

# Chapter 13

## Diaspora Policies, Consular Services and Social Protection for Greek Citizens Abroad



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### 13.1 Introduction

The present chapter is a synopsis of the institutions and policies developed by the Greek state to establish bonds with and accommodate the needs of Greek citizens residing abroad permanently, which go beyond European Union (EU) obligations. It first covers the formal institutional infrastructure and representative bodies engaging with Greek citizens abroad and then overviews general policies that affect them (voting, education, administrative assistance, economic incentives). It subsequently zeroes into policies of social protection in the fields of unemployment, health care, pensions, family-related benefits/services and economic hardship.

Generally speaking, Greek diaspora policies are more institutionalized around and focused on the older generations of migrants and adapted to the needs present in some major destination countries (for example, Germany). These features can be explained by the fact that earlier migration (for guestworkers and their families) was itself more institutionalized, while recent migration of Greek citizens is less formalized and more diverse. Greek diaspora policies often emphasize Greek descent, blood ties, religious affiliation and language and are not restricted to citizens. At the same time, non-state actors such as organized Greek communities and the Greek Orthodox Church cooperate with the Greek state in the implementation of these policies. The existing diaspora-policy infrastructure is developed along several dimensions, including, for instance, educational opportunities for the children of Greeks living abroad and strong ties with religious (Greek-Orthodox) organizations. Generally speaking, institutional formalization and entrenchment are not as advanced as the size of the diaspora would foretell. Ad hoc informality is often the

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reigning principle in certain areas of social protection, in particular regarding aid in cases of financial or health-related emergency. In other areas, such as the provision of a General Minimum Income to all citizens, the absence of specific policies abroad reflects the embryonic state of social protection at home.

## 13.2 Diaspora Policy Infrastructure and Key Policies

### 13.2.1 *The Diaspora and Its Relations with the Homeland*

Greek-speaking, Christian-Orthodox communities had been present on the Balkan Peninsula, in the eastern Mediterranean, in Asia Minor and the Black Sea region long before the creation of the modern Greek state (1830). Following momentous events, such as the Greco-Turkish wars (1919–1922), World War II and the subsequent Civil War (1939–1945, 1946–1949), and in response to fluctuating economic conditions/opportunities throughout the twentieth century, the geographic reach of Greek migration was expanded to include the Americas, Australia and countries in Western Europe (notably West Germany in the postwar period) (Kasimis 2013; Fakiolas and King 1996). Although by the end of the twentieth century Greece had completed a spectacular reversal of migratory flows and become a major country of destination itself, the severe economic crisis of 2010–2016 increased migratory outflows of Greek citizens yet again (Mavrodi and Moutselos 2017).

The size of the Greek diaspora is difficult to calculate precisely, because it includes second or third generation non-citizens, as well as Greek citizens residing in European Union countries who have not been removed from municipal registrars in Greece. According to the most recent national census statistics, the five most important countries of destination for Greek citizens, that is, based on the number of Greek citizens residing in them, are Germany, the United States (US), Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom (UK). Indeed, in countries of earlier migration, such as the United States and Australia, populations of Greek origin are estimated in the hundreds of thousands (G.G.A.E. 2007). Other important countries of destination include Cyprus (about 30,000), Belgium and Switzerland (about 15,000 each), France (7000), the Netherlands, Sweden and South Africa.

### 13.2.2 *Diaspora Infrastructure*

Greece runs an extensive consular network consisting of embassies and consulates in countries officially recognized by the Greek state. The various functions described in this chapter are, as a general rule, the responsibilities of official consular authorities and, in a number of cases (maritime affairs, arrests, detentions, incarcerations, inheritance affairs), the E3 Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In

addition, honorary consuls provide official certifications of documents for purposes of residence registration, confirmation of employment/studies for Greek citizens living abroad (to be used, for example, for purposes of delaying military enrolment or for tax purposes) and authentication of birth/marriage/death certificates. Honorary consuls do not issue travel documents (for example, passports and visas).

One of the recurring issues that renders the relationship between Greek state authorities and nationals living abroad administratively complicated has been the absence of an official registry of this population, as well as the absence of an obligation to deregister from municipal registries in Greece. As a result, many Greeks residing abroad are not officially recognized as such. The situation has started changing in recent years. In the aftermath of the recent economic crisis, Greek authorities sought to tax the estimated income of those who emigrated abroad, based on proof of consumption in Greece (ownership of a vehicle or a real estate property in Greece). This has de facto resulted to taxation in Greece on top of taxation in their country of residence and employment and has led many to register officially in the tax authority of Greek nationals residing abroad (*ΔΟΥ Εξωτερικού*).

Aside from consular and diplomatic authorities, a number of official state institutions and agencies exist in Greece to provide coordination, representation and consultation of Greek nationals living abroad. The General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad (*Γενική Γραμματεία Απόδημου Ελληνισμού*, hereafter G.G.A.E.) is the government's coordinating body for the implementation of state policy with respect to nationals abroad. At the same time, G.G.A.E. implements policies to mobilize and coordinate non-citizens of Greek origin. For this purpose, that is, to encompass both groups in its outreach and coordination efforts, it uses the term "Diaspora Hellenism" (*Ελληνισμός της Διασποράς*). G.G.A.E. was created in 1983 and is a subdivision of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Secretary is typically a government appointee. The overall objectives include the promotion of Greek culture, language, education and the cooperation with Greek community organizations and institutions abroad.<sup>1</sup>

Under the auspices of the Greek parliament, the Special Permanent Committee for Diaspora Greeks (*Ειδική Μόνιμη Επιτροπή για τον Ελληνισμό της Διασποράς*) is a permanent committee composed of 30 members of parliament (MPs) with the specific role of promoting cooperation with "Diaspora Greeks" abroad, registering issues of interest to the diaspora and representing the Greek parliament in an official capacity vis-a-vis Greeks abroad. Much like G.G.A.E., it targets simultaneously Greek nationals living abroad and foreign nationals of Greek origin. It is also meant to work with the General Secretariat of Greeks Abroad and the World Council of Hellenes Abroad.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Geniki Grammateia Apodimou Ellinismou* (General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad), "Main Web Page", accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.ggae.gr/>

<sup>2</sup>*Eidiki Monimi Epitropi gia ton Ellinismo tis Diasporas* (Special Permanent Committee for Diaspora Greeks), "International Affairs: Diaspora Greeks", accessed May 7, 2018, <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Diethneis-Drastiriotes/Diethnes-Perivallon/Ellinismos-tis-Diasporas/Epitropi-Apodimou-Ellinismou/>

Beyond state, governmental and parliamentary institutions, the World Council of Hellenes Abroad (*Συμβούλιο Απόδημων Ελληνισμού*) is the main body representing people of Greek ethnic descent who reside abroad. As is the case with the aforementioned institutional bodies, its statutory commitments lie with both nationals and non-nationals of Greek descent. The stated goal is “to bring together the Greeks of the Diaspora creating a global network aimed at planning and materializing programs for the benefit of the *Omogeneia* (Greek migrants and their descendants) to be subsequently conveyed to the Greek State, thus fulfilling its role as an advisory and consultative body.”<sup>3</sup> Members can be community organizations (federated and non-federated) abroad, assemblies of Greek community parishes (further reflecting the important role of the Greek Orthodox Church), and other influential expatriate organizations. Elections take place every 4 years and representatives from all member organizations vote for their regional representatives in the Council’s geographical branches, roughly one per continent (electronic vote is possible), as well as for the President of the World Council.

Upon its creation, the World Council was recognized by a Decree of the President of the Hellenic Republic as the main advisory and consultative body of the Greek diaspora towards the Greek state. Delegations of representatives are composed during regular elections at the level of “world regions”. Consultation takes place in the form of annual reports to the Greek parliament and irregular hearings and consultations. With regard to social protection, the founding decree (Law 2006/3480) of the World Council does not stipulate a general mission of assistance/administrative support to Greek citizens abroad and does not provide an official outline of the responsibilities of members and elected officials. Generally speaking, the World Council enjoyed high visibility during the 1990s but it has lost importance during the last two decades. At the time of writing, the Council appears to be in dormancy, but is still recognized officially in the Greek Constitution, allowing its elected representatives to claim it is inactive but not dissolved. However, current and immediately previous administrations have not recognized it in its current function and have not authorized the convening of the body to elect a new board since 2010. The new structure of the World Council remains to be formalized in the coming years (Kathimerini 2014; Ta Nea 2015).

### 13.2.3 Key Engagement Policies

Article 108 of the Greek Constitution reiterates the commitment of the Greek state “to care for the life of migrant Greeks (*αποδημος ελληνισμός*) and for the maintenance of ties with the Motherland. [The Greek State] also provides for education and social/professional advancement of Greeks who work abroad.”

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<sup>3</sup> World Council of Hellenes Abroad, “SAE at a Glance”, accessed May 8, 2018, <http://www.sae.gr/?id=12378&tag=SAE+at+a+glance>

The article does not specify whether the term “migrant Greeks” or “Greeks who work abroad” refers only to those with Greek citizenship – the Constitution sometimes refers just to “Greeks” to refer to Greek citizens, but it is not clear that this is the appropriate interpretation for Article 108. The Greek Constitution, including Article 108, dates back to 1975, just before Greek guestworkers from Western Europe began to return to Greece. The Article most probably referred to those Greek citizens and their descendants, as well as Greeks in the US, Canada and Australia, who had emigrated in the 1950s and 1960s.

At the same time, the Greek state practices a regular, if not fully institutionalized, policy vis-à-vis Greek Orthodox communities/parishes abroad, including in the main countries of destination. Greek Orthodox churches abroad fall, generally speaking, under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate and not the Church of Greece, the latter having more direct and explicit links with the Greek state. Still, Greek ambassadors hold ties, attend liturgies, invite Church officials in official capacity and meet regularly with important ecclesiastical personalities, such as the Archbishop of North America, Patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem, etc. An informal parliamentary “Committee on Matters of Hellenism and Orthodox Church”, as well as an “Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.)” formed at the initiative of the Greek Parliament regularly invites delegations from Orthodox countries to convene on matters pertaining to the Orthodox Church.<sup>4</sup>

On contentious issues, for instance those between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and Turkish authorities,<sup>5</sup> the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervenes in favor of Greek Orthodox Ecclesiastical authorities. It also coordinates with Church communities when there is a need of evacuating Greek nationals, members of their families or foreign nationals of Greek ethnic origin. As already noted, the World Council of Hellenes Abroad counts Greek Orthodox parishes among its members.

When it comes to the political engagement of the diaspora, Greece had long been somewhat of an outlier among EU countries in its restricted accommodation of the exercise of political rights from abroad. Although the Greek Constitution explicitly recognized the right to vote from abroad in national elections since 2010, no statute had been passed in parliament to make the exercise of this constitutional right possible (Christopoulos 2018). This meant a *de facto* obligation to return to Greece to vote in national, regional and local elections. In recent years, the issue reemerged in the public sphere and in parliament, and was perhaps the most-widely publicized issue related to Greek nationals living abroad especially in relation to recent migration, along with the overall issue of “brain drain” for the Greek economy. In December 2019 a bill was finally passed with a large parliamentary majority allowing Greek citizens living abroad to vote from their place of residence in Greek

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<sup>4</sup>Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, “*Διακοινοβουλευτική Συνέλευση Ορθοδοξίας*”, accessed March 6, 2019, [http://eiaio.org/home\\_english\\_iao](http://eiaio.org/home_english_iao)

<sup>5</sup>Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “*Oikoumeniko Patriarcheio*” (Ecumenical Patriarchate), accessed October 16 2018, <https://www.mfa.gr/zitimata-ellinotourkikon-sheseon/eidikotera-keimena/oikoumeniko-patriarheio.html>

embassies, consulates and other officially designated polling stations. The bill stipulated strict conditions for eligibility: to benefit from the provisions of the 2019 law Greek citizens living abroad must prove they resided in Greece for a minimum of 2 years over the last 35 years and submitted their tax declaration on income in Greece for the previous or the current year. Otherwise, there are no restrictions in running for elections from abroad, as long as the candidate has collected enough signatures from the district they intend to run; still, candidates must file a formal application in Greece.<sup>6</sup>

Most major Greek political parties have an organized subdivision/secretariat/sector for the issues of Greeks living abroad.<sup>7</sup> The language used to describe these party sub-structures (“Subdivision for Ecumenical Greeks”; “Sector for Diaspora Greeks”) demonstrates that issues of Greek nationals abroad are often subsumed under the overall “diaspora” policy. Even if Greek citizens do not have the option to vote from their place of residence, Greek political parties invest in retaining bonds with them and hope for to reap lobbying and investment benefits. In addition, largely due to the political ties between Greek political parties and Greek emigrants during the 7 years of military dictatorship (1967–1974), mainstream political parties still retain offices and party branches abroad in a number of West European countries.

Aside from broad policy frameworks, Greek consular authorities (embassies, consulates, honorary consuls) are responsible for the day-to-day needs of Greek citizens. Perhaps the most crucial function, the procedure to receive/renew passports, involves an in-person application at the consulate. The procedure involves checking the necessary application materials and passing on a request to home country authorities in charge of delivering passports (Passport Agency of the Greek Police under the Ministry of Interior). The passport is then mailed back to the consulate, but processing takes place by home country authorities. Consular authorities are not involved in issuing national IDs (*Δελτίο Αστυνομικής Ταυτότητας*) and driving licenses.

Another common service provided by consular authority is the certified transfer of tax residency abroad (*Μεταφορά φορολογικής κατοικίας στο εξωτερικό*). The Greek consular authorities are responsible for providing information to tax residents of Greece who (already reside abroad and) wish to transfer their tax residency to their country of destination. In particular, Greek consular authorities publish relevant information on their websites, and provide information by appointment. They are also endowed with the power to issue a document certifying the strong bonds of

<sup>6</sup>Hellenic Ministry of the Interior, “*Ενδιαφέρουν τους Υποψηφίους*” (Of interest to candidates), accessed March 6, 2019, <http://www.ypes.gr/el/Elections/NationalElections/DeputyElections/InterestCandidate/#a2>

<sup>7</sup>SYRIZA (*ΣΥΡΙΖΑ*) mentions the existence of a “Diaspora Sector” in their website. The main opposition party, New Democracy (*Νέα Δημοκρατία*), has a “Secretariat of Ecumenic Hellenism” (“*Grammateia Oikoumenikou Ellinismou*”), accessed 23 May 2018, <https://nd.gr/organosi/grammateies/oikoumenikoy-ellinismoy>. The third biggest political party, the social-democratic PASOK (*ΠΑΣΟΚ*), has a party “Secretariat of Diaspora Hellenism” (“*Grammateia Apodimou Ellinismou*”), accessed May 23, 2018, <http://www.pasok.gr/tomeis/>

the applicant with the country of destination (economic or personal) in case s/he is not able to provide other required documents to the Greek tax authorities.

Perhaps as a result of the large population of Greek nationals in Germany stemming from both earlier and recent migrations, Greek consulates in that country provide several administrative documents and certificates normally issued only in Greece, such as notarized acts, registrar certificates, criminal records, and provide an electronic signature service. Greek nationals residing in Germany can obtain the aforementioned documents in person at the consulate or in the case of electronic signature, from home. This service is part of a pilot program that started in 2015 and it is, for the time being, operational only at the Dusseldorf consulate. Greek consulates in Germany also provide services of authentication for certificates of automobile purchase for non-commercial purposes by Greek nationals residing in Germany, who purchase the automobile from private persons (*πιστοποιητικό αγοράς αυτοκινήτου από ιδιώτη*). The procedure is more expedient than for Greek citizens attempting to authenticate the certificate in Greece. Last but not least, Greek nationals residing in Germany are provided lists of certified translators at consulate website and in person. Each consulate in Germany has its own list for the area under its authority. Certified translators in the lists of the consulates provide translations from Greek to German or German to Greek and their signatures are automatically recognized as valid by the consulates.<sup>8</sup>

Repatriation services provided by Greek consular authorities to Greek nationals abroad and in distress are informal at best and non-existent at worst, except for facilitating services to transfer human remains. Consular services and obligations are set down in the Law 3566/2007 that stipulated and ratified the organizational characteristics of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into an official code.<sup>9</sup> Therein are included the duties and discretionary functions of Greek consular authorities abroad (Article 52). There is no official or discretionary policy of handing out cash loans to Greek citizens living abroad and found in distress. In cases of serious illness or accident, consular authorities inform next-of-kin, arrange visits and provide information on existing services to the Greek citizens affected. A medical evacuation is predicated upon the consent of national authorities in Greece as well as the existence of financial resources – it is not stipulated whether, how much and when the person in need needs to pay for a medical evacuation (CARE 2010: 215).

Emergency evacuations have been organized in cases of natural disasters and war outbreaks. In the follow-up of the 2004 tsunami disaster, 200 Greek citizens and 6 EU citizens were evacuated from Phuket. The second case of mass-scale repatriation was the Lebanon 2006 crisis where 439 Greek citizens and 2217 other EU citizens were provided means of evacuation at no cost (CARE 2010: 216–217). In general, repatriation needs to be authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and takes place only in cases of utmost emergency as considered by the Ministry.

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however, that this practice restricts the supply market for certified translators and often leads to higher-than-usual pricing.

<sup>9</sup> Nomos 3566/2007. Consolidated July 23, 2007.

The procedure for the transport of human remains (*Μεταφορά σωρού, οστών και τέφρας*) is a more established practice. Greek consulates provide logistical support for transport of human remains and issue a certificate of repatriation. They also inform national authorities, in order to contact the next-of-kin. Still, unlike repatriation, no special financial help exists for the transport of human remains.

Greek consular authorities offer a number of services facilitating moving one's residence and economic activity to Greece. Some of these services concern only Greek citizens who desire to re-establish residence/business ties with Greece, while others are also available to non-Greek citizens. For instance, persons (foreigners or Greeks) who have their permanent residence abroad and wish to transfer it to Greece, in order to settle permanently, may apply for a Certificate of Repatriation (*Πιστοποιητικό Μετοικεσίας*). The certificate allows them to import/transfer their personal belongings (household equipment and furniture, cars, pets, etc.), under relief from taxation provided. For EU countries, the certificate of repatriation alleviates the private vehicle tax levy, otherwise imposed on cars purchased in the EU by Greek customs.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of a transfer of secondary residence (*Μεταφορά Δεύτερης Κατοικίας*), the applicant can apply to be relieved from taxation. The tax relief applies to the furniture and other movable items that are imported to furnish or equip a residence in Greece, i.e. only for items of domestic use and items of domestic economy. The policy is applicable to persons who have their usual residence in a country outside the European Union and import domestic items, in order to furnish and equip a secondary residence in Greece.<sup>11</sup>

Greek consular authorities also process applications for the transfer of investment goods (*Μεταφορά Επενδυτικών Αγαθών*) to Greece under favorable conditions. Investment goods and other equipment items (machinery, instruments, appliances, etc.), when transferred to Greece from another country, are exempted from the Value Added Tax (V.A.T.), as well as from the import duty (in the event they are imported from a third country to the EU). The condition is that the above items are owned and have been used by a business (industrial, handicraft, agricultural, etc.), which permanently ceases its activity in the country where it was previously based, in order to practice a similar activity in Greece. These items should also be proportionate to the size and type of the company and should have already been in use for 12 months. EU citizens can also benefit from these financial incentives to move their business to Greece, but the process is expedited for Greek citizens who have a repatriation certificate from a Greek consular authority.<sup>12</sup>

An area where Greece has developed a multifaceted approach to the needs of Greek nationals residing abroad is in its language, culture and education policy. This reflects a strong belief that Greek language acquisition is one of the best determinants for retaining ties with the country of origin. Although Greece lacks a

<sup>10</sup>Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Πιστοποιητικό Μετοικεσίας” (Certificate of Repatriation), accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.mfa.gr/usa/ypiresies/ypiresies-gia-ellines/pistopoiitiko-metikiesias.html>

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



functional equivalent of the British Council or the Goethe Institute for the promotion of Greek culture and education in other countries, there are a number of official programs targeted towards “the Diaspora”.

For example, the Ministry of Education runs primary and secondary schools in a number of countries (*Αμιγή ελληνικά σχολεία του εξωτερικού*), including the UK and Germany, while teachers trained in Greek universities are sent to schools in the US, Canada and Australia, run by the local Greek communities, the Greek Orthodox Church, other non-state entities or the host country. The Greek embassy in London is particularly active in this area and has a special bureau for coordinating educational facilities in the UK. The Ministry of Education directly appoints a special consultant that runs the bureau. Their responsibilities include holding training seminars for teachers in Greek schools in the UK and organizing annual examinations for obtaining a Greek Language Certificate (*Πιστοποιητικό Ελληνομάθειας*). These programs recognize Greek language acquisition as a key principle of retaining ties with the diaspora. Most importantly, there are also special conditions for the acceptance of “Diaspora Greeks” to Greek public universities for undergraduate studies (*Ειδικό καθεστώς εισαγωγής ελλήνων μαθητών της διασποράς στα ελληνικά πανεπιστήμια για προπτυχιακές σπουδές*). Students attending Greek schools abroad for at least 2 years prior to their graduation or have attended high schools in EU countries take special exams and are given grade bonuses for entry to Greek public universities.

A host of other programs encourage cultural exchange among descendants of Greeks who reside abroad. The “program for the promotion of Greek language and culture” (*Προγραμμα ελληνικής γλώσσας και πολιτισμού*) is a 3-week program organized by the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad and aimed at young “Diaspora Greeks”, including the children of Greek nationals living abroad. Participants typically come from countries outside the EU, including Australia. The program includes language and dance courses, visits to important cultural sites, universities, museums and the Greek parliament. Relatedly the program hosting Greek Diaspora Children in Greece (*Παγκόσμιο Πρόγραμμα Φιλοξενίας Παιδιών της Ελληνικής Διασποράς στην Ελλάδα*) allows children (8–12 years old) to be hosted in summer camps in Northern and Southern Greece for 2 weeks at no cost other than travel expenses and participate in cultural activities, Greek language classes, sports, excursions to sites of interest, etc. Last but not least, the National Scholarship Foundation (IKY-NSF) grants scholarships for postgraduate studies (*Υποτροφίες για μεταπτυχιακές σπουδές*) to citizens of another country to study in Greece; still, “Diaspora Greeks” are also encouraged to apply on the NSF official website. A special scholarship exists for Master of Divinity and Master of Theology students of Greek origin at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology of the Hellenic College of Boston to pursue part of their studies in the theology programs of Greek universities.

### 13.3 Diaspora Policies and Social Protection in Greece

In general, policies of social protection for Greek nationals living abroad, independently of the European Union framework, are relatively undeveloped. This is particularly true for unemployment benefits and minimum guaranteed income policies, reflecting the restrictiveness of the former and embryonic state of the latter in Greece itself. Generally speaking, consular services and obligations are set down in the Law 3566/2007 on the organizational characteristics of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into an official code.<sup>13</sup> Several obligatory functions mentioned there are indirectly related to accessing social protection services in the host country (for example, providing information on host country authorities, official translations and document authentications, help with accessing documents from Greece electronically). There is, however, no explicit link between these administrative duties and accessing benefits/social protection from Greece or in the host country, nor is there an explicitly stated duty to help with the latter.

In contrast, policies and consular duties related to pensions, social insurance and health care provision (in Greece and abroad) are more developed, perhaps reflecting the needs of Greek nationals who migrated in the first post-war decades and have enjoyed more time and resources to advocate for such policies. For policies that do exist, the relevant information has not been collected or centralized (for instance via the G.G.A.E. or another subdivision of national ministries), but is typically disbursed by specialized national pension/health care authorities.

#### 13.3.1 Unemployment

There is no provision for granting unemployment benefits to Greek nationals residing abroad in the national legislation. By law, any absence abroad (even for a few days) is considered proof of non-availability and a ground for halting unemployment benefits in Greece. In practice, however, this applies only to long periods of absence or trips outside the EU or the European Economic Area (EEA) area whereby passport stamps reveal absence (and unavailability) for a specific period. At the same time, EU law allows a transfer of unemployment benefits for 3 months if moving to another EU country. Unemployment offices in Greece and the host EU country are involved in making sure the Greek claimant receives unemployment benefits in the EU host country, funded by the Greek unemployment agency (*Οργανισμός Απασχόλησης Εργατικού Δυναμικού*) but subject to the supervision of the host country's unemployment office.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> MISSOC (Mutual Information System on Social Protection). "Greece – Unemployment insurance benefits and unemployment assistance benefits", accessed October 15 2018, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1112&langId=en&intPageId=4571#navItem-moreTopic>

There are also no particular services undertaken by the Greek state/government institutions or consular authorities for providing information about access to unemployment benefits abroad. In particular, other than providing certified translations of home country documents that might be required by unemployment agencies in the host country, no further services exist.

There is, however, an agency that indirectly facilitates employment promotion for Greek nationals residing abroad. The Hellenic National Academic Recognition Information Center (*Διεπιστημονικός Οργανισμός Αναγνώρισης Τίτλων Ακαδημαϊκών και Πληροφόρησης*) is an organization supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Education, responsible for the recognition of university or technical degrees that are awarded by foreign higher education institutions. Of more importance here, the Hellenic NARIC is also responsible for providing information about educational systems and accreditation of institutions in Greece and abroad. Although the focus is on degree recognition from abroad in Greece, the organization also provides information about degree accreditation abroad, with subsequent repercussions about employability of Greek citizens who are degree holders and want to work abroad.<sup>15</sup>

### 13.3.2 Health Care

In general, Greek consulates assist with transferring proof of hospitalization and cost breakdown (*Νοσήλια*/ hospitalization costs) to national health insurance organizations, but the conditions for coverage are exclusively determined at the EU level and the agreements between the EU and third countries. A subdivision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (E3 Directorate) assists with processing the documents provided by Greek nationals hospitalized abroad.<sup>16</sup>

Consulates are also involved in providing residency certificates and translations of health certificates for Greeks living abroad who are interested in being enrolled in a “Special Insurance Fund for Greeks living abroad” (*Ειδικός Λογαριασμός Ασφάλισης Ελλήνων Εξωτερικού*). Applicants can exclusively apply for the health insurance component, that is, for coverage provided during their stay in Greece. The insurance covers hospitalization costs, medicine and examination costs (see below for the pension component of the same Fund) incurred during a visit in Greece. The only condition for access is Greek citizenship or proof of Greek citizenship of ancestors, as well as a medical certificate about the health of the applicant. The main

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<sup>15</sup> Διεπιστημονικός Οργανισμός Αναγνώρισης Τίτλων Ακαδημαϊκών και Πληροφόρησης, Αρμοδιότητες (“NARICS Competences”), [http://www.doatap.gr/gr/narics\\_comp.php](http://www.doatap.gr/gr/narics_comp.php)

<sup>16</sup> Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Νοσήλια” (Hospitalization Costs), accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.mfa.gr/ypiresies-gia-ton-politi/dioikitikes-ypotheseis/nosilia.html>

processing of the application is, however, carried out by central institutions in Greece.<sup>17</sup>

### 13.3.3 Pensions

Consulates are involved in issuing life certificates for Greek nationals who desire to continue claiming pension benefits from Greece. The process is the same for applicants residing permanently in the EU and non-EU countries. Consulates are also involved in authorizing translations required for pension claims of Greek nationals residing abroad. This service costs (at the time of writing, 30 Euros per authorization) are paid in the currency of the host country. Therefore, authorizations (as well as any direct translations offered) should be considered both as a service and a source of revenue for consular authorities.

Life certificates are required on a yearly basis (for Greek nationals living abroad who are entitled to a Greek pension) and are signed and stamped by Greek consular authorities. They are subsequently sent to the central Social Security Agency (previously IKA, now IKA-ETAM) in Greece. Although regulations do not clearly indicate whether central authorities in Athens counter-sign and stamp the certificates, a recent (2013) regulation requires that the pensioner sending the life certificate is also obliged to have a valid tax number (AFM) and social security registration number issued in Greece, a lack of which can lead to rejection of the claim to pension. In general, the claimant of a pension has two options of receiving the pension. The first option is to duly authorize a legal representative who is resident in Greece to receive the benefit on the beneficiary's behalf. A second option is for the beneficiary to provide the information of a bank account in Greece or any other EEA/SEPA country.

In terms of services provided by state institutions in Greece itself, the state's Social Security Agency for paid employees (IKA - ETAM) has a separate administrative division dealing with and providing information for pensions of Greek pensioners residing abroad. It also provides much of this information online.<sup>18</sup> The IKA-ETAM electronic service became particularly pertinent following the 2013 legislative change that required Greek pensioners residing abroad to report a Greek Tax Number and Social Insurance Registration Number. More generally, the IKA-ETAM website provides extensive information on regulations regarding Greece's Treaties and Agreements on the issue of pensions in the EU framework as well as with non-EU countries. However, the IKA-ETAM Subdivision responsible for

<sup>17</sup>Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Παροχή πληροφοριών για προαιρετική ασφάλιση Ελλήνων του Εξωτερικού" (Information on voluntary insurance of Greeks living abroad), accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/images/stories/missions/denmark/docs/ika.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>"*Ilektronikes Ipiressies t. IKA-ETAM*", accessed October 5, 2018, <https://www.ika.gr/gr/infopages/t-ikaetam/eservices.cfm>

pensioners living abroad is not formally responsible for providing information or other assistance on access to host country pensions, except in cases where years of employment abroad count towards exercising a pension right in Greece. This is especially pertinent for potential pensioners who have been employed in non-EU destination countries. For instance, IKA-ETAM authorities are formally responsible for providing administrative support for the implementation of the Agreement on Social Security between Greece and Australia (signed in 2008), the Agreement on Social Security between Greece and the United States (signed in 1993) and the Agreement on Social Security between Greece and Canada (signed in 1981).<sup>19</sup> This includes documentation of coverage in Greece that counts towards eligibility for benefits in the aforementioned countries. These agreements benefit Greek citizens who would otherwise not be eligible for retirement, disability or survivors' benefits under the social security system of the foreign country. They also benefit Greeks who would otherwise have to pay Social Security taxes to both countries on the same earnings.

In addition to administrative assistance, IKA-ETAM has offered a self-insurance scheme with favorable conditions to Greek citizens or persons who can prove Greek ancestry residing abroad since 1984 (*Ειδικός Λογαριασμός Ασφάλισης Ελλήνων Εξωτερικού*- "Special Insurance Fund for Greeks living abroad"). The scheme includes both a pension and a health-insurance component (see section above) and applicants can apply for either or both. More specifically, applicants can enrol into the scheme regardless of work status, income, etc. and regardless of whether they are simultaneously insured through a host country social or health insurance scheme. The only condition is proof of Greek citizenship or Greek ancestry and, for the health component of the insurance, a health certificate issued by two doctors appointed by IKA-ETAM. Greek citizens residing in Greece have no access to this insurance scheme and do not enjoy similar favorable conditions of self-insurance. After 300 days of participating in the insurance program, the Greek citizens residing abroad can return to live permanently in Greece and continue participating in this special program, provided they are not insured through the main Greek public insurance schemes.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Social Security Administration, "Agreement on Social Security between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Hellenic Republic.", June 22, 1993; Department of Social Services, "Agreement between Australia and the Hellenic Republic on Social Security", October 1, 2008; Global Affairs Canada, "Agreement on Social Security between Canada and the Hellenic Republic", November 10, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> "Voluntary Insurance of Greeks living abroad", accessed October 5, 2018, [https://www.ika.gr/gr/infopages/t-ikaetam/20150529\\_odhgos\\_asfalismenou.pdf](https://www.ika.gr/gr/infopages/t-ikaetam/20150529_odhgos_asfalismenou.pdf)

### 13.3.4 *Family-Related Benefits and Services*

Generally speaking, Greek nationals residing abroad are not eligible for family benefits – by law, a proven residence in Greece in the last 10 years is a precondition for granting family benefits.<sup>21</sup> However, in practice the absence of registrars for those moving abroad and the recognition of filing an electronic tax return in Greece as proof of lawful residence means that Greek nationals residing abroad for only a relatively short period of time ranging from a few months to over a year are able to apply for and acquire family benefits.

Greek consular authorities issue birth certificates to the children of Greek nationals residing abroad (*Ληξιαρχική Πράξη Γέννησης*). The procedure is simplest when both parents are Greek nationals and married. The requirements then include a birth certificate from the host country authorities, the passport(s) of parents and a certificate from municipal registrars in Greece, which consular authorities are able to retrieve municipal registrar certificates automatically. When both parents are Greek nationals, but not married, the father must recognize the child officially and the document of recognition must be translated and, in the case of non-EU countries, authorized with an Apostille stamp. When the mother is not a Greek national, an additional official document (also translated and with Apostille stamp in the case of non-EU countries) has to prove that the mother was indeed not married during pregnancy. Greek consulates can also certify translations of birth certificates from Greece or of documents from other institutions in Greece that officially declare the sum of child benefits offered to one or both parents. This is important in the context of host country's child benefit institutions that agree to grant the difference between the sum of the host-country child benefit and the family benefit offered in Greece.

### 13.3.5 *Economic Hardship*

No specific service ensuring assistance in times economic hardship exists for Greek nationals officially residing abroad. For instance, no official or discretionary policy exists of handing out cash loans to Greek living abroad and found in distress. This reflects less any financial constraints and more the incomplete institutionalization of policies for economic hardship. Inside Greece itself, a very limited guaranteed minimum resource program started only in 2014 and was, until 2017, tied to services provided by Greek municipalities, thus requiring a proof of residence in the specific municipality. This novel, nationally implemented program (*Κοινωνικό Εισόδημα Αλληλεγγύης* – National Solidarity Income) includes conditions on available income, savings and property (Matsaganis et al. 2017) and is tied to official residence in

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<sup>21</sup>Independent Agency of National Revenue, “Οικογενειακά Επιδόματα – Πληροφοριακά Στοιχεία” (Family Benefits – Information), [https://www.aade.gr/sites/default/files/2017-05/oikog\\_epidomata\\_pliroforiakastoiχεια.pdf](https://www.aade.gr/sites/default/files/2017-05/oikog_epidomata_pliroforiakastoiχεια.pdf)

Greece. However in practice, and as is the case with unemployment and family benefits, there is no effective controlling mechanism to prevent applicants who have moved abroad, but have not yet acquired a status of permanent residence abroad or foreign tax residence, to apply for the benefit. At the time of writing, the Greek minimum income program is still in its infancy and details about the characteristics of claimants will likely emerge in the coming years.

## 13.4 Conclusions

Generally speaking, the services offered to Greek nationals abroad in the area of social protection are limited compared to the social policies offered to non-movers, because benefits are often tied to proof of residence in Greece. In practice, the lack of an official, updated registrar of Greek nationals residing abroad contributes to low enforcement of conditionality for provision of many services (for instance, unemployment, family and, since 2017, guaranteed minimum income benefits). At the same time, as already noted, there is a recent trend among Greek nationals who reside abroad to officially register their permanent foreign residence for tax purposes. This development may have spillovers into the social protection field - those who are registered as permanent residents abroad are ineligible for other benefits. Recent cuts in national budgets for social protection, as a response to the decade-long Greek economic and debt crisis, have not directly affected services offered to nationals abroad. Still, a number of consulates (for instance, in Germany, Belgium and France) were forced to suspend their services in 2010 (Kathimerini 2018).

Despite extensive public discussions about the “brain drain” of highly educated Greek nationals, there has been little concern about the social protection rights of Greek nationals residing abroad. It is assumed that the EU framework guaranteeing equal treatment with nationals of the host country in education, employment and social security, and existing international Treaties cover most needs. Still, the landscape of transnational social protection for Greek citizens is not uniform. As highlighted in this chapter, consular authorities in major countries of destination, such as Germany, Australia and the UK, offer a number of additional administrative services, for instance with regard to economic and educational services. In addition, the policy framework for older generations of migrants (in particular, related to health care and pension coverage) is more developed than the policy framework for new migrants that left Greece during the recent economic crisis (for instance, unemployment/family benefits). Last but not least, a number of special policies of social protection exist for specific professional groups, especially maritime personnel – not covered in this chapter. At the same time, one quickly notices the existence of several levels of informality in service provision, as consular employees act as informal nodes for granting information and easier access to health services, financing and employment opportunities in Greek diaspora communities. The importance of the Greek Orthodox Church, its role in extending social services informally and its ambivalent, if sometimes symbiotic, relationship with the Greek state should also

not be underestimated, making the country's policy comparable to other non-EU state policies in the area of religion (Turkey, Morocco). Greek orthodox parishes often participate in the representative bodies of the Greek diaspora and in emergency-service provision, enjoying, at the same time, autonomy from Greek authorities.

The representative institutions of Greek nationals abroad, such as the World Council for Hellenes Abroad and the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad do not distinguish clearly between diaspora and Greek nationals in discourse or policy. This indicates an emphasis on “blood” ties rather than citizenship, as well as an over-representation of an older generation of migrants, whose descendants might no longer hold Greek citizenship. At the time of writing, these institutions find themselves at a hiatus and, in the case of the World Council, in full-blown crisis. Ongoing attempts to reform, in particular the World Council, are likely to bring about changes in the way Greek nationals residing abroad are represented vis-à-vis the Greek state in the decades to come.

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