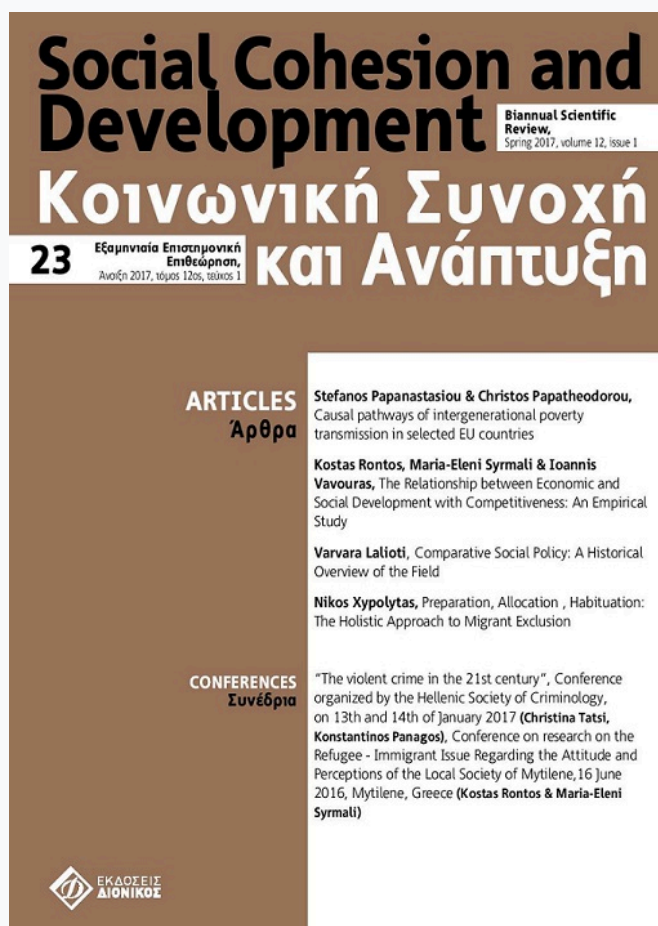


Social Cohesion and Development

Vol 12, No 1 (2017)



Conference on research on the Refugee - Immigrant Issue Regarding the Attitude and Perceptions of the Local Society of Mytilene

Kostas Rontos, Maria-Eleni Syrmali

doi: [10.12681/scad.15948](https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.15948)

Copyright © 2018, Kostas Rontos, Maria-Eleni Syrmali



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Rontos, K., & Syrmali, M.-E. (2018). Conference on research on the Refugee - Immigrant Issue Regarding the Attitude and Perceptions of the Local Society of Mytilene. *Social Cohesion and Development*, 12(1), 75–78. <https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.15948>

graphology to the evaluation of the graphic tracks of the violent crimes and offenders. Moreover, Mr. Dimitrios Papadimitropoulos, Barrister and Associate Professor at the Greek Police Academy, underlined the practical issues that a lawyer has to deal with, when defending victims of domestic violence. At the end of the last session, the General Secretariat of the Hellenic Society of Criminology, Professor Zarafonitou, summarised the main conclusions of the presentations, underlining the submitted proposals for addressing the general phenomenon of violence in Greece.

The conference was concluded by the President's final speech, with Emeritus Professor Farsedakis underlining the need for organizing more relevant events in the future. The warm response of the scientific and student community and of the general public, as well, went beyond any expectation. The conference program can be found at the official website of the Society (www.hscriminology.gr), and the presentations are about to be published in the scientific journal "Criminology", which is issued by Nomiki Bibliothiki Publications.

Christina Tatsi,

PhD Candidate in Criminology, Panteion University

Konstantinos Panagos,

Dr. in Criminology-Penology, School of Law, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Conference on research on the Refugee - Immigrant Issue Regarding the Attitude and Perceptions of the Local Society of Mytilene,

16 June 2016, Mytilene, Greece

Since 2015, the North Aegean islands situated in Greece, and Lesvos in particular, have been hosting mass refugee and migration flows, consisting the main gateway into Europe for fluxes of people fleeing war and poverty amid the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The lack of basic infrastructure and the time-consuming processes of screening refugees and granting the claimed asylum, among other factors, escalate the matter not only among refugees but as far as the local society is concerned as well.

The Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean taking into consideration the existing social changes and recognizing the intensity of recent refugee and migratory displacement, conducted extensive, primary statistical research during the period April-May 2016. The goal of the study undertaken was to examine the sociological aspects of the major repercussions, which were manifested by the refugee-immigrant phenomenon in the island of Lesvos, where the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean is located. More specifically, the scope of the study was to explore the views and attitudes of the local society of Mytilene regarding the refugee-immigrant issue and the way it has affected everyday life. Overall, the research questions addressed specify the impact of mass arrivals on local population, the effect on tourism, the prospects of tackling or perpetuating the problem in addition to the possible means for alleviating it.

The study adhered to the educational needs of the Postgraduate Programs of the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean for the academic year 2015-2016, namely "European Societies and European Integration" and "Social Research on Regional Development and

Social Cohesion". In order to ensure means, use tools and expertise, which were indispensable for the accomplishment of this relatively large-scale research, the contribution of the laboratory "Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure" is pinpointed.

Research findings were presented in the Conference titled "Research on the refugee - immigrant issue regarding the attitude and perceptions of the local society of Mytilene", which was held on the 16th of June 2016 at the University of the Aegean in Mytilene. It should be stressed that representatives of the Academic Community as well as local government agencies attended the Conference.

The opening speech for the Conference was given by the Chairman of the Department of Sociology and Scientific Coordinator and Principal Researcher, Professor Kostas Rontos, followed by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Professor Panagiotis Grigoriou, the Directors of the above mentioned Postgraduate Study Programs, Associate Professor Michalis Psimitis and Professor Ioannis Kallas, as well as Associate Professor Nikos Nagopoulos, who himself participated in the research as well.

In Session A of the Conference chaired by Associate Professor Michalis Psimitis, the research design and structure were presented by Professor Kostas Rontos and Associate Professor Nikos Nagopoulos. In particular, Professor Kostas Rontos analyzed the research objectives and the employed methodology. The survey was carried out in the municipal district of Mytilene with the aim to record the beliefs about the refugee-immigrant issue and the way it has affected daily life. The fieldwork was undertaken during the months April-May 2016 concerning a sample of 697 inhabitants, which were all above 18 years old. The questionnaire consisted of 46 questions broken down into six thematic sections, which namely are the comprehension of the problem, the effect on local population and the island's economy, the behavior of local society towards the phenomenon, the perceptions about agencies involved, the prospects for solving the problem, as well as the collection of demographic and social data. Apart from closed-ended questions, the questionnaire also included open-ended questions for further qualitative analysis so as to deeply investigate the root causes and the consequences of the phenomenon. Research results were based on quantitative analysis, whereas the sampling error was estimated to range between 2.1% and 4.5%.

Therefore, a fundamental research question was raised concerning the way in which the island's residents perceived this volatile situation as they experienced its implications first-hand. In order to deal with issues arising from mass refugee and migration flows in host countries, local residents play a critical role mainly in areas that are entrance gates. In addition, with the institutional recognition and service delivery on behalf of the host State, the role of civil society itself is becoming even more important for a substantial, effective and smooth integration at different levels of organizing social life. Further on, it is argued, as is often attempted when analyzing the results of this research, that the views of local people do not remain steadfast. On the contrary, at crucial questions at least, they are varying and affected mainly by the degree of active presence of State structures and bodies in matters of institutional and legal protection in order to facilitate further policy interventions in the sectors of social care and inclusion.

Associate Professor Nikos Nagopoulos pointed out that due to the seriousness of the issue and the immediate social consequences caused, the attitude of local community is of major importance, not only for managing impressions, but also for the purpose of shaping and implementing policies concerning the immigrant-refugee issue. The perceptions and intention of local society determine in a decisive way the effectiveness of integration policy measures that

are imposed by the State, as well as the success of certain integration programs that are put into public consultation. Research results in this case are essential for outlining distinct parameters of the problem, which are not widely known and express the collective will.

In addition, the utilization of certain data targets at the dissolution of presumably false impressions and misconceived conclusions concerning the attitudes of local population towards immigrants and refugees. Furthermore, the research interest is expanded in order to designate the correct dimensions of the matter that is related to concepts and views, which were presented by the intervention of mass media. Therefore, highlighting in the best possible objective way the issue in question— when the related results arise from valid and reliable research methods – may determine the placement and assessment of the various aspects in the right direction and at the same time search for policy solutions at the micro level at least. In order to reach policy conclusions, it is alleged that it is necessary to investigate the degree of recognizing the problem and the special characteristics of groups along with the acceptance of cultural diversity as the basic and non-negotiable democratic principle and inextricable condition of integration policies. In the spirit of tolerance, the conduct of this research is expected to facilitate policies related to social protection and social rights as well as pertinent policies that ensure social cohesion in local communities and provide a sense of security for inhabitants.

In Session B of the Conference chaired by Professor Ioannis Kallas, some key research findings were emphasized by the Collaborator of the Department of Sociology, Nikolaos Panagos, and the postgraduate students. More extensively, the presented research results established the decrease of Mytilene's inhabitants income. The 52.9% of the population is classified in the clusters 401-800 and 801-1200€, whereas 87.2% gains less than 1.200€. The population that earns no income accounts for 20.7% of the aforementioned percentage. Only 2.1% of respondents stated income more than 2.000€. These outcomes illustrate the effects of the extensive economic crisis that the study area is undergoing as part of the widespread recession prevailing in Greece.

According to 33.09% and 19.45% of local population the greatest responsibility for the refugee-immigrant issue is attributed to the United States of America and the European Union in conjunction with the adopted policies respectively, whereas 17.85% of respondents focused on the extremist action of Jihad. In addition, approximately 10.75% of the population considers that Turkey is mainly responsible for the refugee-immigrant issue, especially due to "facilitating" their access towards Greece.

On the other hand, the answers about the responsibility for the exacerbation of the refugee-immigrant phenomenon over the past few months are differentiated as compared to the previous question. The majority of the population (28%) considers that Turkey is mainly responsible for the increase in the incoming waves of refugees-immigrants followed by the European Union (20%), Jihad (16.7%) and the United States of America (13.5%).

Moreover, the sympathy of the local population towards refugees is apparent, as 82.9% faces with at least enough sympathy their plight. Furthermore, the respondents at a significant proportion (61.6%) feel that public goods or values are threatened because of refugee and immigrant hordes.

Finally, in the selective outline of research results the positive evaluation of the Coast Guard is featured on regarding its efficiency in manipulating the problem gaining median score 9 on the 1 (totally non efficient confrontation) to 10 (totally efficient confrontation) scale. It is characteristic that the Coast Guard is graded with 10 by 48.8% of the population, whereas 76.7% of responses fall between 7 and 10.

All stakeholders concluded that sustaining and advancing this research effort through the use of more complex statistical and qualitative techniques, will further give prominence to the issue at stake, so that the selected quantitative data may be enriched, expanded and be made eligible for continuous monitoring of the phenomenon and the emergence of new strands of research as conditions are rapidly changing together with the views and positions of citizens. The dissemination of research findings will include the publication of special issue, regular publications and the organization of scientific events that may lead relevant discussions in the field with the contribution of the University of the Aegean and local authorities, such as the Region of North Aegean, the Municipality of Mytilene and the Chamber of Lesbos.

Kostas Rontos,
University of the Aegean

Maria-Eleni Syrmali,
Panteion University & University of the Aegean