

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BRAIN DRAIN IN GREECE AND NORTH MACEDONIA

CAUSES, TRENDS AND
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS



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FOREWORD

The present report aspires to provide an overview of the current situation regarding the issue of brain drain in Greece and North Macedonia. Its aim is to identify common and contrasting trends with regards to certain aspects of brain drain and mobility patterns in the two countries and come up with targeted policy recommendations.

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INTRODUCTION

Even though it is not a new term, brain drain has gained buzzword status, especially after the global financial crisis, and is more and more frequently used by experts, journalists, governments, politicians, and young people around Europe and especially in the wider South-East European region. The issue has been analyzed and examined since the publication of the report “*Emigration of scientists from the United Kingdom*” by the Royal Society in 1963 which focused on the issue of the emigration of British scientists from the United Kingdom towards the United States in the immediate period after the end of World War II.¹ Almost 70 years later, brain drain remains an on-going matter that still affects societies all over the world, especially the ones that are marred by a number of problems such as internal turmoil, bad governance and violation of human rights, low levels of academic freedom and poor investments in the field of research such as the societies of the Western Balkans and the wider South-East Europe region. The aforementioned reasons along with the existence of more favorable professional and educational opportunities in other countries as well as the desire to seek a higher standard of living leads to the migration of a significant number of highly educated and skilled individuals.²

The Balkan region has been deeply affected by brain drain. Ever since the 60s, educated and highly skilled individuals were looking for a way to migrate towards Western Europe for the reasons that were mentioned in the previous paragraph. This trend only grew stronger as the decades passed and the foundations of the political and economic system of Yugoslavia were shaken to the ground especially after the breakout of the Yugoslav wars. In the aftermath of the deadliest war Europe has witnessed since World War II, the newly born states were called to implement a series of economic and institutional reforms in order to undergo the democratic transformation required in order to reach the goals set by Europe.³ However, the overall complexity and slow progress of the democratization process along with the interconnection between bad governance, the lack of funding of the educational and research system and the inadequate respect towards human rights create a toxic environment for young professionals. Moreover, the global financial crisis inevitably hit the Balkan countries and the state of the economies deteriorated further. More specifically, almost half a million people left Serbia between 2007 and 2019 while around the same number of people migrated from Bosnia between 2013 and 2019.⁴ The trend is no different in Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and

1. Brian Balmer, Matthew Godwin and Jane Gregory, “The Royal Society and the ‘Brain Drain’: Natural Scientists meet Social Science”, *Notes and Records - The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 63 (2009): 339–353.

2. European Students’ Union (ESU), “BM77: Transforming brain drain into brain circulation in South Eastern Europe”, *European Students’ Union*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.esu-online.org/?policy=bm77-transforming-brain-drain-into-brain-circulation-in-south-eastern-europe>.

3. Vedran Horvat, “Brain Drain. Threat to Successful Transition in South East Europe?”, *South East European Politics* Vol. V, no. 1 (June 2004): 76-93.

4. Alice Taylor, “Balkan brain drain could be costing the region its future”, *Euractiv*, December 13, 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/balkan-brain-drain-could-be-costing-the-region-its-future/>.

Montenegro. Hundreds of thousands of people have migrated from the Balkans to Western Europe, mainly EU member-states.⁵

Having said that about the issue of brain drain regarding the Balkan states which aspire to join the Euro-Atlantic institutions, it is important to underline that EU member-states have also been deeply affected by brain drain despite the admittedly better position in which they stand on both economic and political level compared to countries that are not EU member-states such as the Western Balkans six. Migration is not a new phenomenon for Greece. Between 1950 and 1974 significant flows of Greek migrants moved abroad, mainly to Germany, the US, Australia and Canada. Their move was not only economically motivated, but also politically due to the developments of the late 60s and the overthrow of the democratic government by the Army.⁶ This trend continued after the restoration of democracy and during the 90s the number of people leaving Greece was significant. By the early 2000s, the situation in the country gradually became more stable on every level. However, this period ended with the breakout of the global financial crisis which hit Greece severely and created an unprecedented recession for over a decade.⁷

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Focusing on the literature around the brain drain, it is clear that there are more than one definition regarding this phenomenon. Nowadays, the term “brain drain” has become synonymous with high-skilled migration while carrying a negative undertone because it implies the loss of active and valuable assets of a society such as the highly educated and skilled individuals. The affected countries suffer an outflow of its educated elite, on a level that threatens the needs of national development in the long term. The Parliament speaker of Lebanon Nabih Berri suggested that brain drain is Lebanon’s biggest issue and a “*transmitted disease among the youth*”. Even though this phrase is loaded and a bit extreme, it can help us understand the importance and severity of the issue and its impact on the countries that cannot control the migration of graduates and the country’s most active part of the workforce.⁸

One of the simplest definitions of the term was given by Beine, Docquier and Rapoport and describes brain drain as “*the emigration of a fraction of the population that is relatively highly educated as compared to the average*”.⁹ The Routledge Dictionary of Economics suggests that brain drain is “*the international migration of highly qualified persons, especially surgeons, physicians, scientists, information technology specialists*

5. Dilek Kutuk, “The Western Balkans Must Reverse Their Brain Drain and Regain Their Youth”, *Politics Today*, February 9, 2022, <https://politicstoday.org/western-balkans-youth-brain-drain/>.

6. Charalambos Kasimis and Chryssa Kassimi, “Greece: A History of Migration”, *Migration Policy Institute*, June 1, 2004, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/greece-history-migration>.

7. Andrea Pelliccia, “Greece: education and brain drain in times of crisis”, *IRPPS Working Papers no. 54* (2013).

8. John Gibson and David McKenzie, “Eight Questions about Brain Drain”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 25, no. 3 (Summer 2011):107–128.

9. Michel Beine, Frederic Docquier and Hillel Rapoport, “Brain drain and economic growth: theory and evidence”, *Journal of Development Economics* Vol. 63 (2001): 275-289.

and engineers, from low-income countries to more prosperous economies". The differences in salaries and research facilities are pointed out as two main reasons that lead to the migration of the aforementioned groups.¹⁰ In our opinion, the definition that best describes brain drain, keeping in mind the specific characteristics of the countries of South-East Europe, was given by John Black who described brain drain as "a pejorative description of the tendency for talented people from poor countries to seek employment in richer ones. Sometimes this migration occurs because while similar skills are needed in both poor and rich countries, the rich pay more for them. In other cases brain drain occurs because the technical and economic backwardness of poorer countries means that job opportunities there are limited or non-existent. It is also possible that brain drain is encouraged because of tendencies in poorer countries to fill such good jobs as there are on a basis of family connections, political influence and corruption while on average richer countries, though subject to some of the same problems, tend to fill posts on a slightly more meritocratic basis."¹¹

At this point, we would also like to mention that certain academics examine the issue based on a center-periphery perspective by presenting the brain drain phenomenon as an example of exploitation of the poorer countries. Das underlines that the brain drain "implies losses in the intellectual potential of developing countries, owing to the fact that students studying abroad do not come home once they graduate"¹² while Ramos dos Santos suggests that the brain drain is similar to technology transfer but in reverse; developing countries are stripped of their highly qualified resources (human resources).¹³

AIM OF THE RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

The present report aspires to provide a general overview of the current situation in Greece and North Macedonia. Its overarching aim is to identify common and divergent trends with regards to brain drain and mobility patterns in the two countries and come up with targeted policy recommendations. The objective of our research is to shed light on a series of specific questions, such as:

- ▶ Do the majority of young people in the two countries prefer to study and/or work in their home countries or favor seeking educational and career opportunities abroad?
- ▶ What are the principal reasons which motivate individuals to study and/or work abroad?
- ▶ How are preferences shaped and what are the most popular options in terms of countries of choice and educational institutions?

10. Donald Rutherford, *Routledge Dictionary of Economics* (London: Routledge, 2002), pg. 76.

11. John Black, *A Dictionary of Economics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pg. 38.

12. Man Singh Das, "Brain Drain Controversy and Utilization of Returning Indian Scholars Trained Abroad", *International Review of Modern Sociology* Vol. 8, no. 2 (December 1978): 145-158.

13. Bohdan Jałowicki and Grzegorz Jerzy Gorzelak, "Brain drain, brain gain, and mobility: theories and prospective methods", *Higher Education in Europe* Vol. 29, no. 3 (2004): 299-308.

- ▶ Do those people who currently study in a foreign university or are employed in a foreign country consider returning to their home countries in the future, and if not, why?

The methodology we used to address the above questions was the distribution of online quantitative questionnaires to an equal number of citizens of Greece and North Macedonia. We developed the questionnaires in collaboration with the Public Opinion Research Unit of the University of Macedonia, which was also in charge of data collection and manipulation.¹⁴ The total sample of the research consists of 834 respondents (N=834), 420 from Greece and 414 from North Macedonia. 65% of the respondents reside in their home countries, 14% are planning to go abroad in the near future, 15% are currently living abroad and 5% have returned to their home countries after having lived abroad in the past. 44% of the respondents are male, 52% female and the rest 4% do not identify with any of the two categories. As far as the level of education is concerned, the most representative cluster is people who have completed higher education (Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral studies) (61%), followed by high school graduates (28%) and graduates of technical schools (4%). The most common occupation of respondents is "student" (34%) and "employee in the private sector" (31%). Employees in the public sector, freelancers, scientists and unemployed are also represented in the sample, while there is also a wide representation of different levels of perceived affluence. For a more detailed picture of the demographic data of the sample refer to the Annex.

The next two sections will provide a description of the main findings for each country respectively. This will be followed by a comparative analysis of the two cases. Despite the fact that citizens of North Macedonia face more barriers to mobility compared to Greek citizens, since Greece is a member of the European Union, the results indicate that both countries are almost equally affected by brain drain. A quick analysis of the data reveals that several similar trends are observed in the two countries. We will closely examine and try to explain those trends. In addition, we will scrutinize the differences in the preferences and the reasons which lead young talented Greeks and North Macedonians to seek better educational and employment opportunities abroad. Finally, based on this analysis, we will provide targeted policy recommendations which we believe will be instrumental in combating the problem of a shrinking qualified and highly-skilled workforce, enabling the two countries and the wider South-East Europe region to achieve a prosperous and sustainable future.

GREECE

Out of the 420 Greek respondents, 299 (71%) currently reside in Greece, while 43 (10%) intend to move abroad in the near future. 57 respondents (14%) are at the moment studying or working abroad and 20 (5%) have returned to their home country after having lived abroad in the past. More than two thirds of those who

14. We would like to give special thanks to Professor Nikos Marantzidis and Georgios Siakas for their valuable input and participation.

live or have lived in a country other than Greece have or had been abroad for less than five years (29% for less than 2 years and 42% for between 3 and five years).

When asked to choose between four possible definitions of brain drain, the overwhelming majority of respondents in the Greek sample (91%) replied that the definition that better describes the issue is “the migration of highly skilled and educated individuals”. 3% perceived brain drain as “the influx of highly educated persons from abroad” while another 3% as “the lack of talented, skilled and highly educated individuals”. Finally, only three respondents understood brain drain as “the illegal stay of highly educated individuals in the country”.

To understand the root causes of brain drain, it is essential to grasp people’s views and opinions on the quality of education, the employment opportunities and working conditions in their home country. The majority of Greek respondents (60%) evaluate universities in their home country, both public and private, either in a positive manner or holds a neutral opinion (29%). Only approximately one in ten respondents considers the quality of Greek tertiary education institutions to be low. This positive picture is somewhat reversed when it comes to the availability of employment opportunities. 34% believe that there are not enough opportunities, while 56% that there are some but not sufficient, making up 90% of the sample. Finally, when it comes to working conditions and salary levels in Greece, the picture is even more discouraging. More than 8 out of 10 respondents believe that those are poor. Only 4% evaluate working conditions and salary levels in a positive manner.

It is very interesting to see what Greeks responded when asked whether they would choose to study abroad should they have the opportunity. More than half of respondents (223 out of 420) stated that they would choose foreign universities for their studies. The most popular choices include the United Kingdom and the United States, while other preferred options are the Netherlands, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway). The main justifications of the people who replied that they would prefer to study abroad are that there are better prospects after the studies (mentioned by 202 out of 223 respondents), better universities (161), and better quality of life (143). Less common reasons are the friendlier environment to live in and the possibility to study a subject that was not available in the home country (37 and 39 respectively). The least important reason is having friends or relatives abroad (4).

When asked whether they would prefer to work in Greece or abroad, 220 out of 420 respondents stated Greece as their preferred option, indicating a reverse trend compared to studying abroad. The number of people who would prefer to pursue a career abroad is nevertheless still quite high (46%). The choices are similar to the aforementioned countries when it comes to work, with one difference being the increased prominence of Switzerland. The main motivations to migrate are higher salaries (mentioned by 162 out of 192 respondents), more employment opportunities (146) and better working conditions (140). Quality of life is also perceived as an important factor (94), while less significant reasons are the friendlier environment to live in (7) and having friends or relatives abroad (5).

Understanding the root causes which lead people to leave their home countries and seek better educational or employment opportunities abroad is crucial for finding

effective solutions to the problem. It is, however, equally important to know what people who live abroad think of their lives there compared to their home country, what are the possible difficulties they face, and whether they consider returning in the future? Let us see what the 77 respondents who currently live or have lived abroad in the past think. An overwhelming majority (97%) described their experience of living abroad as positive. When it comes to difficulties faced, the most frequently mentioned are missing their family (40 out of 77), more difficult human relationships (33) and higher living costs (32). Other difficulties experienced by Greeks abroad are the native language of the new country and the associated barriers (28), the weather (29) and the food (16). Focusing on the perceived differences between their home country and the country in which they currently study or work, 55 out of 77 stated that there is a notable difference in salaries, while 45 out of 77 pointed out that there are better career development prospects. According to the respondents, a further important difference concerns the treatment of employers towards employees (38). Surprisingly, flexibility in changing occupations was only mentioned by 4 respondents. As far as discrimination is concerned, only a small fraction of respondents reported being subject to such incidents. Quite a few respondents mentioned that they have experienced discrimination either at workplace (13) or in their social lives (13). Fewer respondents report cases of discrimination in have felt discriminated against in the academic (7) and friendly (2) spheres. Finally, 6 respondents stated that they have been discriminated against in all of the above spheres.

When asked about their intentions about the future, 50% of the respondents (sample, N=77) replied that they are satisfied with their lives and therefore intend to stay abroad. 46% of them stated that ideally, they would like to return to Greece but the lack of opportunities is a discouraging factor. 10% of the respondents said that they wish to stay but are compelled to return due to family reasons. 8% of the respondents will return because they cannot afford life abroad, despite their desire to stay, while 5% (of the respondents have already returned to Greece because they found life abroad more difficult.¹⁵

NORTH MACEDONIA

In the sample, 414 respondents were from North Macedonia. 59% of the respondents reside in their home country, 18% of them are planning to move abroad in the near future, a 16% already lives abroad, while 5% of them has returned to North Macedonia after living abroad for a period of time. Out of those that live or have lived abroad, more than 50% stayed or have been staying abroad between three and five years. In addition, 34% of the respondents lived or have lived abroad for two years or less while 13% for more than five years.

Regarding the phenomenon of brain drain and how it is perceived by the respondents from North Macedonia, the majority of them (65%) described brain drain as “the migration of highly skilled and educated individuals”. 9% suggested that brain

15. In the part of the questionnaire regarding their intentions about the future, the respondents from Greece (sample of 77) were allowed to choose more than one answer.

drain is “the influx of highly educated persons from abroad” while around 7% considered brain drain as the “illegal stay of highly educated individuals in the country”. Finally, 12% suggested that brain drain is “the lack of talented, skilled and highly educated individuals”.

The next set of questions focused on the perception of the domestic tertiary education as well the domestic job market. Around 23% of the respondents from North Macedonia evaluate the quality of the education provided by the country’s universities, both public and private, as good enough (19%) and very good (4%). On the contrary, around 29% have a negative opinion about the quality of education provided in the country’s universities while 44% stated that their opinion is neither good nor bad. When it comes to the domestic job market, 55 respondents mentioned that there are sufficient work opportunities in North Macedonia while 95 disagreed with that opinion. The majority though argued that there are some work opportunities in the country but they are not enough (60%). As far as salary levels and working conditions in North Macedonia are concerned, 68 respondents (16%) have a positive opinion. However, 174 respondents (42%) have a negative opinion on this specific issue while 158 out of the total 414 respondents (38%) have a mixed opinion.

Moving on, the respondents were asked to specify whether they would choose to study in North Macedonia or abroad if they had the choice. 203 respondents would choose to study in the country while slightly less (167) would prefer to study abroad. The most popular destinations among people who wish to study abroad are Slovenia and Germany. Other frequent answers included the United States, the United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Greece. Out of the 167 respondents that would choose to study abroad, it was mentioned by 128 that universities abroad provide more quality education. For 108, another important reason is the existence of better prospects, while it was also pointed out by 106 that the quality of life is better. The friendlier environment to live in and the possibility to study a specific subject not available in North Macedonia were less frequent options (24 and 22 respectively). Finally, a few (13) would study abroad because they have friends or relatives there.

Similarly to the previous set of questions, the respondents were asked to choose between working in their home country or abroad if they had the choice to do so. Almost 60% would prefer to work in North Macedonia while a little more than 30% would choose to work abroad. The countries that are mentioned more are Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. 130 respondents would prefer to work abroad. Higher salaries were mentioned the most (91), followed by the quality of life (72), and better working conditions (72). More employment opportunities were stated as a motivation by 68. Finally, only 11 respondents stated the friendlier environment as an influential factor to work abroad while 9 would consider migrating because of the presence of friends and family abroad.

The last part of the questionnaire was answered by the ones that are currently living or have lived abroad. Moving to a different country inevitably comes with certain difficulties. More specifically, 35 respondents mentioned the language barrier as an obstacle while 33 pointed out living costs as a difficulty. Additionally, 28 respondents

consider the weather conditions as a negative aspect of life abroad. Food-related issues were pointed out by 11 respondents. Another difficulty is the development of human relationships according to 15 respondents. Still, many (55) highlighted that missing their family and loved ones as the primary challenge in relation to living abroad. Regarding the perceived differences between North Macedonia and the current country of domicile, the most common answer (67) was the salary difference, followed by the career development prospects (45), the treatment of the employees by the employer/supervisor (23) and the flexibility in changing occupations (13). As far as discrimination is concerned, 19 respondents claimed to have experienced such incidents on various levels. Social discrimination was mentioned by most respondents (15). Other cases included discrimination at the workplace (6), within the university halls (3), in a friendly relationship (3), while one respondent has reportedly experienced all of the above.

Moving on to the last set of questions, the 86 respondents were asked whether they identify with certain phrases related to their intentions about the future. 56% of the respondents identified with the phrase “I intend to stay abroad because I am satisfied here” even though 22% of them also stated that they would return to their home country if there were more opportunities. 12% of the respondents expressed their wish to stay but family reasons do not allow it. 9% of the respondents find life abroad too costly, while 8% of them have already returned to North Macedonia because they were overwhelmed by life abroad.¹⁶

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The two neighboring countries made international headlines back in 2018 with the signing of the Prespa Agreement, which ended a decades long name dispute between them. For the most part, citizens in both countries believe that this agreement was neither beneficial nor unrewarding, according to the survey, although the general perception is closer to a positive evaluation than a negative one. It is essential to consider that Greece and North Macedonia have a different international status, the first being a member-state of the European Union and the latter being a candidate state for European accession. 7 out of 10 Greeks, who already enjoy European citizenship for forty years now, are happy being a part of the European family. Macedonians do not seem very convinced about the prospects of joining the EU, as opinions are more divided on the topic (37% positive, 37% neutral, and 17% negative). Still, both countries face a common undermining factor to their countries' prosperity, namely the brain drain phenomenon.

A motivating factor on comparative analysis was definitely the need to fully fathom what is the main rationale behind mobility patterns in both countries. The majority of the Greek respondents highlighted that it is the employment opportunities and working conditions which are somewhat difficult to cope with, whilst expressing a positive opinion on the quality of education in their home country. On the other

16. In the part of the questionnaire regarding their intentions about the future, the respondents from North Macedonia (sample of 86) were allowed to choose more than one answer.

side, Macedonians remain mostly neutral on their depiction of the education and working conditions, only to spot a common perception regarding the fact that employment opportunities seem inadequate to satisfy the labor force in both cases. More specifically, respondents from both countries expressed their uncertainty on sufficient employment opportunities by 56% and 60% respectively. It may seem a bit contradictory to previous results but it is actually the Greek youth who prefers studying abroad, while Macedonians would actually rather graduate from a domestic university. However, when it comes to selecting a foreign institution to pursue their studies, both countries turn to the West. By comparing their top choices it is evident that countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States are highly represented. At that point it has to be noted that whereas Balkan countries are not a popular option for Greek respondents, Macedonians included Slovenia and Greece as two of their often chosen study destinations. The aforementioned motives on why someone should explore study opportunities abroad, are being reflected upon these two central differences concerning priorities; Greeks tend to seek better career prospects after the course of their studies (48%), while Macedonians aim for better academic institutions (30%).

The research also indicated a similar urge to reinforce the local labor market on behalf of the youth in both countries. A focal incentive on leaving their home country to work abroad is the need for higher salaries presented evenly in both samples, followed by employment opportunities. It is obvious that what dissatisfies the work force the most in both cases on an equal level is the average salary. When asked to mention other countries that seem to fit in those criteria, respondents from North Macedonia excluded Slovenia, one of their top study destinations from their list while Greek respondents added Switzerland as one of their preferable work destinations. However, the results presenting the side of North Macedonia are distributed more evenly than those of the Greek side. This means that the former pay more attention to factors such as quality of life (17%) and work conditions (17%) in contrast to work opportunities, which happen to be more present in the latter's criteria list.

Moving on to a more sociological aspect of people's perceptions and eager to detect prevalent stereotypes about regional activities, the respondents were questioned upon whether they would study in another Balkan country. A reluctant Greek majority commented that they probably would not, while young citizens from North Macedonia seemed more familiarized with this idea. A complementary pattern of hesitation was also the case for Greeks regarding work preferences in the Balkan peninsula, 42% did not think of this option, producing a reverse outcome compared to the 40% of the respondents from North Macedonia that would definitely do so. Certainly this applies to a much larger contradiction between the latter which clearly stated a preference on studying in Greece, with a completely reversed answer of the Greek side, which showed low to no interest in studying or working in North Macedonia. Of course this is undoubtedly connected with the fact that little information is being shared about regional study and work opportunities. A whopping 44% from the side of Greece were probably unaware of regional efforts and opportunities, while the side of North Macedonia claimed at 48% that they most likely knew.

For those who did actually migrate, it is apparent that the overall experience is positively expressed from a Macedonian and Greek majority. Notwithstanding, be it

building a career and gaining expertise or working just to make ends meet, people in both countries pinpointed certain obstacles. First and foremost, one can notice crucial similarities regarding the traditionally strong family ties in both countries, as it is primarily mentioned when asked on difficulties in a mobility process. Undoubtedly, respondents from both sides set salary as the main distinction between their past and current living conditions. It is also noticeable that career development opportunities and social interactions with other colleagues are also considered important.

As we proceed to wrap up the survey, there are still questions to be answered. Did any of the migrating population come across discrimination issues? Thankfully enough, the majority in both countries answered negatively, although Greek participants reported more incidents of discrimination. Overall, the process appears to be relatively stable and respondents from both countries share a positive attitude regarding their mobility experience. Last but not least, over half of the Greeks highlighted the wish to remain in their country of choice as they feel satisfied by the services and quality of life provided. Whilst both respondents from Greece and North Macedonia replied that they would most probably return to their home countries, provided that there would be more job opportunities, Greeks tend to be more akin to that scenario (45%) whereas Macedonians' interest remained relatively low (22%).

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

It becomes evident from the above analysis that despite their different status both countries are faced with the challenge of their young citizens seeking better study or employment opportunities abroad. This has a detrimental effect on their long-term development prospects and prosperity, as a considerable part of the most productive segment of the workforce choose to offer their skills and talents in a different labor market. As a result, North Macedonia and Greece need to come up with effective solutions to address the issue of brain drain which has been especially prominent over the last 15 years. We, as SEE in Action¹⁷, drawing upon the insights we received from this research we would like to propose the following policy recommendations to contribute to overall effort of retaining talent and expertise in our region:

► **Overcome the accession impasse of North Macedonia and the rest of the WB6**

The EU accession of the Western Balkans Six (North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) would gradually attract capital and investments resulting in more employment opportunities, higher salaries and improved working conditions. By advancing the principle of EU social market economy, the suitable conditions that will be developed will motivate the citizens of the wider South-East Europe region to stay and thrive in their home country.

► **Increased and targeted investments in education and research**

Allocating more funds in education is necessary for preparing the future workforce of the country which will be the focal point of its long-term prosperity.

17. SEE in Action (<https://seeinaction.org/>)

More specifically, further investments in tertiary education are needed in order to improve the quality and the diversity of the offered fields of study and available research resources and equipment. This will create favorable conditions for aspiring highly educated and skilled individuals to pursue their goals without having to migrate.

▶ **Innovation and employment opportunities**

Encourage investments in innovative technologies and green jobs. The world may be changing rapidly, presenting serious challenges, but at the same time this comes with new opportunities for lasting positive transformations. Digitalization and sustainability policies which are prevalent in the EU agenda have the capacity to transform the labor market. The countries of the region need to step up investment in digital and high-tech jobs as well as jobs that will be the outcome of the on-going energy transition and the gradual shift to renewable energy sources. This will ensure that the South-East Europe region will not be left behind in comparison with countries which are already heavily engaged in this transformative process.

▶ **Ensure quality working conditions**

Developing and strengthening the existing legal framework and adjusting it to the emerging needs also associated with new forms of work (e.g. hybrid, virtual, remote) will ensure that employees will not be subject to unfair treatment and breaches to their rights. In addition, reinforcing monitoring mechanisms and regular checks and controls to safeguard the alignment with the legal framework will provide the workforce with increased security.

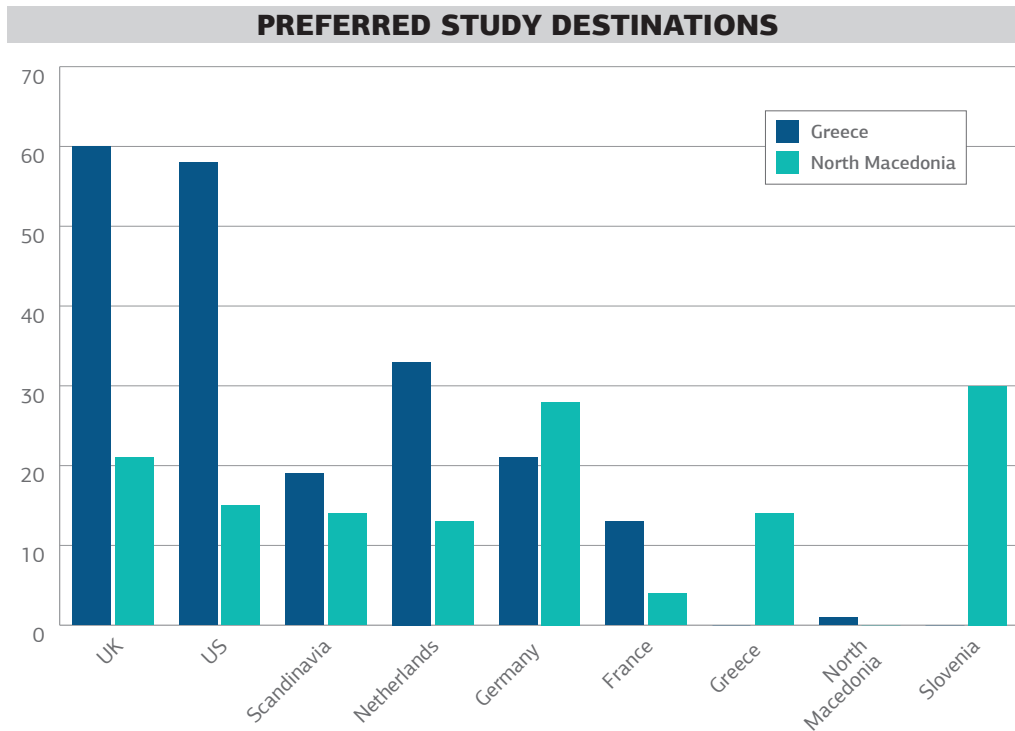
▶ **Regional cooperation and enhanced information in the South-East Europe region**

As we saw in the analysis in the previous chapters of this report, many young citizens from Greece and North Macedonia have not even considered the possibility of working in the region. While people from North Macedonia consider Slovenia and Greece for their studies, this does not apply for Greeks. We believe that, to a certain extent, this is the result of lack of information. Therefore, we actively support the establishment of bilateral youth offices in Greece and North Macedonia following the footsteps of Germany and France and the successful example of the Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ). By participating and supporting the “Cooperation for a Common Future”¹⁸ initiative, SEE in Action aims to foster regional cooperation and increase the flow of information for available educational and employment opportunities in the Balkans and the wider South-East Europe.

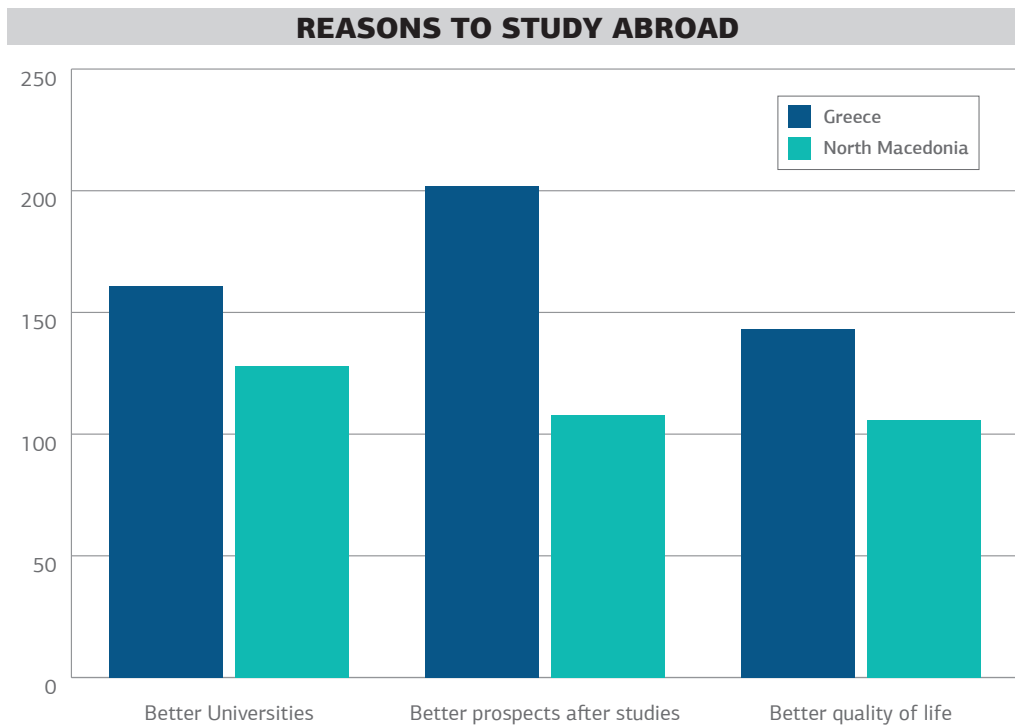
18. Cooperation for a Common Future (<https://www.c4cf.org/>)

ANNEX

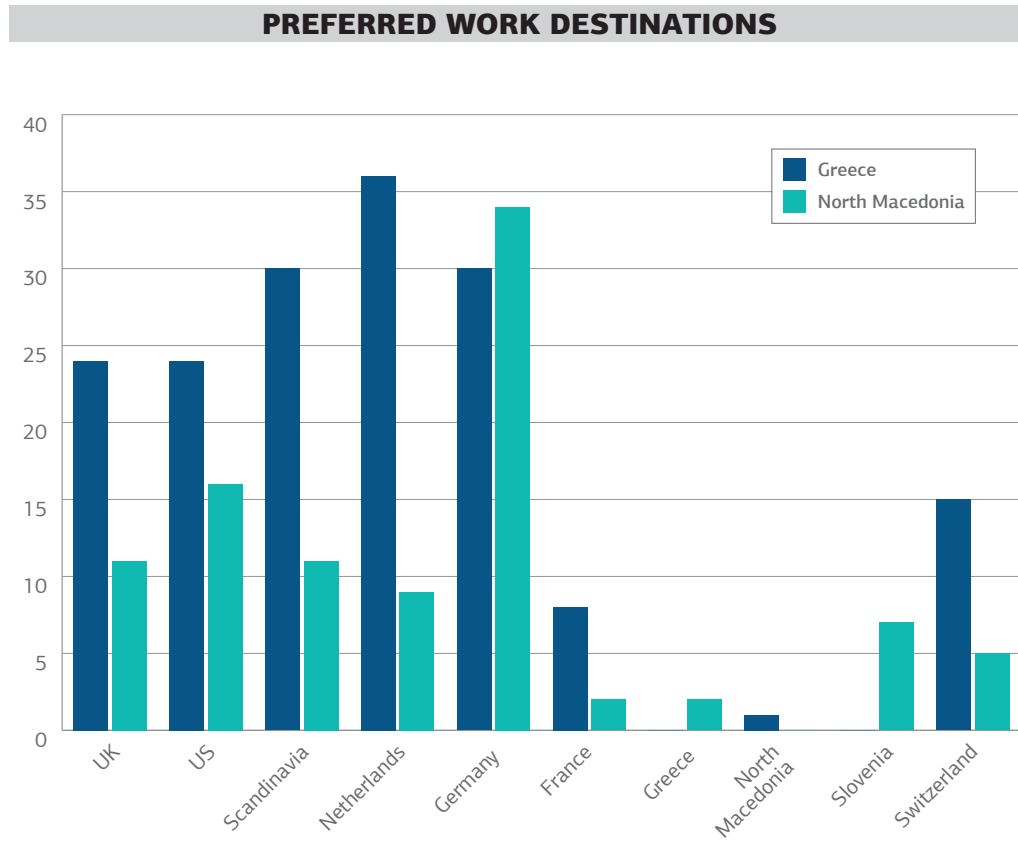
*If you would choose to study abroad, you would go to:
(respondents, count)*



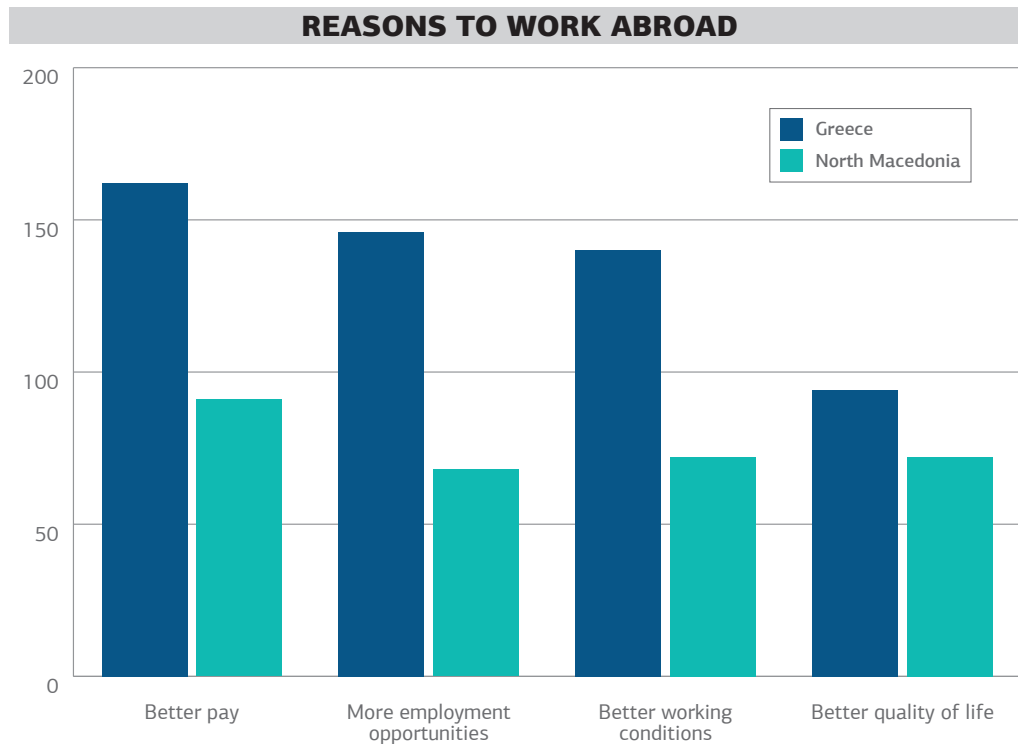
Main reasons to study abroad: (respondents, count)



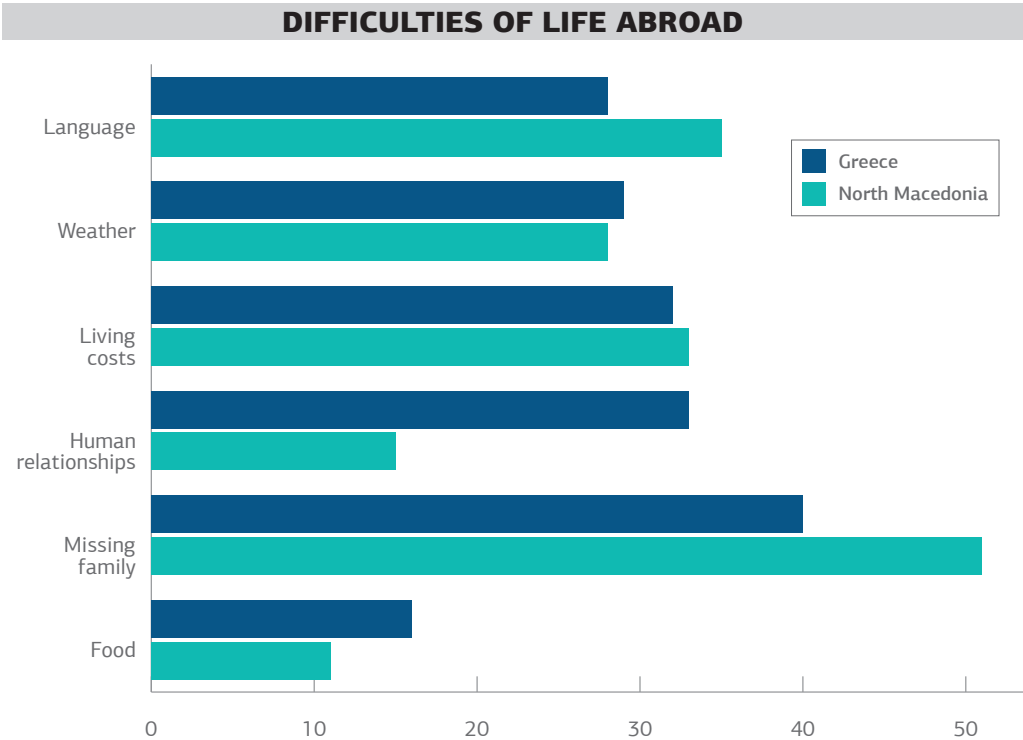
*If you would choose to work abroad, you would go to:
(respondents, count)*



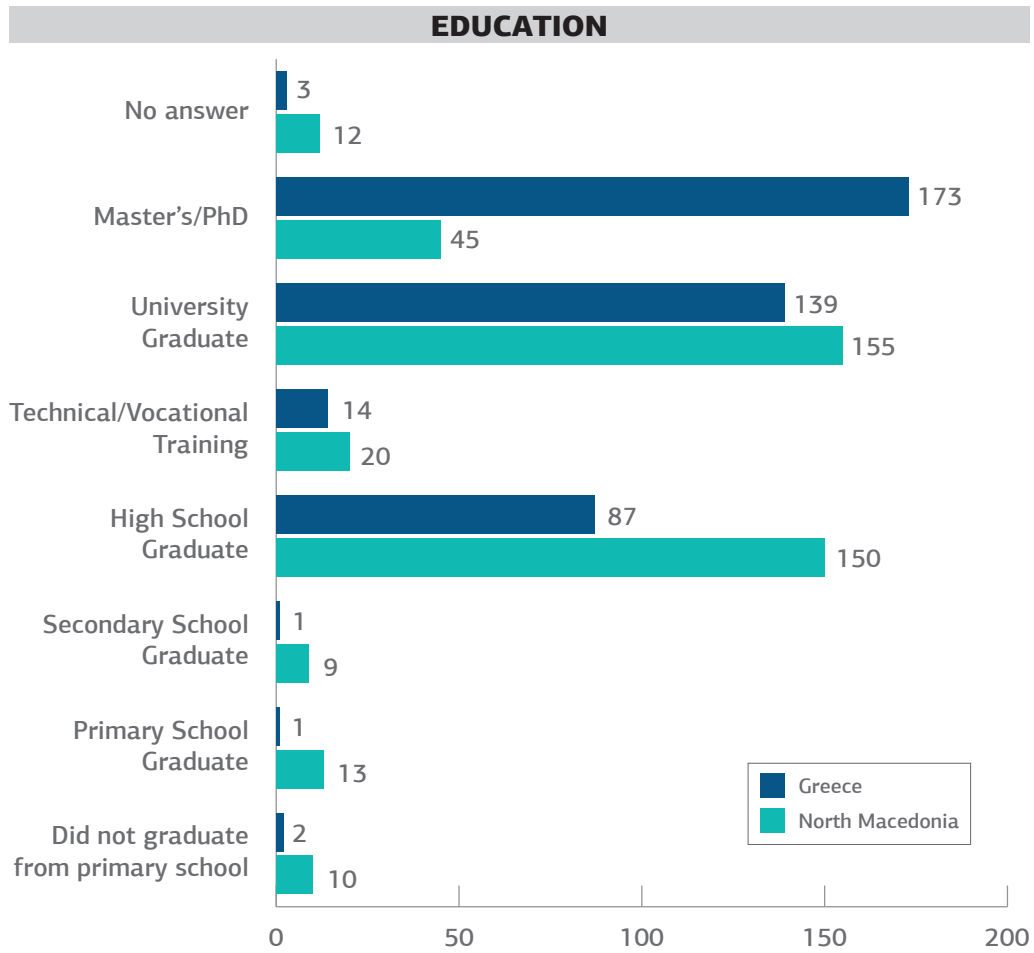
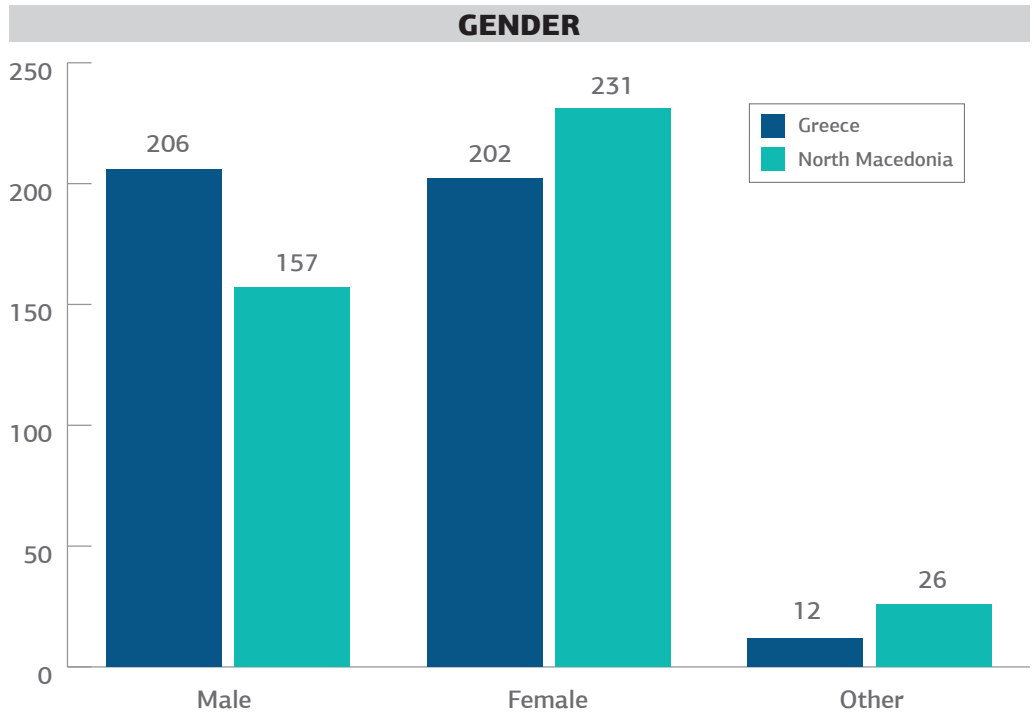
Main reasons to work abroad: (respondents, count)



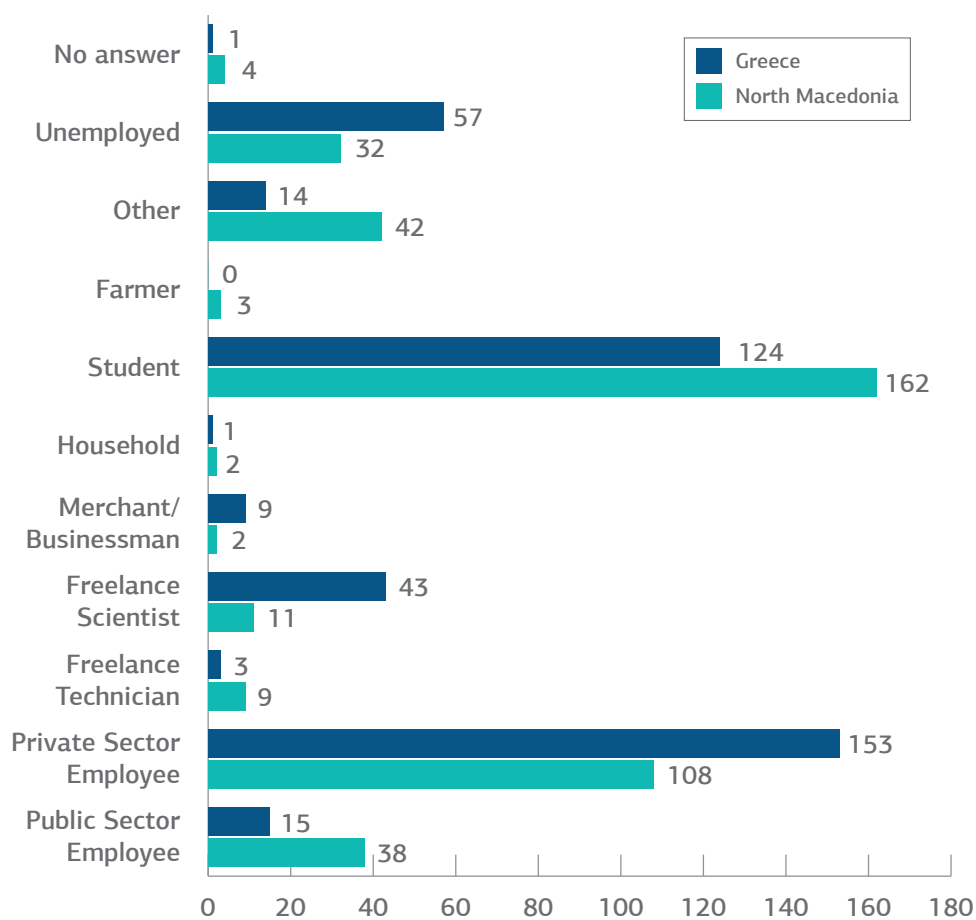
*Difficulties faced when studying/working abroad:
(respondents, count)*



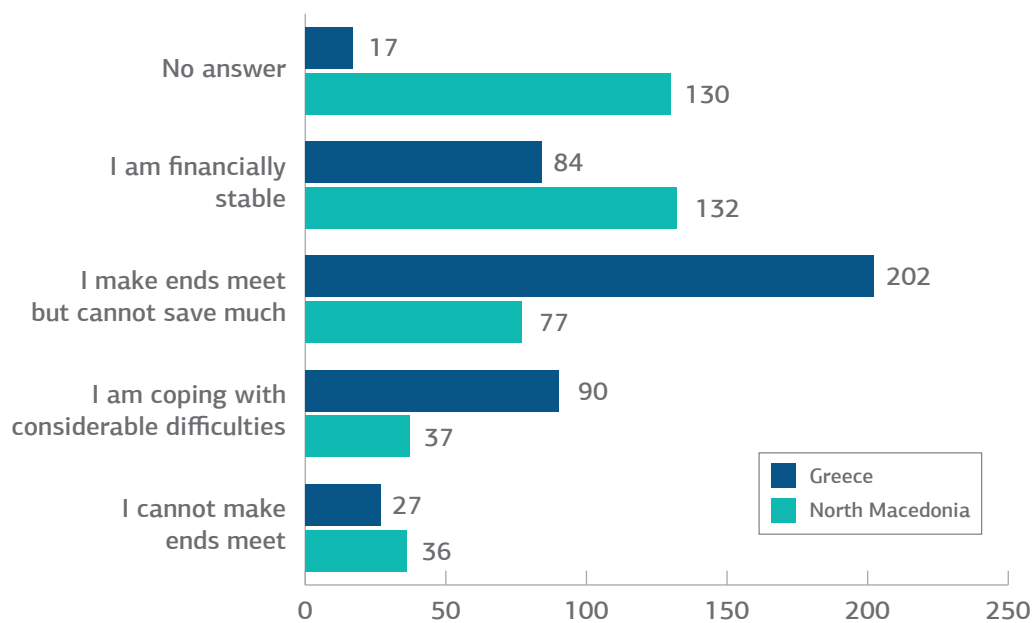
SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA



OCCUPATION



PERCEIVED FINANCIAL SITUATION OF HOUSEHOLDS



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