followed.

- In the context the flight to Greece becomes crystallized as a collective pattern of action. The retrieval from the reserve of the collective memory
and the activation of the “ancestral dream” of returning to the “real” homeland offers the Pontians a biographical perspective. This perspective is reinforced by the official policy of the Greek state during the period from 1989-93, as this policy is expressed both by the official invitation to the Pontians to come for permanent residence in Greece and by the ideologically loaded characterization of them as “repatriated” greeks. These two discourses, of the Pontians on the one hand, and of the Greek state on the other, refer to and cite one another.

- Migration to Greece has a massive character: entire family-, kinship- or locality-based networks relocate together. This feature, combined with the fact that in most cases there is liquidation of all the assets owned in the country of birth, gives migration a definite and irreversible form. All the bridges for going back are cut.

The immigrants’ arrival in the country of destination constitutes a serious biographical rupture that differentiates the biographical time between a “then” and a “now” and the spatial orientation between a “there” and a “here.”

The social terms of this biographical rupture can be defined as follows:

- Arrival in Greece means for the Pontian immigrants an entrance into a different system, that is, into a social formation that differs from the one of their country of birth in the ways it functions economically, administratively, legally, and culturally as well.

- Within this new system, a series of embedded notions and practices, and acquired skills and aptitudes became inactive. This fact necessitates a radical transformation of the subjects’ way of understanding the self, the world and the way of acting in it.

- An area where this reality manifests itself most clearly concerns the occupational situation of the newcomers. Migration signals a rupture in their occupational career and changes in their professional identity. Mending this rupture, and in what terms, remains an open wager.

- The rupture is exacerbated because of the high expectations held by the newcomers and the subsequent frustration of these expectations. The heightened expectations were formed on the basis of an idealized perception of their “return” to the motherland, their credulity regarding the promises by the official agencies and by the politicians, as well as their overestimation of the capacity of the Greek state to provide housing and occupational accommodations. This overestimation of the state’s capacity is understandable if we consider the political context (soviet state interventionism) within which they had been socialized.

At this point, it is interesting to note the following: the immigrants perceive their present situation by comparing it with their former one. On the basis of this juxtaposition, the former situation appears especially brighter concerning
issues of economic and social security, occupational stability, lack of anxiety, and a dignified life. Thus, the transition from one situation to the next is understood as a “loss” (reversal of an embedded normalcy), and even as a “sacrifice.”

B. The policy of reception and settlement of the Pontian newcomers

During the four-year period from 1989-1993, the Greek state adopted a policy of official invitation to Greece toward the Pontians from the former Soviet Union. On the basis of their ethnic origin the newcomers were characterized as “repatriated” and, on the administrative level, they were naturalized as Greeks through relatively simple procedures.

A National Foundation for the Reception and Settlement of Repatriated Greeks (EΙΠΑΟΕ in Greek) was founded and begun operating in 1991. The Foundation’s objectives were to receive the immigrants; to organize their stay (hospitality centers and reception hostels); to provide them with immediately necessary items; and to prepare them for social integration (learning the language, familiarization with the workings of the state agencies, health services, psycho-social support).

The Foundation designed an ambitious plan that aimed at creating the infrastructure for the permanent settlement of a large part of the Pontians in Thrace (north-east part of Greece). The plan provided both for the housing (through the granting of houses) and for the occupational accommodation of the participants in the program. 19,857 people participated in the program. With regard to housing, by 1998 a total of approximately 1,200 housing units had been given away, covering only about ¼ of the participants. As for occupational accommodation, according to the Foundation’s data, 559 entrepreneurial initiatives had been subsidized until 1995. At the time of our fieldwork in the area of Thrace during the fall of 1998, no quantitative data on the development of these subsidized enterprises were available.

The programs for promoting entrepreneurial activity that we mentioned earlier are designed and implemented by the Foundation and they constitute specific policies whose target group are the Pontian immigrants. They consist of cash subsidies (the sums usually cover a small part of the required capital) and of rent subsidies to businesses for an initial period of their operation.

Besides the Foundation’s initiatives, the repatriated Pontians have been designated as a vulnerable social group and thus have formal access to additional programs aimed at promoting and supporting self-employment. Both our research and testimonies from the agencies that operate these programs indicate that the Pontian immigrants have utilized them only minimally. The main reason given for this under-utilization is the lack of information about these options.
Beyond the existence of these initiatives and programs aimed directly at promoting entrepreneurial activity by the Pontians, we ought to mention some of the arrangements and choices that contribute indirectly to the creation of the conditions for the organization of self-employment efforts.

In this vein, we must note here a legal provision that led to a singular type of entrepreneurial activity. This refers to a provision that allowed the Pontian immigrants to import and resell the entire set of their household effects without having to pay any import duties. This concession, in combination with the existence of a network of relations at the country of birth which insures the steady supply of new merchandise, led a number of people to work on a more permanent basis as vendors of goods from the former Soviet republics in the open street markets.

We will now refer to the significance ascribed by the Pontian immigrants to their participation in the Program of Reception and Settlement and its particular policy components.

- Information about the existence of a state-organized program of Reception and Settlement contributes significantly to taking the decision to emigrate. The heightened expectations regarding the institution of the National Foundation for the Reception and Settlement of Repatriated Greeks, together with the symbolic investment of the program of Reception and Settlement, can be understood if we consider the fact that they inevitably overestimate the intervention capacity of the state mechanisms, given their socialization within a political system of extensive state interventionism.

- Participation in the Program restricts the choice of place to settle to Thrace. The analysis of the empirical data shows that Thrace would not have been chosen as a place to settle if it were not for the fact that the program of the Foundation for the Reception and Settlement operated there.

- Participation in the Program for the Reception and Settlement was opted for by immigrants who could not avail themselves of family and kinship networks already settled in Greece, which could have been used to organize their strategies of integration. Thus, they choose an integration strategy organized around state measures and policies.

- A factor that reinforced participation in the program was the prospect of home-ownership. We can understand the special significance of this prospect for the immigrants, since home ownership, in addition to improving their material circumstances, signals the establishment of roots in the place of settlement.

- Participation in the Program for the Reception and Settlement, and the particular spatial divisions that it implies, constitutes a concrete case of
determination of the biographical trajectories and plans by an institutional logic/rationale.

II. INTERVIEWS WITH THE EXPERTS.

Subsequently, we shall refer to the stage of the research that concerned the approach of the issue through the recording and the elaboration of the opinion of people who are involved in the designing and applying policies. This stage of the research took place at autumn 1998 in the broader prefecture of Thrace where an organized program of Reception and Restoration for newcomer Pontians functions.

The research group of the University of Crete interviewed the following experts:

1. G. E: The President of the Cultural association of Pontians, named “Nea Archi” ("New beginning") established in Alexandroupolis. The members of this association are Pontian refugees from the former Soviet Union settled in Greece in recent years. The interview with the President was quite important to the extent that these association, apart from other activities, deals with political issues concerning Pontians. Actually, it acts as mediator between Pontian refugees and the local authorities. It was, also, important, since the President is more or less the expert on the problems of this social group as well as the receptor of their demands.

2. N.G: President of the "native" Pontians Association and Director of the local Repatriates’ Information and Support Center (RISC), (KEPYP, in Greek). The association consists of Pontians settled in Thrace in the past (mainly after the 1st World War) and today are fully integrated in the local society. The interview with the President was important, because: 1) he represents a group of population which has the same historical roots with those Pontians coming in Greece in recent years and, furthermore, he mediates in a way between this group and the local society 2) As director of RISC he knows very well the problems of this particular social group and takes initiatives to support the social integration of Pontians who came to Greece recently.

The associations of both kinds have a political character to the extent that they act as mediators supporting Pontians’ demands on political level. Their directors have political ambitions, since they often struggle to obtain a political post in the local and regional political scene. Consequently, the relationships which develop between them and the members of the associations are of a clientele or patronizing type.
3. G. L. Member of the Directive Council of EIYAPOE (National Foundation for the Reception and Settlement of Repatriated Greeks). This Foundation is responsible for the planning and implementation of support and rehabilitation policies for Pontian Greeks. Our discussion with this particular interviewee aimed at the evaluation of the political initiatives taken so far on this subject as well as the future plans of the Foundation.

4. E. K: Director of "Further Education Committee" (NELE in Greek) of the prefecture of Evros. This interview was very important, because this particular Committee has carried out vocational training (and self-employment support) as well as Greek language learning programs for Pontian refugees.

5. CH. M & T.T: Social workers who work for the Rehabilitation program conducted by EIYAPOE. Because of their post, the interviewees visit the families of Returning Pontian Greeks which take part in the program every day and they are charged with support as well as control responsibilities.

Furthermore, we recorded the speech of the Mayor of the town of Sappes (it is a town where there is one of the biggest settlements for Pontian refugees in Greece). The speech of the Mayor is quite interesting to the extent that there are three easily distinguished social groups coexisting in this town: Christian natives, Muslim natives and recently settled Pontians. However, in the processing of the interview we took into consideration the fact that the speech was made during electoral period.

1. Method.

In our interviews we used the method of semi-structured interview. The questions set during the interviews vary according to the status of the interviewee. However, in all interviews we set the following general questions:

Questions:
1. Evaluation of the situation. Problems faced by Pontian refugees from the former Soviet Union.
2. Valuations – Data concerning the employment of the group in question.
3. General support policies aiming at the integration of Pontian refugees in the local society.
4. Programs – activities dealing with employment and particularly with the support of self-employment.
5. Judgements concerning the effectiveness of such activities and programs.
6. Theoretical background and targeting of the programs and activities.
7. Involvement of the interviewee or the institution he represents in the problem.

2. **Conclusions from the analysis of the interviews.**

In this part of the report we will describe briefly the conclusions resulting from the processing of the interviews with the experts focusing on the general conditions of life of Pontian refugees in the prefecture of Evros, the opinion of the experts about the social policies pursued so far on this subject and the special characteristics of this particular social group.

A. **Conditions of life of Pontians.**

1. **Housing.**

The housing situation of Pontian Greeks in the prefecture of Evros on the 25th of September 1998 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent residence</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented flats</td>
<td>1349</td>
<td>5096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palagia Accommodation</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soufli Accommodation</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dikea Accommodation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EIYAPOE, Evros.

Based on the official timetable, in which there were much more houses to be constructed and given to Pontian refugees, we can see out of this chart that there is a considerable delay in this respect. It is, also, evident that the housing problem is faced mainly by rent support policy. Still, a big number of refugees keep on living in accommodation settlements under bad conditions.

2. **Employment.**

The general situation of Pontians in this respect, which results from the interviews is characterized by the following:

a) There is a discrepancy between the typical qualifications (educational level & professional experience) and the professions Pontian refugees have in Greece.

b) The percentage of under-employment, occasional or unofficial employment is higher in Pontian refugees than in natives.

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1 These are houses bought or built by EIYAPOE and have been given to Pontians.
2 EIYAPOE pays for the rent.
3 Improvised settlements in which Pontians can live for a certain period of time until they are transferred in rented flats or permanent houses.
c) The percentage of self-employment of Pontian refugees is low in comparison with the total self-employment percentage in Greek economy.

3. Special characteristics and problems of Pontians.

Several special characteristics were reported in the interviews with the experts which distinguish the social group in question and at the same time are factors of social inferiority.

a) Difficulties with the use of Greek language.

b) Problems with the equivalence of any kind of diplomas in Greece.

c) Cultural problems resulting from the way of life, institutions and the political and economic structure of their country which were radically different from those of Greece in certain aspects.

B. Aspects of social policy.

Because of its Greek origin, the target group in question (Pontians) is treated quite positively by the Greek State as far as welfare policies are concerned. There is, actually, a special organization (EIYAPOE) which has taken over the responsibility for the planning, implementation and coordination of a certain program which aims at the “reception and rehabilitation” of the returnees. This program deals mainly with housing policies as well as strategies for the professional rehabilitation of the returnees. Based on the interviews with the experts, we must stress certain points concerning the program as well as operational aspects of the organization (EIYAPOE) itself:

1. Judgements about the function of EIYAPOE

Our interlocutors were quite sceptic about the Reception and Rehabilitation Program of EIYAPOE, as far as its effectiveness is concerned, stressing the problems and malfunctions in the way it works. Their criticism focussed mainly on the following points:

a) Structure and effectiveness of Foundation.

The Institution has extravagant operational expenditure. It is overstaffed, and at the same time it did not select its specialists on orthological basis. In addition, whereas the program is conducted in Thrace, the administration is situated in Athens (centralism). In this way, most of the time planning and decisions are taken without thorough knowledge of the real needs and potentials of the area. There is, also, lack of data base enrichment. Thus, information about the individuals taking part in the program, social workers etc. do not reach the administration centers and are not taken into consideration, when planning or reorientation of politicians is to be done.
b) Distance between the announced objectives and the activities already accomplished. There is not correspondence between the announced objectives and the subsequent expectations of Pontians taking part in the program on the one hand and the activities of the Foundation on the other as far as housing and employment policy is concerned. Finally, the prescheduled timetable was not followed in details.

2. Evaluation of the Housing plan.

As far as Housing problem is concerned, Greek authorities have decided to construct huge accommodation settlements for Pontians out of the boundaries of towns and villages in the area of Thrace.

This policy was criticized as follows:

a) The selection of the place where the settlement should be established was not made on a rational basis, that is the authorities did not take into consideration the real developmental potentials of the area. Consequently, there are many cases in which huge settlements were constructed in places where the existing urban space as well as the local labour market had not the proper infrastructure so as to receive a large group of new residents.

b) The establishment of Pontians in separate settlements out of towns complicates the process of social integration.

3. Evaluation of the employment plan.

As for the employment, there were several measures taken towards self-employment, which was emphasized in this program.

a) Certain amount of money as financial support for the establishment of small business.

b) Allowance in land for agricultural activity or/and economic support for animal purchase (cattle-breeding activity).

c) Vocational training.

Criticism:

a) The financial support is insufficient in comparison with the total amount of money needed for such activities. Pontians do not have this capital and consequently the existing funding has not the desired results.

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4 At this point we must note that the above criticism is done on the grounds of an "assimilation" logic of Pontians, which our interlocutors believe in.
b) Because of difficult conditions of life, Pontians do not invest the money of the financial support on productive activities but rather they spend it for satisfying their life’s needs, which are quite urgent.

c) The support is given without taking into consideration the perspectives and viability of business.

d) The seminars of vocational training function essentially as subsidies, that is people attend these seminars mainly in order to get the benefit which corresponds to each participant and secondarily because they are interested in the topic of the seminar. It is quite characteristic that there is high percentage of participation of women- men have taken over the responsibility to find money for living- even in fields which are traditionally for men (e.g. car engineers). Furthermore, we do not have many cases where people established their own business using the knowledge they got in the seminars.

e) The housing policy as well as employment policies carried by EIYAPOE are usually fragmented. Especially the housing policy determines and overrides the employment policies. Two indications of this could be given:
- The Foundation (EIYAPOE) decided to construct huge settlements in places where the existing urban space as well as the local labor market had not the proper infrastructure so as to receive a large group of new residents. They decided for these places under the criterion of the financial and technical reasons concerning the construction.
- In cases in which the donation of the house is combined with land and financial support in order to work in agriculture and cattle breeding the selection of the beneficiaries is not made under the criterion of the relevant former vocational experience. The house and the support is taken by the families who precede at the housing- list.

4. Relationships between EIYAPOE and Pontian refugees.

Our interlocutors expressed several opinions about the special relationships developed between EIYAPOE and Pontian refugees who take part in its programs. Most of them believed that there is a sort of institutionalization of Pontian refugees, resulting from the following:

a) Pontian refugees who participate in the program rely absolutely on the program and become inactive. Apart from the activities of EIYAPOE, they gradually abandon every personal action. In addition it is widespread the belief that those who do not participate in the program of the Institution have been activated and accomplished their economic and the rest of their targets.

b) EIYAPOE is the central point of reference and unique receptor in the process of structuring and promotion of the demands on the part of Pontian refugees, who believe it to be the State. According to their
way of thinking and based on their experience from the Soviet political system, Pontians believe that the State- and consequently EYAPOE- is absolutely competent in organizing the whole economic, at least, activity.

c) As matters stand at present, the participation in the housing and professional rehabilitation program of EYAPOE presupposes a voluntary cession of certain rights (e.g. free crossing and settlement beyond Thrace), as well as the undertaking of controlling role on the Institution’s behalf. This controlling role is undertaken by the social workers of EYAPOE. Control is also intensified because of the danger of institutionalization which is observed in those participating in the program, to the extent that they become inactive and dependent on the subsidies from the organization.

III. BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS.

1. Methodology.

A. Biographical approach and "grounded theory".

The research team conducted 14 biographical Interviews with Pontian newcomers. The interviews were conducted following the method of the ‘narrative interview’, that aims to thematise the life history and to assist the interviewer to utilise a narrative mode of exposing an order of things. This allows the narrator a larger ability to construct and articulate his/her discourse according to her/his own priorities and conceptual framework.

The interviews were analysed following the technique of a structural reconstruction of meaning. The text is treated as a context of meaningful correlations and co-references that transcend the communicative intentions of the narrator. The analysis seeks to decipher these meaningful structures and to cast light on their internal logic.

Especially, the analysis of the biographical interviews begins with the structural description which divides the actual text in parts (suprasegments, segments, subsegments) according either to the topics that are presented in these texts or according to the mode of the presentation (narrative, description, argumentative).

Parallel a line by line analysis is maintained that aims to extract as greatest amount of information as possible both on the level of manifest meaning and on the level of latent meaning. This analysis results to shape Codes (Coding) of

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5 See Annex 1.
interpretive assumptions and hence the first theoretical categories begin to emerge.

With regard to the research design, the present project adopts the methodological guidelines of the interpretative social research paradigm and specifically the one proposed by the "Grounded Theory" methodology, exemplified by the work of Anselm Strauss, Barney Glaser and Juliet Corbin⁸.

According to the founders of Grounded Theory, empirical research does not aim to the verification or falsification of pre-formulated hypotheses, but to the formulation of theoretical propositions emerging out and grounded on the empirical material. The theoretical schemes, the categories, as well as the relevant to a specific theme theses, which have already been articulated in previous studies, function as a “heuristic” framework that activates and sharpens the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity. However, this does not limit his/her freedom regarding the articulation of hypotheses and theoretical interpretative schemes that emerge from the empirical material at hand. The final formation of these theoretical interpretative schemata ensues from the constant transformation of the initial hypotheses on the basis of new “discoveries” in the empirical material. This methodological process is epistemologically founded on the C.S. Peirce’s concept of Abduction, which serves as an alternative to the dualism of deductive/inductive reasoning for the formation of theories.

B. Sampling.

The sample choosing was not made based on a statistical division, but rested on the logic of a theoretical sampling. Accordingly, the cases were selected because of differentiation that were regarded significant either from the localized research or from an initial analysis of the interviews.

The first interviews (7 Interviews) were conducted in the area of Thrace (prefecture of Evros) where a specialized program concerning repatriates refugees, was applied, carried by EIYAPOE⁹. This program was specialized in policies of housing, education, and professional restoration). Consequently, in this initial stage, we had the ability to preserve stable the parameter regarding the participation in supplementary policies. Thus, we explored cases that successfully or unsuccessfully attempted to establish a business of their own. Apart from the criterion of successfulness or failure, another essential criterion that differentiated the sample was gender.

In a second stage of the research process we extended the selection of the cases further than the area of Thrace, where a specialized program concerning

⁹ Repatriates Greeks Reception & Rehabilitation National Institution of Greece
repatriates refugees was applied, in the city of Chania (Crete). The aim of this transition is to maximize the difference that is connected to the factor “integration within the framework of an organised project of restoration” in as much as this factor does not occur in the geographical area of the island of Crete.

We investigated cases through key-persons that could assist our effort. They did not have any particular difficulty or refusal to confess their stories. However, we have to note that quite often the interviewees did not speak adequately Greek and this in turn affected the narrativeness of the interviews. The interviewee, due to problems respecting the operation of Greek language, does not speak much; replies shortly and directly - she excepts the intervention or question of the interviewer in order to continue. Therefore, the interviews that were conducted apparently deviate from the “ideal type” of a biographical interview, where an extensively narrative part is prioritised where the interviewee indistinctly narrates his/her life-story. During the interviews that we conducted we quite often intervene in order to “mobilize” the interviewee.

2. Employment and self-employment among the Pontian newcomers

We will now attempt to sketch the context and the terms of employment of the Pontian newcomers and to trace within this context typical patterns of entrepreneurial undertakings.

Following the central hypothesis of the TSER program, in our examination of our sample we identified certain characteristics of the Pontian group, which, as a sort of “deficits,” constitute the causal conditions that produce a set of particular/unique phenomena.

With regard to the labor market, the deficits that make up the causal conditions for the difficulties faced by the Pontian immigrants include the following:
- Inadequate knowledge of the Greek language
- Lack of correspondence of acquired skills and formal qualifications between the country of birth and the receiving country.
- Unawareness of the legal context and of the nexus of rights and obligations.
- The immediate and pressing need for work.
- The lack of economic capital – lack of access to financing (e.g., inability to obtain loans due to the absence of mortgage-able property).

These causal conditions produce the following effects in the area of employment:
- Skill-related inadequate employment. That is, employment in sectors and in positions different (usually lower) than those where the immigrants worked in the country of origin.
- Underemployment and occasional employment (lack of security concerning the duration and the stability of employment).
- Employment in the informal sector.
- Uninsured employment.
- Over-exploitation that includes both low wages/remuneration and a vague understanding of rights and obligations that leaves room for employer arbitrariness.
- Low entrepreneurial activity.\textsuperscript{10}
- High rates of unemployment.

These elements define the context within which any entrepreneurial activities are organized. We will attempt next: (A) To trace the two typical paths of undertaking entrepreneurial activity. (B) To identify the criteria and the rationale around which the acting subjects organize their entrepreneurial plans. (C) To detect the significance of social networks or practices for the overcoming of restrictions on the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity.

A. Typical paths of undertaking entrepreneurial activity.

(The differentiating criterion is the way that the entrepreneurial attempt enters the biographical trajectory of the acting agent.)

Type A: The entrepreneurial attempt in the country of destination is based on similar experience in the country of birth.

Characteristics of Type A:

- The subject utilize his previous similar experience and starts a business similar to the one he ran in the country of origin.
- The occupational capital earned in the country of origin can be utilized in the new market and serve as the basis for the articulation of a business plan.
- Besides a relevant occupational specialization, other significant types of available “capital” that can facilitate the articulation of a business plan include: the possession of a business culture and know-how; possible ownership of an elementary infrastructure (tools); or a start-up financial capital.
- For this type, the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity relates to the subject’s attempt to (re)establish continuity of his/her biographical time, which, after migrating, has been divided to a “before” and an “after.” Together with the economic considerations, the establishment of a similar business ensures the performance of similar, familiar practices, and also, a smoother management of the changes concerning the self-determination and self-reflection on the social identity within the new social context.

\textsuperscript{10} The entrepreneurial activity of those coming from the former Soviet Union hovers at especially low levels. Although exact quantitative information is unavailable, this is the assessment of the relevant public agencies.
A variation of this type is the following:

The entrepreneurial activity in the country of destination becomes the culmination of a prior preparatory phase in the country of origin.

Characteristics
- The subject attempts to pursue an occupational-biographical plan, the foundation for which has been laid in the country of origin.
- It mainly concerns scientific professions for which the formal and substantive qualifications have been earned in the country of origin. Thus, an initial prerequisite is the equivalence, the recognition of these qualifications in the country of destination.
- From the moment of arrival in the country of destination until the commencement of employment in a position that corresponds to his/her professional qualifications, the subject works occasional jobs in lower-status/paying positions and prepares for entry into his/her profession.

Type B: The entrepreneurial attempt relates to a prospect for a new biographical beginning.

Characteristics of Type B:
- The establishment of continuity with the previous professional status proves unfeasible. Self-employment appears as a possibility to the extent that the previous professional expertise goes unwanted in the new labor market.
- The articulation of an entrepreneurial plan often follows the experience of unemployment or dependent wage labor under especially exploitative conditions.
- Among the factors that strengthen the decision to proceed with an entrepreneurial attempt are the possession of one’s own capital, ability to have access to the policies [programs] aimed at promoting/supporting self-employment (Flora), the activation of social networks, the transformation of traditional knowledge into professional skills (Rania), the willingness to undertake business risks (Giannis).
- Taking on the self-employment challenge for these types of cases contributes to arresting one’s downward social mobility; protects from the subjection to conditions of over-exploitation; forms, more generally, an axis around which the person renegotiates his/her identity and place within the new social world.

B. Typical patterns for the organization of the entrepreneurial plan and the criteria of selecting the type of self-employment.

A central assessment that is borne by the analysis of the interviews that we conducted is that the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity is not an arbitrary and spontaneous decision to act by the subject, but rather constitutes a elaborate attempt that can be analytically distinguished into the following levels:
intentions, ambitions, and expectations of the acting subject,
possibilities and restrictions set by the objective terms and conditions,
the subject’s own perception of the scope of action.

We will present next a series of different rationales, which permeate the entrepreneurial attempts by the acting subjects and define the type of enterprise that is selected.

1. Prior professional specialization or entrepreneurial experience is assessed by the subject as a favorable prospect in the new market and the entrepreneurial attempt is organized around it (Andreas, Thanasis, Thrasyvoulos, Simone). A variation of this type can be the following: the subject retrieves from his/her biographical reserve a knowledge or a skill that, until now, had not been utilized professionally and builds around it a new professional perspective (Rania).

2. The entrepreneurial attempt is organized in domains in which the members of the Pontian group deem that they have comparative advantages. Such domains may include: (a) Meeting the particular cultural needs of the recent immigrants. In this domain the entrepreneurial attempt is based on a better understanding of these needs and on advantages stemming from the ability to act as brokers with the markets in the place of origin (Giannis, Thanasis).
(b) A more thorough training in certain occupational specializations (Andreas).  
(c) The supply of goods or services at below-market prices. Often, this comparative advantage amounts to a peculiar type of self-exploitation.

3. The entrepreneurial initiative is shaped more by a variety of factors or exigencies and less through a rational business plan. This rationale concerns projects that were taken on because the actors aimed for different types of benefits (for example, home ownership) that came with the program rather than the support of entrepreneurial activity. The case of the village of Giannoulis is a characteristic example: in the context of a policy promoting the re-population of abandoned villages in Thrace, 40 families were granted houses along with farmland and a start-up capital for agricultural and stockbreeding enterprises. The families settled there, primarily because of the free housing. Thus, when we visited the village in 1998, none of the agricultural and stockbreeding enterprises that had been started were any longer operating. The families continued to live there, facing a lot of difficulties due to the remoteness of the village from the closest urban center. We also located certain cases where the type of enterprise was not chosen with business criteria – profitability, market research, etc. – but on the basis of haphazard and contingent parameters, such as the availability of a business space together with a pre-existing infrastructure (Giannis).
In all the cases the business plans that are organized require a small capital investment for their realization.

A core differentiation among the entrepreneurial attempts has to do with whether these target the primary sector of the market or they compete for a place in the secondary sector, in the “margins” of the market. By “secondary” sector we mean those activities and practices that display some of the following characteristics: a) production of goods and services primarily intended for particular, small sectors of the population (e.g., small shops selling merchandise that has cultural significance for the immigrant groups, such as products imported from the country of origin); (b) meeting the secondary needs of other similar enterprises – e.g., subcontracting the repairs from a larger business; (c) activities that have an occasional, haphazard, or itinerant character; (d) activities that are not reported officially and do not meet legal and insurance prerequisites (e.g., baby-sitting, cleaning houses).

Our analysis suggests a strong correlation between the degree of social integration of the acting subject and the type of market sector where the entrepreneurial attempt is made. Thus, in the primary sector we find mainly acting subjects who demonstrate a high degree of social integration in the local society (good knowledge of the Greek language, familiarity with the institutional and legal context, access to supportive policies, participation in the social life of the local society). On the other side, the entrepreneurial attempts of subjects with a low degree of social integration are limited in the “gray” areas of the market.

C. The significance of social networks in relation to the overcoming of constraints on the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity

In our analysis of the cases in our sample we observed that the family, and the kinship networks in general, play an especially significant role as factors that support the launching of entrepreneurial activity. We will attempt next to specify more accurately the nature of this contribution.

1. Making financial capital available

One of the most serious obstacles that the acting subjects need to overcome before they can launch an entrepreneurial attempt is the lack of start-up capital. This problem is exacerbated because of the inability to obtain credit from financial institutions (loans from banks) due to the lack of necessary prerequisites (equity).

Capital is thus often obtained through the contribution of the other members of the family. A certain capital is put together through savings from the wages of all the family members that is then invested in a family business or support the entrepreneurial attempt of a certain family member.
In some cases the investment includes the money that has been made from the sale of the family assets brought over from the country of origin.

2. **Support of the self-employed family members**

Very often, the entrepreneurial activity fails to yield immediate economic results/gain, but has a middle/long-term objective. Such an entrepreneurial attempt can be undertaken only in the context of a family-wide strategy, so that during the unproductive periods the support of those engaged in the business is assumed by the other members of the family (Flora, Rania). Our sample shows a significant differentiation according to gender in these practices – it is generally the women that assume the operation of the business, while the men find work in dependent labor relations in order to earn the family’s livelihood.

3. **Contributing to circumvent legal or bureaucratic problems**

The significance of the family network is also illustrated in those cases that legal or bureaucratic obstacles need to be circumvented. Indicative of this strategy are some cases where two parallel business activities are legally incompatible (e.g., holding a street vendor’s license and starting another business). Then the family or kinship network helps in finding a way to bypass the limitation – the business license is issued in kin-member’s name.

4. **Exchange of information**

Limited access to critical information (e.g., information regarding available programs and policies) is one of the most serious problems that we came across during the fieldwork, and also from the narratives of the target group. This limited access is due to the inadequate knowledge of the language and of the ways that the Greek public services operate, on the one hand, and on the dysfunctionality and the bureaucratic structure of the Greek public administration. This vacuum of information is partly filled by the informal networks of personal relations, primarily kinship networks.

Here we must mention two additional factors that contribute to the overcoming of the structural constraints on undertaking entrepreneurial activity:

   a. The first concerns the usual practice where the self-employed person, together with his/her entrepreneurial activity, works at a second job, so that he/she can earn both a daily livelihood and a capital that is invested in his/her business (Stergios, Giannis). The entrepreneurial activity has a middle/long-term objective and cannot meet immediate subsistence needs.

   b. The fact that basic running expenses (rent, utilities) are paid for by the Foundation for the Reception and Settlement of Repatriated Greeks contributes toward the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity, to the extent that this support provides a sense of security which leaves some room for entrepreneurial risk. (This dimension reveals an indirect contribution of the supportive policies to the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity.)
D. Factors relating to the success or failure of entrepreneurial attempts.

We checked our material seeking to identify those factors that have major significance in the outcome of the entrepreneurial attempts. Being aware of the risks that attend such a generalization, given that the outcome often depends on random or contingent factors, we concluded with formulating a central hypothesis that describes the dominant tendency.

To the success of the entrepreneurial attempts contributes the functional co-presence of the following processes:

1. The organization of the attempt ought to be articulated organically and to utilize skills and knowledge that have crystallized in the biographical reserve of the agent. These may concern the specialized know-how, a pre-existing homologous experience, but also more general skills, such as organizational or communicative abilities, the ability to utilize networks and sources, etc.

2. The attempt ought to have a rational objective. It is important to identify a market area that is not yet saturated, or even a privileged one for the agent, and to organize a business plan that does not exceed the subjective and objective capabilities of the agent.

One case of successful entrepreneurial activity that is based on the functional articulation of the above factors is Andreas’s attempt who started a goldsmith’s shop. His previous experience, his possession of both the know-how and the necessary tools, as well as the maximum utilization of supportive programs were the prerequisites for the organization of a business plan that came to fill a gap in that particular market: subcontracting from other jewelers the making and repairing of special design jewels for the Pontian immigrant market.

On the contrary, in the case of Thanasis who attempted to start an import-export company with countries of the former Soviet Union, both his personal commitment and the interesting business idea which aimed at taking advantage of certain comparative advantages (knowledge of the language and of the markets in those countries, presence of informal social networks) were not sufficient to overcome objective barriers, such as inadequate capital or difficulty in finding financing. In this case the business objective exceeded by far the context of possibilities that were available for the agent.

We can also mention as an example the case of Giannis who succeeded in his attempt as an itinerant vendor, but failed in three attempts to start a housed business.

Regarding his activity as a vendor, where the subject followed a collective pattern of action, an objective typical for the group, his success relates to the utilization of comparative advantages such as: possession of knowledge and
participation in social relationships that facilitate his role as a middleman with
the markets of the former Soviet Union, where the goods for sale come from;
securing a client base both among the recently arrived immigrants who seek the
satisfaction of [regular] needs with familiar products, as well as from among
the native population that is attracted by the low prices. Another significant
factor was the fact that such an activity, because of its street-based character,
does not require a high capital and has minimal running expenses.
Consequently, it falls within the context of the objective capabilities of the
agent.

On the other hand, concerning his attempts for a housed business, those failed
because: (a) a total lack of similar prior experience; (b) saturation of the market
in the particular areas; and (c) the selection of the business plan not on the basis
of economic and entrepreneurial criteria, but rather on the basis of haphazard
and random parameters (for example, the availability of a commercial space
together with a preexisting infrastructure).

IV. POLICY RECOMMENDATION.

1. The contribution of policies (supportive programs) in undertaking
entrepreneurial initiatives.

We examined our data with the following question in mind: how do supportive
policies/programs affect the decision to proceed with an entrepreneurial
attempt? And we came up with the following different types:

1. The acting subject has a clear business objective whose pursuit is not
dependent on the expectation of participation in supportive policies (Thanasis,
Giannis).

For this type, not taking into consideration existing supportive
policies/programs may be related to a) the lack of information about the
existence of such programs, or b) the subject’s impression that he/she is not
eligible for participation in them.

2. Participation in policies/programs supportive of self-employment is a factor
that reinforces the initiation of entrepreneurial activity (Andreas).

Entrepreneurial activity becomes included as a possibility in the biographical
options of the subject. The existence of supportive programs contributes to the
transformation of the possibility into action, to the extent that nullifies some of
the factors that inhibit the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity and reduces
the risks.

3. The existence of supportive programs forms the perspective of self-
employment.
The perspective of self-employment does not pre-exist in the subject’s options. The implementation of measures and policies results in the emergence of the possibility for the organization of an entrepreneurial plan. The experience of unemployment, unstable employment, or over-exploitation favors such a development.

We identified the following measures as policies to support self-employment:
- (a) economic grants that help raise the initial capital and reduce the business risk (Flora, Rania, Andreas, Thrasyvoulos).
- (b) special privileged provisions that lead, directly or indirectly, to self-employment activities – e.g., granting repatriates a special license that permits the sale of their household effects in the street markets (Giannis).
- (c) organized dissemination of information on ways to start a business and on the possibilities of taking advantage of supportive measures (Antigoni).
- (d) Occupational training programs that provide specialized skills that can be used to articulate a self-employment plan (Niovi).

2. Evaluation of the policies implemented to support entrepreneurial activity, and their effects on the activity of the Pontian immigrants.

a. Our research indicates that there is a lack of access by the Pontians to policies/programs. This lack is borne both by the immigrants’ own inherent “deficits” (lack of knowledge of the language and of the ways of the Greek administration) and by the dysfunctionality of the Greek bureaucracy. As another causal condition we ought to mention the lack of self-confidence and trust in an alien and “hostile” environment that deters the planning an undertaking of complicated activities. The inability to have autonomous access to critical information amplifies the mediating role of personal relationship networks, whether these refer to kin or friends, or networks of clientelistic relationships (mainly through the Pontian cultural associations, which inherently have a political character).

b. The various policies, even when they formally include integrated interventions and combined action in their scope, in practice they are limited to the handing out of financial subsidies. The sums that are given cover only a small part of the start-up capital and operating expenses. The limited financial support, together with the absence of substantive supportive measures, reinforce the trend among the Pontians to become active in the secondary sector, at the “margins” of the market.

c. The measures and the policies have a formal, uniform, undifferentiated character. They are not specialized in accordance with the specific plans for entrepreneurial activity, nor do they take into account the particular
needs of the acting subjects. Often, they determine the life paths and the biographical integration of the subjects by imposing a rationality that is alien to their accumulated biographical experience, their skills, and their needs. In the context of an instrumental outlook, they treat the immigrants as people without history.
References:

### Annex 1. The cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (sex) (age)</th>
<th>Undertaking of Business activity</th>
<th>Type of business</th>
<th>Economic output</th>
<th>State funding (from EYAPOE or OAED)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Andreas (M) (50)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jewelry work shop</td>
<td>Satisfactory. Plan for expansion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Flora (F) (50)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Clothing shop</td>
<td>Expectation of output in the long-run</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thanasis (M) (35)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Exportation commercial company</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tonia (F) (45)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thrasyvoulos (M) (55)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Photo-shop</td>
<td>Expectation of output in the long-run</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Simon (F) (30)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Medical office (Dentist)</td>
<td>Expectation of output in the long-run</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Rania (F) (55)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Woolly work shop</td>
<td>Low output</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Giannis (M) (27)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fast food (Failed) Commercial shop (Failed). Street market salesman (Suc.)</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Niovi (F) (24)</td>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>Food shop</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Antigoni (F) (30)</td>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>Cloth repairing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ria (F) (32)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Takis (M) (53)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Interruption</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Lea (F) (20)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Minas (M) (33)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common for all the cases:
1. Obtainment of Greek citizenship.