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# Social mobility in Greece: Perceptions and preferences

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## Η κοινωνική κινητικότητα στην Ελλάδα: απόψεις και αντιλήψεις των Ελλήνων

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present the views and perceptions of Greek individuals regarding social mobility based on a questionnaire survey conducted after the end of the financial crisis. Optimistically, most Greeks acknowledge the existence of social mobility in the country, reflecting positive changes in equality of opportunities. Personal experiences and recent income changes influenced participants' views. The main barrier to social mobility based on the citizens' answers includes the transition from education to the labour market. On the other hand, cognitive and non-cognitive skills and professional experience were deemed important for upward mobility. The participants also underscored the significance of different aspects of mobility.

**KEY WORDS:** Social mobility, economic crisis, questionnaire survey, absolute and relative mobility, social policies.

### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Σκοπός αυτού του άρθρου είναι να παρουσιάσει τις απόψεις και τις αντιλήψεις των Ελλήνων σχετικά με την κοινωνική κινητικότητα βάσει έρευνας ερωτηματολογίου που πραγματοποιήθηκε μετά το τέλος της οικονομικής κρίσης. Το αισιόδοξο εύρημα είναι ότι οι περισσότεροι Έλληνες αναγνωρίζουν την ύπαρξη κοινωνικής κινητικότητας στη χώρα, αντανακλώντας θετικές αλλαγές στην ισότητα ευκαιριών. Οι προσωπικές εμπειρίες και οι πρόσφατες αλλαγές εισοδήματος επηρέασαν τις απόψεις των συμμετεχόντων. Το κύριο εμπόδιο στην κοινωνική κινητικότητα με βάση τις απαντήσεις των πολιτών περιλαμβάνει τη μετάβαση από την εκπαίδευση στην αγορά εργασίας. Από την άλλη πλευρά, οι γνωστικές και μη γνωστικές δεξιότητες και η επαγγελματική εμπειρία κρίθηκαν σημαντικές για την ανοδική κινητικότητα. Οι συμμετέχοντες τόνισαν επίσης τη σημασία των διαφορετικών πτυχών της κινητικότητας.

**ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ:** Κοινωνικές Δομές Άμεσος Αντιμετώπισης της ΦΚοινωνική κινητικότητα, οικονομική κρίση, έρευνα με ερωτηματολόγιο, απόλυτη και σχετική κινητικότητα, κοινωνικές πολιτικές.

## 1. Introduction

**S**ocial mobility, the ability of individuals or groups to move within a society's hierarchical structure, is central to understanding social cohesion and development. People have the possibility to change their class. The groups can be divided by the income of their occupation or wealth or occupational/educational/social status. An open society provides opportunities to their citizens to move upwards while social mobility also leads to the opposite direction generally for people who do not have the capabilities to maintain their status. The importance of social mobility in every society is acknowledged and it is often related to income. If the resources are allocated in a fair way in a society, this is going to improve the social welfare (Fields & Ok, 1999; Yang & Qiu, 2016). According to Council of Europe (2012) social mobility is linked to social cohesion. The expectations and aspirations of different generations that their life's outcomes are not associated only with the socio-economic background but mainly by their efforts and merit, can reinforce the sense of justice in a state. In addition, the state benefits from the talents and skills of all citizens (without losing valuable human capital) and it may reach better welfare more easily. Living in a country with lower social mobility the citizens have lower aspirations and motivations<sup>1</sup> for greater efforts that could lead to more economic efficiency and development (Wilkinson, R.G. & Pickett, 2010). Furthermore, this efficiency should have likely positive effects on economic growth (Breen, 1997). According to Citi GSP (2023) "a 10-point increase in each country's Global Social Mobility Index score could lead to a \$514 billion increase in global GDP". Acemoglu, et al, 2018 highlighted its significant role in the prospects and stability of democracy and the views and preferences of citizens as voters. As a result, social mobility is a desirable notion for people who want to be determined by their personal efforts and not by the initial endowments and it is useful for policymakers to evaluate the degree of social mobility and minimize the reasons that affect it negatively.

One of the fundamental distinctions about social mobility is between intergenerational and intragenerational as well as absolute and relative mobility. Social mobility indicates the changes in the social status of an individual from one period to another (intragenerational mobility) or comparing to her/his parents, between two generations in this case (intergenerational mobility). Both types of studies require at least two observations to investigate the time path of the social hierarchy (Fields & Ok, 1999).

The changes in rank mobility are connecting with the term of relative mobility while the changes in real status (income, occupation or educational achievements) are connecting with the term of absolute mobility. For instance, sometimes a small upward mobility by rank can mean a significant mobility in income mobility when we are mainly referring to countries with higher income inequality. The opposite can also happen. As Corak et al. (2014) noticed "same distance in terms of percentile rankings does not necessarily imply equal changes in earnings". The absolute reflects the changes in the structure of society that affects the distribution of the citizens or technological changes or industrialization<sup>2</sup> which affects incomes and labour market generally while relative mobility is related to social fluidity (Eurofound, 2017). The income class of an individual can be different compared to his/her position before and people have the opportunity for upward or downward mobility in economic classes. The hypothesis is that absolute changes due to the economic progress or recession, it is possible to affect relative mobility respectively. Citizens may value relative mobility the same as absolute mobility and. this is perhaps one reason that Greece

maintained its social cohesion during the crisis because many people realized that despite the reductions in their wages, they were maintaining or improving their relative living standards compared to many other fellow citizens who lost much more. Due to the high importance of the topic, we aim to explore the perceptions<sup>3</sup> and preferences of Greek citizens regarding social mobility, particularly in the aftermath of the economic crisis.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we review the literature regarding the research on perceptions of social mobility. In Section 3 we describe our questionnaire survey. Section 4 discusses the research questions and hypotheses. Section 5 presents our main findings of all questions. Section 6 provides concluding remarks and discussion.

## 2. What we can learn from the citizens' perceptions

The important achievement of the questionnaire researches conducted in the past reminds the scientific community that certain theoretical conventions may not be shared by the majority of individuals. People are different and hence it is natural for them to hold different views on what is important or good for society. The point may obviously be even more important in the context of social mobility, which involves intrinsically more problematic judgments than those implied by inequality comparisons (Bernasconi, M., Dardanoni, V., 2005). Individuals' perceptions of the social mobility/income distribution can affect how they will react to redistributive policies, which is a key input for public finance models (Cruces, et al., 2013). Furthermore, misconceptions of people about the planned policies can reduce their effectiveness. Cruces et al (2013) also show that people who have biases in their perceptions of their own income, if correcting these biases, they can change their views on redistribution. Romer (2003) confirmed this correlation as well. Even among knowledgeable people who are aware of the developments in policies it is noticed that there may be a difficulty in realizing the welfare stem of these policies in the future and adopting them. Misunderstandings, ignorance and biased assumptions of people also linked to enforcement problems. The interaction between policymakers and citizens can help the latter to perceive the gains, rationality and the benefits for majority of the population by providing insights. On the other hand, If the beliefs about the policies connected to personal incentives and not the public interest, the efforts to educate people about real economic facts as well as the rationality of the efficacy of governmental decisions, it will not work. Investigating people's perceptions shows us which policies are more desirable and tolerated.

Social mobility policies can be linked to political decisions about the relocation of resources, equal opportunities access to specific faculties or occupations as well as the stability of democracy (Acemoglu et al, 2016). The way in which income is distributed, equal opportunities are provided and how people view them plays a significant role in determining political economic policies for redistribution and boost social mobility. Americans tend to see wealth as earned through ability and hard work, while Europeans often see it as inherited through family and connections. This perception affects their support for redistribution policies. Pessimistic information about social mobility can also lead to increased support for "equality of opportunity" policies. Literature also suggests that individuals' views on social mobility and support for redistribution depend on their own personal experience of mobility and that the median voter may prefer less redistribution if they believe in upward mobility for themselves or future generations (Alesina et al, 2018).

### 3. Questionnaire survey: Sampling techniques

**D**ue to the limitations of national datasets, a questionnaire survey focused on mobility is an interesting source of information. It allows us to carry out multiple ways of measuring social mobility. In our survey, we construct cross-sectional data consisting of actual individuals' pairs (one parent and one child). They are all taken at a specific period of their life which gives us information about their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. The questionnaire survey includes data regarding 427 pairs of actual parents-children. In our survey, there are two cohorts. The children cohort consists of their children who were between 30-50 years old when the crisis ceased. They were born between 1970 and 1990. The parents' cohort consists of children's parents. The mean generation age difference is higher than 22 years (Appendices Table 1).

In order to ensure that our survey is as representative as much as possible, we did not employ only random sampling. Instead, the participants were chosen from snowball sampling. This is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects. We initially approached 10 people (parents) from 10 different occupational classes who accepted to be interviewed with their children. After the interviewees suggested other people from different occupations to complete the survey and so on. We switched to a self-completion approach of the questionnaire as a result of the pandemic making face-to-face fieldwork unfeasible. From the total sample, we also created two sub-samples. 125 pairs of parents-children are the stratified subsample following demographic and educational characteristics of the total population (250 individuals in total). The other 302 pairs are a random subsample coming from our snowball technique. To ensure representativeness, snowball sampling was used in conjunction with stratified sampling to capture diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Data validation included comparisons with national demographic and occupational statistics, confirming consistency with population trends. The main differences between the two subsamples are the regional representativeness and the gender because the stratified sample focuses on the sons

A novelty is that we include children who emigrated (11.29%) due to the explosion of immigration the previous years and the high level of qualifications and skills of these people who usually earn high salaries. This decision reflects the significant emigration wave during Greece's economic crisis and the high skill levels of these individuals, which make them integral to understanding intergenerational mobility in a Greek context. While the title emphasizes domestic mobility, we acknowledge the role of new diaspora populations in shaping perceptions and preferences regarding mobility. The inclusion of emigrants also reveals a nuanced perspective: despite physical separation, they retain a strong interest in domestic policies. The number of participants is an issue that needed clarification before presenting the results of the research. Previous studies used similar number of observations. For instance, in one of the most remarkable papers of Bjorkluynd and Jantti (1997) in the American Economic View, the number of fathers was 540 and the sons 327. Grawe (2004) applied quantile analysis in two samples of 233 and 354 from different databases. Solon (1992) in his analysis referred to the relationship between father and son's earnings and the main sample comprised 348 pairs.

## 4. Research questions

The research questions that we tried to answer through our questionnaire are:

- a) The position of an individual in income distribution and his/her experiences of social mobility affects his/her perceptions?
- b) What agents affect the upward and downward mobility in Greece according to the citizens?
- c) Which dimension of mobility, the citizens can recognise and prefer? (Absolute versus relative)
- d) How beliefs about intergenerational mobility affect preferences for government policies?

Based on the previous research questions we created the following major set of questions in the questionnaire:

### *I) The perceptions of mobility (question a)*

Perceptions of one's relative position in the income distribution have a significant impact on attitudes toward redistributive policies. Poorer individuals tend to place themselves in higher positions than they actually occupy, while richer individuals underestimate their rank. Those who overestimate their relative position and think they are relatively richer than they are tend to demand higher levels of redistribution when informed of their true ranking (Cruces et al., 2013).

### *II) Views on fairness - Barriers and opportunities to succeed social mobility (question b)*

The way that the income is distributed in a society is an important factor in determining policies that involve redistribution, such as healthcare, and taxation. However, the actual shape of the income distribution is not the main determinant of policy. Rather, it is the perception of the income distribution by citizens or agents in the economy that drives policy decisions (Cruces et al., 2013).

### *III) Evaluating the social mobility (question c)*

People care about their relative position in society for various reasons. A high social standing can yield respect, admiration, and power. When making choices for their children, people are more likely to answer positionally. Ignoring positional concerns may lead to incorrect descriptive explanations of government fiscal policies. People react to their relative intra-generational changes with reluctance or not to pay taxes. (Solnick, S. & Hemenway, D., 1998)

### *IV) Social mobility and preferences for governmental actions (question d)*

When people are presented with pessimistic information about social mobility, they tend to favour policies that promote "equality of opportunity," such as public education or healthcare spending, over policies that promote "equality of outcome," such as progressive taxation or safety net policies. Across all countries, views on social mobility are highly correlated with policy preferences. Those who are more pessimistic about social mobility tend to favour more generous redistributive policies and higher levels of government involvement. This correlation is stronger for "equality of opportunity" policies (equal educational opportunities) than for "equality of outcome" policies as progressive taxation (Alesina et al., 2018).

Combining the motivation discussed above with the literature of similar researches, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

- (a) The position of an individual in income distribution and his/her experiences of social mobility influence their perceptions of social mobility. Individuals who belong to higher relative income positions or have experienced absolute or relative changes are more likely to believe in the existence of social mobility indicating an optimism of the phenomenon in Greece.
- (b) Different generations identify different factors which enhance or prevent social mobility in Greece.
- (c) The dimensions of social mobility, specifically absolute/relative mobility have distinct effects on individuals' preferences for different types of mobility.
- (d) Beliefs about intergenerational mobility significantly affect preferences for government intervention. People who hold optimistic views about upward mobility for themselves or future generations are more likely to support policies promoting equality of opportunity, such as public education and healthcare spending.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 The perceptions of mobility

The answers to the question "do you believe that there is social mobility in Greece?" across the income distribution quartiles in parents and children's cohorts are presented initially. Greek citizens from both generations recognize that Greek society creates opportunities for social mobility. Two-thirds support this statement independently of their financial situation. Table 1 presents the distribution of income among parents and children in two different groups, those who believe in social mobility (Yes) and those who do not (No). The table shows that among those in the first quartile of lower income, 64.24% of parents and 68.46% of children believe in existing social mobility in Greece. Similarly, in the second quartile and the third quartile, the percentages are similar. The fourth quartile, or the group of the richest people, has the highest percentage of people who believe in social mobility with 70.13% of parents but the lowest for offspring's generation (61.84%). The main finding from this table is that there is a positive correlation between income and belief in social mobility. This means that people in higher income groups are more likely to believe in social mobility compared to those in lower income groups. The only exception is the richest children quartile.

**Table 1: Income distribution and beliefs about social mobility**

Parents' distribution			Children's distribution		
	Yes	No		Yes	No
1st quartile (lower income)	64.24%	35.76%	1st quartile (lower income)	68.46%	31.54%
2nd quartile	70%	30%	2nd quartile	71.43%	28.57%
3rd quartile	70.11%	29.89%	3rd quartile	77.5%	22.5%
4th quartile (richest people)	70.13%	29.87%	4th quartile (richest people)	61.84%	38.16%
Total	67.78%	32.22%	Total	69.36%	30.64%

The next table (2) presents the beliefs about social mobility in relation to the experience of intergenerational mobility among offsprings (based on our data)<sup>4</sup>. The table is divided into two parts, one for relative intergenerational income mobility and the second one for occupational mobility. In both parts, the table shows the percentage of people’s perceptions about mobility for different intergenerational movements. There are no significant differences among the people who experienced intergenerational relative income or occupational mobility. The interesting fact is that people who experienced downward mobility in many cases, recognize the existence of mobility in Greece more than the other groups. For relative intergenerational income mobility, 74.05% of people who experienced downward mobility believe in social mobility, compared to 68.13% who experienced immobility and 66.15% who experienced upward mobility. For intergenerational occupational mobility, 71.08% of people who experienced downward mobility believe in social mobility, compared to 72.38% who experienced immobility and 64.97% who experienced upward mobility. The main finding from this table is that there is a correlation between experience of intergenerational mobility and beliefs about social mobility. Specifically, people who have experienced downward mobility in terms of relative income or occupational mobility are more likely to believe in social mobility, possibly due to the fact that the experience of downward mobility is more sore.

**Table 2: Intergenerational relative income mobility/occupational mobility and beliefs about social mobility (Offsprings’ cohort)**

Beliefs			Beliefs		
Intergenerational income mobility	Yes	No	Intergenerational occupational mobility	Yes	No
Downward	74.05%	25.95%	Downward	71.08%	28.92%
Immobility	68.13%	31.87%	Immobility	72.38%	27.62%
Upward	66.15%	33.85%	Upward	64.97%	35.03%

Opposite to the previous findings, the recent fluctuations in their salaries affect the participants’ perceptions regarding mobility. People who experienced income increases or their income was not affected, tend to declare that they believe in opportunities for social mobility in Greece, compared to the people who experienced a decline in their income. The intragenerational mobility is of as much importance as intergenerational mobility if we want to have the whole picture of mobility in one country. Absolute changes in their incomes and psychological factors can affect the perceptions of people. Table 3 presents the experience of intragenerational income mobility during the crisis and beliefs about social mobility in both generations. This question reveals that there is a correlation between recent changes in income (linked to the concept of absolute income mobility) and beliefs about social mobility. Comparing the results of the two questions, it is noticed people are more optimistic about the social mobility in Greece when they have experience upward mobility based on their actual information that they have regarding their salaries whereas people who have experienced downward changes compared to their parents are also more likely to recognize social mobility. The overall belief in social mobility is quite similar to all aspects of mobility (hypothesis a).

**Table 3: Recent changes in their income during the crisis and beliefs about social mobility**

	Parents' Cohort		Children's Cohort	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Increased	82.86%	17.14%	72.09%	27.91%
Remained more or less the same	68.06%	31.94%	68.42%	31.58%
Decreased	65.13%	34.87%	63.53%	36.47%

## 5.2 Views on fairness

**T**able 4 presents the results of the question that examines the barriers and key obstacles to social mobility among two generations. We listed a number of potential barriers to social mobility and participants identified the most significant barrier. Participants from both generations state that the most significant barrier to social mobility in Greece is the transition from education to the labour force, transitions from school to work (lifelong learning) with 33.2% of the parents' cohort and 33.5% of the children's cohort. The second obstacle is the social networks of the family. The previous generation believes that income inequalities created difficulties in changes in social status. On the other hand, the younger generation identifies the obstacles that the labour market creates in order to have access to specific occupations. The latter barrier to social mobility is quite significant for both groups with 12.9% and 16% respectively. These data provide insight on the perception of the barriers to social mobility among different groups and can be useful for policymakers and researchers to understand the public opinion and take actions accordingly. The similar answers between the two generations highlight the parental effect on the offspring's opinions.

**Table 4: Barriers and key obstacles to social mobility**

	Parents' cohort	Children's cohort
Early childhood education (lack of ECE, high cost)	0.7%	0.2%
Schools system (early tracking, ability grouping)	6.6%	7.4%
Financial barriers to complete education (enrolment fees, cost shifting to parents, etc)	7.3%	5.2%
Transitions from school to work	33.2%	33.5%
Labour market (difficulty to access to certain occupations)	12.9%	16%
Social inequalities (social networks)	19.8%	17.2%
Income inequalities	16.3%	13.8%
Health inequalities	0.2%	0%
Regional differences	0.2%	1.7%
Discrimination (race, religion, gender)	1%	3.4%
Other	1.7%	1.5%

Subsequently the survey respondents were asked: “Which are the main reasons identified as the most important for a promotion/to earn more in professional life?” in order to identify cognitive and non-cognitive skills which are important for upward mobility and adding them in educational procedure. We divided the answers of two subgroups based on their optimism regarding the existence of social mobility in Greece. Table 5 presents the results of the previous question. The most significant reason for both cohorts independently of the perceptions regarding social mobility is "multi-tasking and planning" with 18.9% of the parents' cohort and 25% of the children's cohort who believe that there are chances of social mobility in Greece. Other reasons that people identified are "Lifelong learning" with around 12% of the parents' cohort and around 13% of the children's cohort and experience. It can also be seen that "Want to work more hours" is considered a significant reason by a considerable percentage of the parents' cohort (17.6% for pessimistic people regarding social mobility) but less by the children's cohort (6.6% and 4.7% respectively). "Attendance of an education program/further vocational training" is considered a way to experience better results in your job by a relatively small percentage of both groups (11.5% of the parents' cohort and around 10% of the children's cohort). Both generations also recognized the importance of professional experience. The outcomes obtained from the tables 4 and 5 showcase results that are incongruent with the predictions set forth in hypothesis (b), prompting a minor difference among the generations regarding the factors of social mobility.

**Table 5: Cognitive and non-cognitive skills which are important for upward mobility**

	Parents		Children	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Attendance of an education program/further vocational training	11.8%	11.4%	8.4%	11.7%
Want to work more hours	12.1%	17.6%	6.6%	4.7%
Time management	6.8%	4.6%	5.6%	6.2%
Teamwork and leadership skills	14.3%	9.2%	16.7%	16.4%
Self-awareness to self-control	2.8%	3%	3.1%	5.5%
Multi-tasking and planning,	18.9%	17.6%	25%	21%
Lifelong learning	12.5%	11.4%	13.2%	12.5%
Intergenerational transmission of skills	3.9%	5.3%	4.2%	0%
Experience	13.6%	12.2%	12.2	11.7%
Other reasons	3.2%	7.6%	4.9%	10.2%

**5.3 Evaluating different dimensions intergenerational mobility**

Chetty, et al (2014) pointed out the significance of relative mobility, the position of the offspring in social stratification compared to the ranking of their parents in their own generation distribution (intergenerational mobility) or the changes in individuals' positions relative to their cohort (intragenerational mobility). Absolute movements indicate the fraction of people with higher/lower income or status between two time periods (Berman, 2022). Absolute mobility ignores the moves across the social hierarchy paying attention only to the absolute changes. In

order to test the preferences of absolute and relative intragenerational mobility (relative positional concerns) we asked the two generations the next questions:

There are 2 societies (Alphaland and Betaland). We suppose that the prices of goods are similar to current prices and the purchasing power of money is the same. Pick the one where you would prefer to live.

*Question C1*

Alphaland: your current monthly income is 1000€ while the other citizen earn 500€

Betaland: your current monthly income is 2000€ while the other citizen earn 4000€

*Question C2* Would you prefer the same for your children?

*Question C3*

Alphaland: You have a bachelor and the other have completed high school

Betaland: You have a postgraduate degree while the others have a PhD

*Question C4* Would you prefer the same for your children?

The idea regarding these questions derives from previous research (Solnick & Hemenway, 1998). Following it, we adjust the questions to the reality of Greece in terms of income and qualifications. Participants with children answered questions C2 and C4. For this reason, the rate of responses is lower for the offspring cohort (last column in Table 6). The vast majority in all cases tend to prefer absolute income mobility compared to relative income mobility. However, the percentages of relative standings are not negligible. This offers an extra value to the discussion of intragenerational income mobility in the previous chapter and reason to identify the heterogeneity of the people who choose them. In both cohorts, there is a slight decrease when responders asked for their children. The results observed in tables 10-13 are in harmony with the predictions set forth in hypothesis (c).

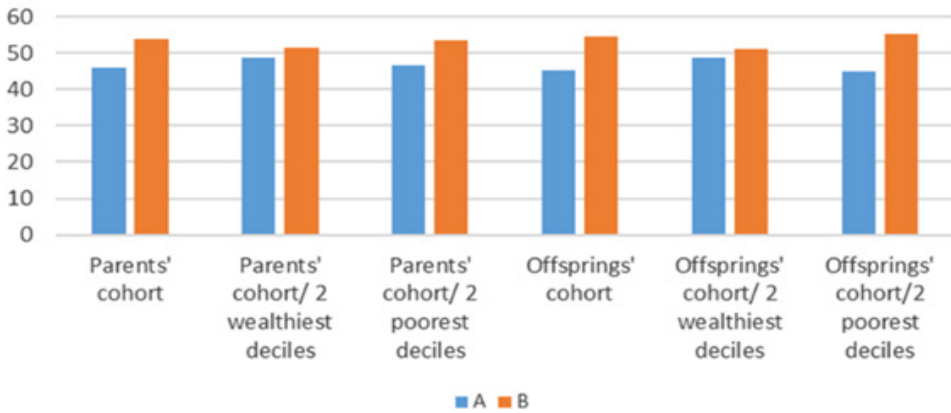
**Table 6: Results for the questions C1 and C2**

	Parents' cohort	Parents' cohort for their children	Offsprings' cohort	Offsprings' cohort for their children
Total answers	382	381	392	201
Alphaland	108	129	114	61
Betaland	274	252	278	140
Percentages				
Alphaland	28.3%	33.9%	29.1%	30.3%
Betaland	71.7%	66.1%	70.9%	69.6%

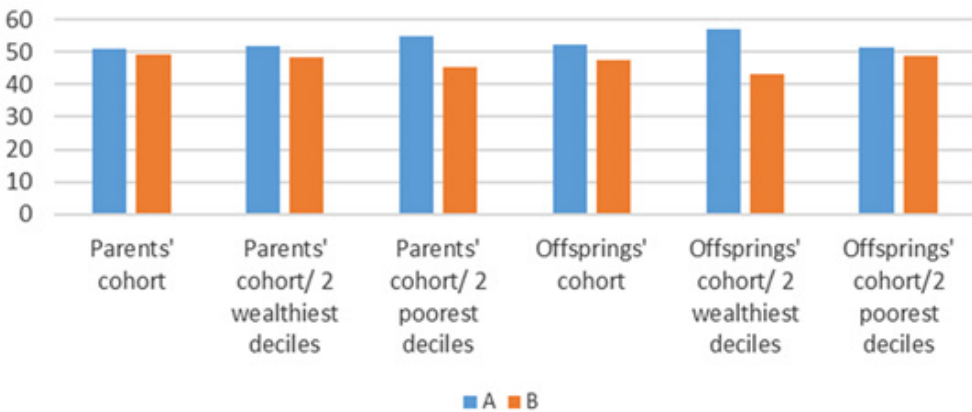
People care about studies, among other things, trying to stand out from others and gain an advantage in finding an interesting and well-paid job. Especially if they originate from lower strata of social stratification, they want to escape the destiny of their parents. While those in the upper strata how to maintain their position. It is therefore interesting to investigate how Greek adults perceive mobility in terms of absolute or relative movements as well as their preferences about themselves and their children. Furthermore, what they are willing to study for strengthening their possibilities about upward mobility.

Figures 1 and 2 presents the results of questions C3 and C4. The first answer is considered as a preference for relative mobility (individual has better qualification than others but lower than his endowment of the second option). The second choice is considered as a preference for absolute educational mobility (higher personal attainment but worse than everyone else). Both generations marginally prefer absolute achievements. This trend is stable among the poorest and wealthiest strata but it is interesting that the population is split almost equally between the two options (Figure 1). This is a shred of evidence that both absolute and relative positions in society are appreciated.

**Figure 1: Percentages of answers in question C3**  
**Relative or absolute mobility in education about themselves**



**Figure 2: Percentages of answers in question C4**  
**Relative or absolute mobility in education about their children**



Survey also suggest that Greek people may change their views when they are asked about their children. A reversal from absolute to relative mobility can be noticed. Controlling for income and generation the pattern remains the same (Figure 2). However, the preference for relative mobility is marginal as the corresponding for absolute in the previous question. The percentages slightly overcome 50%. This preference also worked as a confirmation of the trends between the 2 types of educational mobility. It was confirmed that about half of the citizens perceive mobility as an improvement of their own educational attainments regardless of the achievements of other people. While the rest care more about their relative position having better educational outcomes compared to the majority of the population independently the level of studies. These gathered findings lend the opportunity to support a new assumption. People may prefer more absolute mobility for themselves because they already entered the labour market or have retired (the offspring cohort includes adults over 30 years old while parents' cohort consists of their older father or mother who were pensioners at the time of conducting the survey). Therefore, they enjoyed their educational choices or they are not able to change them anymore. On the contrary, concerning their children, parents feel the responsibility to provide them with a high-quality education aiming to end up better educated compared to their peers.

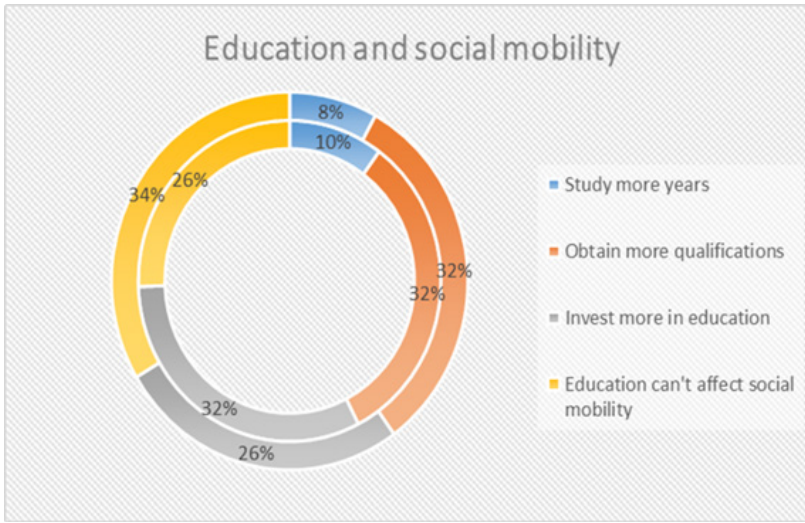
Similarly, variations in the responses of the role of education in social mobility exist. Participants are asked about their views and willingness to be more educated as a key determinant to enjoy upward mobility.

Question C5: What are you willing to do for improving your social status?

- a) Study more years
- b) Obtain more qualifications
- c) Invest more in education
- d) I don't think that educational background leads to upward mobility

Figure 3 displays their preferences. The widening circle shows the answers of the younger generation while the narrow indicates their parents' choices. Three comments are occurred by the graph. Greek people associate more social mobility with an extra qualification than additional years of studying without a higher degree (eg. a person who chooses to obtain a second bachelor rather than to continue for a postgraduate degree). The older generation favors financial investing for educational purposes more than the younger, possibly due to the culture of those decades or because they were rewarded with higher returns to education. Finally, approximately 34% of the offsprings strongly believe that education cannot promote social mobility in Greece. This percentage is the highest among the younger generation and it may reflect a pessimism proceeds from 10 years of crisis, sinking of wages and opportunities in the country. In their informal comments during the interviews, many of them highlight that everybody has a bachelor or master degree hence this educational advantage has disappeared due to educational expansion. Relative achievement and other cognitive skills matter more in the labour market than absolute achievement. The oversupply of graduates encourages employers to select employees with different standards. Better-off descendants maintain their advantages through the social network of their parents.

Figure 3: Percentages of answers in question C5



### 5.4 Perceptions and social policy preferences

Lastly, we check the correlation among the experiences of social mobility, individual perceptions of mobility and acceptance of policies. Each coefficient in the table refers to a regression of the variable in the column on the variable in the row. The entries in the table are correlation coefficients, which indicate the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two variables in each row and column. A positive coefficient indicates a positive relationship, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase. A negative coefficient indicates a negative relationship, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable tends to decrease. The \*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate the level of correlation. The symbols denote statistical significant at 10%, 5% and 1%.

Absolute income mobility is a binary variable equal to one if the responders prefer absolute income mobility compared to the relative. Affected by crisis negatively is a binary variable equal to one if the responders experienced a decline in their salaries during the crisis (based on their statements). Pessimism for the future is a binary variable equal to one if the responders believe that their income will decline in the future. Absolute income mobility preferences for their children is a binary variable equal to one if the responders prefer absolute income mobility compared to a relative for their children. Government cannot do much is a binary variable equal to one if the responders say that social mobility can improve through equal opportunities in education, the labour market or if the government does not need to do something about it. Absolute education mobility is a binary variable equal to one if the responders prefer absolute educational mobility compared to the relative.

Table 7 shows the results of this statistical analysis that examines the correlation between these variables for the "children's cohort." The strongest positive correlation is between "absolute mobility preferences for their children" and "absolute income mobility" for themselves (0.929) and between preferences for absolute mobility for their children and absolute education-

al mobility (0.498) meaning that as the individuals desire absolute mobility for their themselves or for their children, they also desire absolute educational mobility. A negative correlation is found between "pessimism for the future" and "absolute income mobility" (-0.086) which means as the individuals have a negative outlook for the future, they tend to prefer relative changes in their income class. The effects of crisis in individual's lives correlates with their pessimism for the future as it was expected (0.215) whereas the latter linked to preferences for relative income mobility about their children.

**Table 7: Correlation between views of mobility, policy preferences, pessimism and personal experiences (children' cohort)**

	absolute income mobility	affected by crisis negatively	pessimism for the future	absolute mobility preferences for their children	gov can not do much
absolute income mobility	-				
affected by crisis negatively	0.005	-			
pessimism for the future	-0.086*	0.215***	-		
absolute mobility preferences for their children	0.929***	-0.06	-0.122*	-	
gov cannot do much	-0.065	0.011	0.057	-0.093	-
absolute educational mobility	0.443***	-0.019	0.006	0.498***	-0.076

While in children's cohorts, the results did not reveal any linkage between the perception and expectations of the governmental policies, in parents' cohort (Table 8) it is clear that people who were affected by the crisis and are pessimistic about the future declare that they have lost their hope regarding how the policymakers can boost mobility in the country. The data derived from correlations 7 and 8 suggests a divergence from the expected outcomes in hypothesis (d), signaling a need for further investigation and consideration of specific governmental policies when the participants would be asked. A consequence is that they prefer to have an educational advantage compared to their other citizens as they have lost their trust in the governmental willingness to change the situation.

**Table 8: Correlation between views of mobility, policy preferences, pessimism and personal experiences (parents' cohort)**

	absolute income mobility	affected by crisis negatively	pessimism for the future	absolute mobility preferences for their children	gov can not do much
absolute income mobility	-				
affected by crisis negatively	-0.024	-			
pessimism for the future	-0.003	0.131***	-		
absolute mobility preferences for their children	0.730***	0.010	0.028	-	
gov cannot do much	-0.031	0.101**	0.085*	-0.036	-
absolute educational mobility	0.421***	0.035	-0.098	0.377***	-0.109 **

## 6. Discussion

In our research, we tried to give the floor to the citizens and consider their views and opinions so as to include new ideas on how we can promote social mobility. As we showed at the beginning of the chapter, it is important for policymakers and governments to take into account citizens' views because beyond planning it is important to convince them to follow the policies. Starting with an optimistic finding from our survey, it was revealed that most Greeks recognize that there is social mobility in the country and this is positive evidence of what happened in the previous decades in terms of equality in opportunities in the country, as well as a good basis to set policies for the future. In the previous generation, the level of income affected to some extent the optimism about the existence of mobility. Furthermore, the personal experiences of social mobility influenced the views of participants especially the changes in their income recently.

In Greece, the main barrier to social mobility is considered by citizens to be the transition from the educational process to the labour market and it sounds logical based on the recent crisis that was experienced by the country. Other key obstacles that they should be dealt with, are social networks in which help some people to find either better jobs or well-paid job positions maintaining the social status of their families, income inequalities, and the fact that there is nepotism in certain professions. In order to experience upward mobility, Greeks believe in the so-called cognitive and non-cognitive skills. They are identified as important and we could include them in the educational system (since recognized as important by employers as well). These are multitasking, planning, teamwork, and leadership skills. While among purely work characteristics, they consider that professional experience and the willingness to work more hours can lead you higher up the social ladder.

Through questions we asked the participants to identify different aspects of social mobility, the results highlighted the great importance of absolute and relative mobility in their lives (and in

the lives of their children) through their answers. Especially in the question about absolute and relative educational mobility, the percentages were almost the same. The younger generation in particular does not recognize education as a mechanism that promotes social mobility and is less willing to invest more in their education than their parents, yet both generations recognize that more degrees can give a boost to the individual's future prospects.

Higher inequality leads to Greek population requiring redistribution policies from the state due to sense of unfairness. This sense is more intense when people believe that individuals belonging in the low incomes groups, are there due to social causes and not due to the lack of their efforts. And this belief and demand for state's intervention which can distribute the incomes more fair, is widespread (Katsimi et al, 2014). To comprehend this situation, it is essential to mention that after the dictatorship the majority of governments were centre-left oriented while the state played important role in many aspects of economic life in Greece. It owned multi-sectors until the start of financial crisis and it intervened in many others occupying numerous of public servants. It seemed to be like a socialist state which tried to follow the developments of capitalistic standards at the same time participating in all economic organizations of western world. Regarding the governmental policies through income redistribution, public educational investments, and equal opportunities in education and labour market and if they strengthen mobility, our survey indicated that recent personal experiences and pessimism about the future can negatively influence citizens' views and their willingness to follow these policies. It is therefore necessary for the state not only to set and apply these policies but to communicate them to the public and to convince the people and the agents that they are effective. There is a discussion on the impact of biased perceptions on attitudes towards redistributive policies and how positional concerns can play a role in these attitudes. It is noted that considering positional concerns is important in evaluating the effects of government fiscal policy.

Greece could follow the example of corresponding countries, especially the Scandinavian ones, which are successful both in terms of educational processes and also in high social mobility (Hilson, 2008).. The focus should move away from the mere acquisition of degrees and should be directed toward creating an education where empathy, social cohesion, and collective goals are cultivated. We can also follow the example of highly tracked educational systems such as the German one, where pupils are chosen in early stages of their school life in order to participate in Protipa and Pirimatika schools as this may diminish the relationship between innate ability and educational attainment and increase the educational outcomes for people from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

## Notes

1. "Expectations" are anticipations of future outcomes based on present conditions and societal norms (Bazzani, 2023). "Aspirations" are the goals or ambitions individuals set for themselves, often shaped by perceived opportunities and constraints (Hong, 2021). "Motivations" refer to the internal drivers that influence behavior toward achieving these aspirations.
2. Usually in this type of mobility it is noticed an upward mobility from occupation with lower skills to jobs with higher levels requirements and this is a signal of a country's development as well. This kind of mobility was something common in the developed countries the previous century.

3. For the purpose of this research: Perception is defined as an individual's subjective interpretation of their social environment, influenced by personal experiences and societal narratives. Opinion refers to an expressed viewpoint that reflects perceptions, attitudes, and cognitive evaluations of social phenomena. Assumption is a belief or presupposition held without explicit evidence, often underlying perceptions and opinions.
4. We estimated if the child indicated intergenerational upward or downward mobility by comparing the positions of both generation in their income distributions and the occupations based on ISCO-08.

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