

# Chapter 9

## Ukrainian Migration to Greece: from Irregular Work to Settlement, Family Reunification and Return

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### 9.1 Introduction: Volume and Dynamics of the Flow of Ukrainian Migrants to Greece Over the Last Two Decades

Although Greece was not a key destination for Ukrainian migrants, it was among the first EU member states to receive immigrants in the mid-1990s, just after the relaxation of the exit visa regime in Ukraine. Ukrainian immigration to Greece in the 1990s followed patterns similar to those of other former communist states, driven by broadly similar factors. The most important pull factor was the demand for cheap labour in the informal sector combined with the restrictive migration policies of Western European countries (Castles and Miller 2003). Since 2007 the inflow of Ukrainian migrants to Greece has diminished and there is a tendency towards return (see Table 9.1). These trends have been intensified by the economic crisis.

According to the 2011 census, 17,008 Ukrainians were resident in Greece, making up 2% of the total third-country national population (712,879) yet they constitute the fourth-largest third-country national population after Albanians, Pakistani and Georgians. Nikolova and Maroufouf (2010) identify three periods of Ukrainian migration to Greece. In the first period (1991–1998), which begins with Ukraine's declaration of independence and Greece's first Migration Law, the character of migration changes, as well as the reasons behind it; while before 1991 it was mainly for ethnic (repatriated Greeks from the region of Crimea, see for example Voutira 1991, 2006) or family reunification reasons, a new and more numerous flow con-

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**Table 9.1** Valid stay permits held by Ukrainian nationals in Greece, 2005–2012

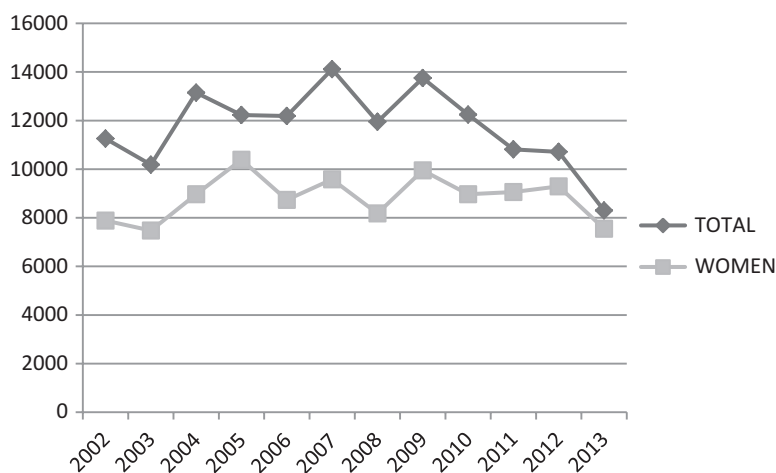
Nationality/Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Ukrainians	20,854	22,295	22,995	22,210	22,178	21,523	20,959	16,698

Source: Greek Ministry of Interior, Nikolova 2013

sisted mainly of labour migrants after 1991. Then, Ukrainian migrants were generally employed in the informal labour market as domestic workers. The most common method of arrival in Greece was to obtain a tourist visa and overstay, thus living and working in the host country irregularly. The second period (1998–2007) is characterized by the implementation of a number of regularization programmes which enabled those Ukrainians living and working in the country without residence permits to regularize their status and obtain stay permits; the third period (since 2007) marks the end of the regularization programmes and the onset of the economic crisis, which has boosted return migration as is shown by the triangulation of the available statistical data, interviews with stakeholders and migrants, and academic research (Nikolova 2015a, b; Nikolova and Maroufouf 2010; Levchenko et al. 2010). According to Eurostat data on the number of family reunification stay permits issued in different European member states, in 2013 Ukrainians received the greatest share of those permits in Greece.

Family reunification and long-term residence permits are considered to be among the most significant legislative provisions for both the mobility and temporality of Ukrainian migration to Greece (Nikolova 2014). A turning point in the legislation, which facilitated the mobility of Ukrainian nationals and motivated them to regularize their status, was the possibility of family reunification introduced by Presidential Decree 131/2006.<sup>1</sup> Under this decree, some 1,317 permits had been issued to Ukrainian nationals for family reunification purposes by the end of 2011 (796 to women and 521 to men) (Nikolova 2013). Furthermore, the long-term residence permit gives people in vulnerable situations – be it through unemployment or for family reasons – the option of returning to Ukraine, while keeping open the option to come back to Greece legally (Nikolova 2015a). According to a qualitative study, those Ukrainians who managed to obtain a long-term residence permit after 2007 (in 2011 the total number was 1,950) claimed that this facilitated their return and reintegration in Ukraine. These were mainly families, who tended to return for economic or emotional reasons, and elderly women, who usually returned for family reasons (Nikolova 2015). The economic environment in Greece and the armed conflict which started in 2014 in Ukraine makes return problematic for many migrants, however.

<sup>1</sup>Harmonization of Greek legislation with Directive 2003/86 / EC on the right to family reunification.



**Fig. 9.1** Ukrainian population in Greece by gender (2002–2013) (Source: Labour Force Surveys, Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT))

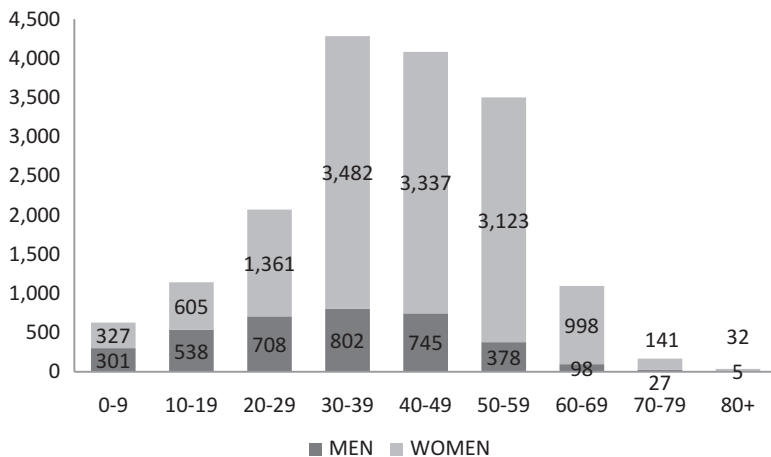
## 9.2 Migrants' Socio-demographic Profiles

Census data provide the most comprehensive picture of the migrant population. Census and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) data show that between 2001 and 2013 women made up between 72 and 91% of the Ukrainian population of Greece (see Fig. 9.1). Although there was a small but steady increase in the number of men, especially in 2007 and 2009, a rapid decrease can be observed over the last 6 years, due to the sharp decline in the construction sector, where the men were mainly employed, caused by the economic crises (Nikolova and Maroufouf 2010). Figure 9.2 shows clearly that Ukrainian migration to Greece is highly feminized (for more discussion on the implications of feminized migration, see Chaps. 5, 6 and 10).

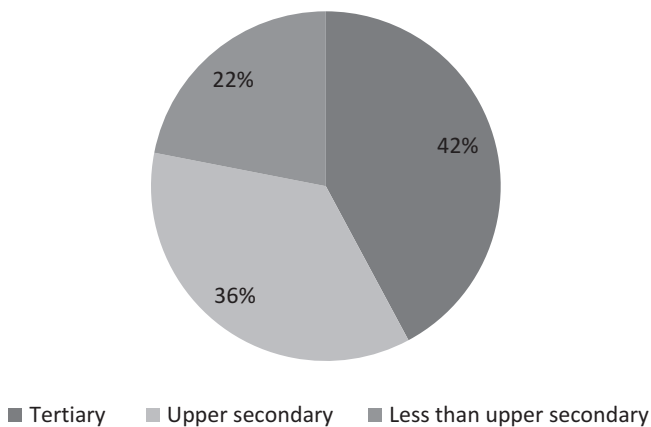
Unsurprisingly, the majority of Ukrainians in Greece belong to the most productive age groups. According to the 2001 and 2011 censuses, over 90% of the Ukrainians residing in the country were part of the active population (15–65 years of age) while more than half were between 20 and 45 years old (Nikolova and Maroufouf 2010) (see Fig. 9.2).<sup>2</sup>

The educational level of Ukrainian immigrants in Greece appears to be particularly high, in fact substantially higher than that of the country's general population. According to data from the 2011 census, over 40% of the Ukrainians residing in the country have completed some type of post-secondary education and over 35% have completed secondary education or pre-secondary vocational training (see Fig. 9.3). Some of the available data are more reliable than others. The data pertaining to insurance and residence permits, provided by IKA (one of the largest social security organizations in Greece) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs respectively, are

<sup>2</sup> Updated with data from the 2011 census.



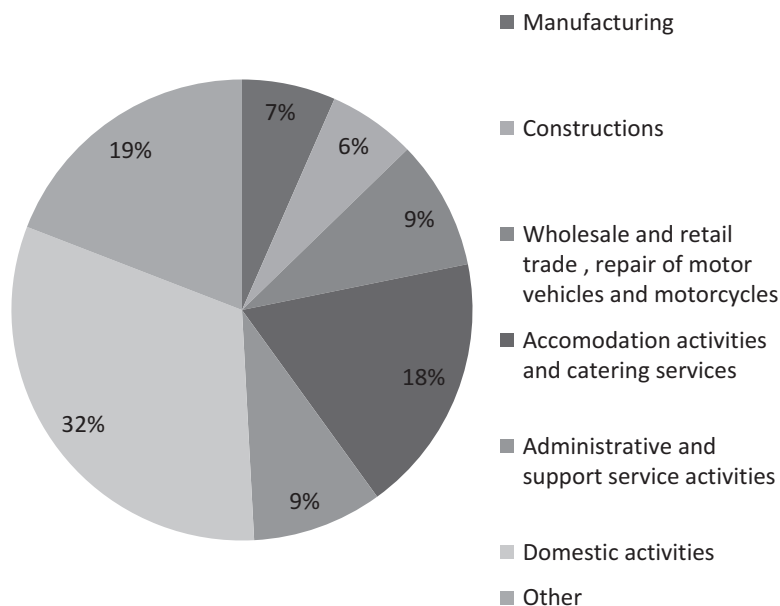
**Fig. 9.2** Ukrainian population by gender and age group in 2011 (Source: Census 2011, Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT))



**Fig. 9.3** Ukrainian population by educational level (Source: Census 2011, Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT))

reliable since they correspond to the actual number of persons who were insured or possessed a residence permit at a given time. Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, on the other hand, provide estimates on the Greek population, and the Hellenic Statistical Authority has confirmed that estimates lower than 5,000 persons must be treated as purely indicative since they are accompanied by very large standard errors.<sup>3</sup> However, given the lack of other reliable sources of data, the LFS data does provide indications of the development of Greece’s Ukrainian population. In that light it is quite difficult to estimate the size of the irregular Ukrainian population in

<sup>3</sup>Written communication with EL. STAT., 15 June 2012.



**Fig. 9.4** Ukrainian population by employment sector (Source: Census 2011, Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT))

the country – some estimates by community leaders speak of approximately 5,000–6,000 persons without documents, but estimates<sup>4</sup> by the Ukrainian embassy in Greece for 2010 suggest that there were 3,000 irregular Ukrainian migrants.

A study of the number of residence permits issued between 2005 and 2012 shows a sharp decline in the number of Ukrainian permit holders in 2012. The decrease came as a result of the economic crisis, which led to income and job cuts for the Greeks; consequently migrants employed primarily in the services sectors and construction suffered job losses, reductions in working hours and pay cuts. Some of them returned to Ukraine and others fell back onto irregularity as they could not afford to renew their stay permits. In December 2011 the total number of Ukrainians holding a valid permit was 16,570, of whom 81% were women. The largest number were issued for employment purposes (7,736 in total, of which 6,257 to women and 1,479 to men). The second-largest category was for marriage with EU citizens (mainly with Greeks: approximately 5,500, of whom 5,000 were women). A significant share are the holders of long-term ten-year residence permits and a very low percentage hold permits for an indefinite length of stay (total 1,950, of whom 1,521 were women and 429 men) (Nikolova 2015a).

According to the 2011 census, Ukrainians were employed mainly in domestic work and hotel and catering services, followed by retail, motor repairs, administrative

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ukrinform.ua/ukr/news/blshst\\_ukranskih\\_trudovih\\_mgrantv\\_u\\_grets\\_gotov\\_povernutisya\\_v\\_ukranu\\_\\_\\_mzs\\_952970](http://www.ukrinform.ua/ukr/news/blshst_ukranskih_trudovih_mgrantv_u_grets_gotov_povernutisya_v_ukranu___mzs_952970)

and support service activities, manufacturing and construction (see Fig. 9.4) (For more discussion of gender-differentiated work sectors, see Chap. 5). Generally, the Ukrainians remain in the same employment sectors with the exception of a small rise in those employed in the hotel and catering industry since 2008. In addition, according to the Labour Force Survey, Ukrainian unemployment is at a lower rate<sup>5</sup> than that of both the Greek population and Greece's wider foreign population (Nikolova 2015a).

### 9.3 Patterns of Settlement at Destination Country

Most Ukrainians travelling to Western and Southern Europe, especially till the early 2000s, used to depart on tourist visas for their destinations, but remained to work informally and without permits to stay in the host countries after their visas expired (Baganha et al. 2004), and this has also been observed in the case of Greece. When four regularization programmes were introduced in a few consecutive years in the period 1998–2005, many Ukrainians managed to legalize their status, with most of the permits to stay being issued for employment purposes. To summarize, the first phase of Ukrainian migrants to Greece (1990–1998) generally entered using tourist visas which were later overstayed. During the second phase (1998–2004), under regularization, living and working conditions improved. However, “return to irregularity” was quite common, with many Ukrainians (between 2,000 and 5,000 people according to different sources) failing to fulfil their residence permit renewal requirements (Nikolova 2013).

The migration flow was at its height during 1997–1998 and lasted until the first years of the new millennium, though it has considerably decreased since 2011 (e.g., in 2007, 22,995 Ukrainians were living officially with stay permits in Greece, compared with 16,698 in 2012).<sup>6</sup> In the late 1990s Greece was statistically one of the countries with the highest shares of legally resident Ukrainian workers. Even so, they are not as numerous as in other Southern European countries, partly because migration and labour demand in Greece is female oriented. Due to improved legal channels of communication in both the sending and the receiving country, Ukrainians are now better informed about migration routes to Greece and living conditions in the country. Nevertheless, strategies for reliable information on legal migration channels need to be supported institutionally by government and other organizations. Other key features of Ukrainian migration to Greece include the fact that the majority of migrants are holders of permits to stay; some have succeeded in obtaining citizenship; the percentage of mixed marriages is very high; and since 2006 the option

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<sup>5</sup>In 2012 the percentage of unemployed Greeks is 22.7, the total percentage of unemployed foreigners is 31 and for unemployed Ukrainians it is 18.12% (Labour Force Survey, ELSTAT).

<sup>6</sup>Data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the number of stay permits in the period 2005–2012.

of a family reunion permit to stay has been used to enable children or other family members to enter the country and be reunited with their relatives (Nikolova 2013).

The main reasons for the cessation of migration from Ukraine since 2008 are: improved living conditions in Ukraine; the first signs of the coming economic crisis in Greece observed in the decreasing amount of work in the construction sector; and last but not least, more reliable and better information in the home country about the position of migrants, job opportunities and way of life in the potential host country (Nikolova 2013). Indeed, since 2009 there has been a trend among Ukrainian migrants in Greece towards returning to their home country.

Until 2010, Ukrainians had high employment rates in the domestic sector (52%), followed by retail trade and motor repairs (17.4%), hotels and catering (17.4%) and construction (10.2%). There is a steady rise in those employed in the hotel and catering industry since 2008. The number of employed Ukrainians reported in LFS statistics more or less coincides with the number who in 2007 were insured with IKA, the main social fund in Greece, which indicates that the majority of employed Ukrainians are insured. Since the introduction of long-term stay permits in 2007, almost 20% of Ukrainians have successfully applied for 10-year stay permits (Nikolova 2015a). The long-term stay permit allows them more time to plan possible future scenarios, should they lose their job in Greece.

Psimmenos and Skamnakis (2008) argue that the duration of stay of women working in domestic service depends on the economic or educational needs of their children. Many Ukrainian families worry about reintegrating their children back in the homeland if they return. The number of children attending three Sunday schools in Athens in 2013 which offer courses in the history, geography and language of Ukraine reflects a desire to feel confident about reintegrating children at school back in Ukraine (Nikolova 2014). The time taken between decision and action seems longer and the people seem to prepare themselves and their family much more thoroughly for the return to Ukraine than they did for the original migration to Greece (Nikolova 2015a).

To return to the issue of integration in the labour market, according to the study by Psimmenos and Skamnakis (2008), the lack of official papers is an important factor determining the economic activity and the absorption of immigrant women into domestic work. Studies in Greece focus on legal obstacles and insurance, and migrants' perceptions of them, because of the (until recently) very restrictive legislation on labour mobility between different sectors for migrants. At present there are no inter-governmental agreements for transfer of insurance and pension rights between the two countries. In recent years live-in domestic workers from Ukraine have been earning from €400 to 500 per month, while some young women have taken on additional jobs due to their desire for greater independence or because of their family commitments (Nikolova 2013). Most women working in the domestic sector, especially those living in, are elderly and have been doing this kind of work for a long time.

Another factor in the cessation of migration flows to Greece, in addition to the tightening visa regime and rising wages in the stabilizing Ukrainian economy, is retirement for women in their own country – not hitherto an option in Greece

(Nikolova and Maroufouf 2010). A further shift in overall migration patterns from Ukraine is that new potential migrants are often well-educated young people looking for a professional job or further education, for whom Greece would not be a target destination.

With the intensification of the financial crisis since 2010, Ukrainian men have found it harder to keep their jobs or find new ones in Greece, hence the outflow of many families to Ukraine. According to a representative of a Ukrainian community organization in Athens, seven out of ten men have returned to Ukraine and some have already moved to Russia in order to find work there (Nikolova 2013). Some families who returned to Ukraine appeared to be unable to adjust psychologically and have returned to Greece. Many of those leaving hold long-term permits to stay and are legally entitled to remain in Greece, so they have the option of trying their luck in Ukraine or returning to Greece.

According to Nikolova's (2013) research, representatives of community organizations identify a number of reasons why immigrants might be hesitant about returning to Ukraine (also see Chap. 6 for temporal aspects of migration). Psychological factors are a major part of this decision. Migrants might be reluctant to return because they have developed a new way of life in a different cultural environment and cannot imagine being able to successfully reintegrate back in Ukraine. General studies of Ukrainian migration have shown that a long stay is likely to reduce the desire to return (see Chap. 10 for a comparison with the Italian case). Moreover, as both literature and interviews conducted in Athens testify, return remains problematic while there is no suitable economic environment in Ukraine in which to find a job or start a small business.

The pattern of return migration appears to take three forms: (1) following a decision by the immigrant and/or his/her family to return using their own financial means; (2) through organized schemes such as the IOM's assisted voluntary return programme; and (3) enforced return following expulsion and deportation (Nikolova 2013). The majority of Ukrainian returnees, however, remain statistically invisible, as they are returning to their homeland using their own resources. The majority of returnees probably hold a permit to stay in Greece. Projects promoting the reintegration of Ukrainian returnees have been established, but there is not much demand for their services, so in that sense they have been unsuccessful (Nikolova 2013).

On the other hand, data from a counselling centre for potential migrants in Western Ukraine show that, between January 2006 and January 2013, there was some interest in migration to Greece, even if it was not among the top preferred destinations (Nikolova 2013). There is no evidence as to whether those interested in Greece actually ended up migrating. Over the same period 2,052 people in total requested information about Greece from the Information Centre hotline in Ternopil. Most of them were women, most live in large cities and two-thirds of them were employed. Most of them wanted to go to Greece in order to find temporary, but not seasonal work – most were interested in the fishing industry and shipping, while only a small proportion were interested in domestic work or care of the elderly or children (Nikolova 2013). It is worth pointing out that the Centre staff are not



allowed to provide any information about employment agencies, record personal details or cooperate with other agencies.

Furthermore, monitoring by the Ukrainian NGO Europe Without Barriers of EU member states' consulates in Ukraine reveals that Greek consulates have improved their practice in comparison with the past two years: the percentage of visa application rejections has fallen, there have been substantial improvements in the attitude of consular staff towards visa applicants and the average number of documents required to obtain a visa has been reduced to seven. Greece is among the top five countries for rapid processing of the documents and attracts above all "tourists", "businessmen" and "close relatives". Europe Without Barriers believes that Ukrainians are now well informed about Greece as a host country thanks to "well-organized social networks and horizontal communications", but it notes the lack of official information about legal migration channels, formal employment and way of life in the country (Nikolova 2013).

One of the most important factors with regard to Ukrainian migration is ethnic networks of family, friends and fellow countrymen. These networks, however, also include (Greek) employers, traffickers, etc. whose motives are not always altruistic (Nikolova and Marouf 2010). Social networks usually play a key role in the choice of destination for Ukrainians deciding to migrate to Greece as the initial information about the country and how to organize the trip often comes from acquaintances or distant relatives. In addition, newly arrived migrants rely on the support of relatives, acquaintances or (travel/recruitment) agencies for support with their initial settlement and search for employment. The role was even more central during the 1990s when access to information through formal channels was scarce (Nikolova 2015b).

## 9.4 Literature and Research Overview

Early publications in the 1990s and early 2000s referred to migrants from the ex-USSR countries in general, including Ukraine, although this research mostly focused on Greek repatriates. From the population census of 2001 and data from immigrants who submitted applications by nationality during the first regularization programme in 1998 (Baldwin-Edwards 2004; Cavounidis 2003), it became obvious that migration from Ukraine had a strongly female character. Ukrainian migration has often been examined along with migration of other nationalities in studies concerning female migration and domestic work.

A study by KETHI (Research Centre on Gender Equality) in 2007 refers to the feminization of migration; women migrate on their own, not following their husbands or families as had generally been the case during the 1980s. The author concludes that most of the immigrants arrived after 1995, were married, and had come directly to Greece without a stopover in another country. The main reasons for migration were low wages, the desire to explore other ways of life and the need to provide financial assistance to their families. The women were mainly working as

live-in domestic workers and carers for the elderly and tended to remain in the country without intending circular or temporary migration.

Kampouri (2007), in her study of Albanian and Ukrainian immigrant women, conducts discourse analysis of the legislation and Parliament speeches and concludes that the immigrant women are represented by two models: “add-ons” of the male immigrant or victims of illegal human trafficking networks. Specific research suggests that immigrants working legally or illegally as domestic workers are already an important part of the immigrant population in the country. It also focuses on the narratives of immigrant women’s daily lives as domestic workers and stresses that this economic sector lies outside official migration policies.

Psimmenos and Skamnakis (2008) explore and explain access to and use of social services, health care and education by Albanian and Ukrainian migrant domestic workers and their families. According to the authors, the majority of Ukrainians migrated to Greece on a tourist visa and the way they entered the country, as well as their lack of official papers, played an important role in determining their type of economic activity and their absorption into the domestic work sector. Informal employment and employment conditions pose an obstacle to obtaining the papers required to apply for a work permit.

Emke-Pouloupoulos (2003) studies trafficking and highlights the fact that Ukraine was one of the major countries of origin for trafficked girls and women in Greece at the beginning of the twenty-first century (see also Lazos 2002). However, according to data from the Ministry of Citizen Protection, trafficking from Ukraine for the purpose of sexual exploitation decreased between 2003 and 2007 and is currently not a cause for concern.<sup>7</sup>

Kaurinkoski (2008) focuses mostly on identity issues and the temporariness of stay – separating the migration paths and plans of Pontic Greeks, Mariupol Greeks and ethnic Ukrainians. The Greek repatriates have easier access to citizenship and integration programmes. The author argues that Mariupol Greeks think of themselves as temporary economic migrants, Pontic Greeks perceive themselves as Greeks, and ethnic Ukrainians perceive themselves as foreigners in Greece. Accordingly the Greek origin of some, the possibility for others of receiving Greek citizenship, and the marriages with Greeks or family reunion, have a bearing on their future plans and the duration of their stay in Greece.

Nikolova and Marouf (2010), while examining Georgian and Ukrainian migration to Greece, present the main demographic features of the two immigrant groups. They analyze the causes, the phases and the pathways of migration from the two countries to Greece, the presence of both ethnic groups in the Greek labour market as well as the role of gender; finally they present the main activities and functions of both communities.

In the background report for the IRMA research project,<sup>8</sup> Nikolova (2013) presents a review of the main issues discussed in the literature on Ukrainian migration since the 1990s, an analysis of key informant interviews with relevant actors in both

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<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.astynomia.gr/>

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://irma.eliamep.gr/>

Greece and Ukraine, and relevant statistical data. The report focuses on the characteristics of the Ukrainian community in Greece and the way it has been influenced and shaped by Greece's migration management but also by the economic environment prevailing in the country that determines the working conditions, living standards, or the migrants' decision to return back to their home country. A year later (Nikolova 2015a), the author follows the main patterns and challenges of Ukrainian migration to Greece and refers to the consequences of the recent economic and social crisis in the country on migrants' lives.

## 9.5 Conclusions

Among the important topics to be explored are the transnational aspects of Ukrainian migration to Greece, and the impact of the Greek financial and social crisis and the strategies for coping with it; additionally, more research is required in the areas of family reunification, integration (among others also of second-generation migrants) and political participation. With regard to political participation, it should be noted that migrants' right to participate in municipal elections was introduced by Law 3838/2010, but 3 years later it was withdrawn by the Greek State Council Decision No. 460/2013. The Decision stipulates that the right to vote and to be elected in municipal elections cannot be extended to those without Greek nationality (with the exception of EU nationals), without a revision of the relevant Constitution provisions.<sup>9</sup> In this context, researchers should focus on issues related to migrants' integration and political participation, both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective, in order to draw conclusions related to the benefits for society as a whole.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.lawnet.gr/news/h-apofasi-4602013-ste-doc-antisuntagmatikes-basikes-diataxeis-tou-n-38382010-28810.html>.

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