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"Brain-Drain" in an era of business and socio-economic uncertainty: the role of diversity training in managing social integration at the workplace. The case of Greece and Portugal

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the extent to which diversity training is being used in workplaces in the UK to better integrate migrant workers. The paper also aims at assessing the perceived challenges and benefits that diversity training may produce for individuals in an era of economic and social uncertainty and insecurity. The underlying reasons that made many highly-skilled individuals to emigrate would also be highlighted. Most importantly though, the paper aims at initiating a discussion as to what extent diversity training could facilitate their social integration at the workplace. Thus, to better serve its purpose, the study explores Greek and Portuguese migrant workers' perceptions of the phenomenon under investigation.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Individuals who left Greece and Portugal for UK were identified as the target audience of this research. Due to time and access constraints, web-based social and professional networks proved to offer the best solution in accessing our sample population. The snowball technique was also utilised (recommendations from existing participants). For instance, Facebook was one amongst them by accessing various Greek and Portuguese community groups. Additionally, several professional sub-groups within Linkedin resulted to higher participation. Further to that, specific levels of integration were suggested (e.g. participants' intention to stay in the organisation, social support from British colleagues, type of diversity training programmes, psychological & work-related distress etc.) so to better evaluate the extent to which diversity training could facilitate their social integration at the workplace. So far, 56 people have successfully completed the survey questionnaire, yet with a response rate to be quite low compared to the members within the respective groups.

Findings: Research evidence describes "brain-drain" as an intriguing and important issue both within the organisational and national contexts. The findings of this study indicate that crisis, low wages, and limited career advancement opportunities are amongst the most important reasons reported by respondents. On one hand, research participants reported an overall mediocre or inexistent diversity training programmes implemented within their workplaces. As a result, their social integration was difficult, with some participants indicating high levels of marginalisation within the workplace. In contrary, there were others suggesting that diversity training have offered them the social support being required to effectively integrate within the organisational and work settings. A large majority of our research participants outlined the importance of diversity training as a means of social integration at work. To this extent, the research could make a strong argument that diversity training can be viewed as a means to better integrate migrant workers at the workplace.

Originality/Value: The research is expected to offer both theoretical and practical recommendations. The paper offers an association between the "social integration" paradigm and the institutional perspective by suggesting that the two elements of social integration at work (e.g. social connectedness & work context) can facilitate migrant workers' social integration at work, while concurrently to eliminate its negative aspects. A brain-mobility process has dominated the headlines of most global media over the last 9-10 years, since the global financial crisis commenced. Final research findings and suggestions could constitute the starting point of future research within different national contexts; thus, to offer a comparison amongst people and nations over the phenomenon under investigation.

Keywords: Brain Drain, Work Migration, Diversity Training, Diversity at the workplace.

Introduction

The "brain-drain" phenomenon is not a current trend, yet it has become more intense in recent years particularly due to the global economic crisis. In the last few decades, many nations have been hit by this workforce mobility which resulted to a growing demand of highly-skilled individuals beyond national borders (Mitsiniotou, 2016; Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Hadjimatheou, 2012; Gurria, 2011).

Various authors suggest that in times of this new skill migration era, workforce migration can be regarded as "a jigsaw piece in the strategy to counteract brain-drain" (David et al., 2012: 25; Harvey, 2012). Therefore, brain-exchange could offer benefits both for the parent and the host country in terms of knowledge, training and skills/expertise reciprocation (Marinakou et al., 2016). Eventually, it may take the form of a temporary brain-loss which will be compensated by a corresponding brain-gain (ibid). Concurrently, we also need to consider that brain-migration might differ from one country to another, and from time to time, as that being suggested by Iravani (2011).

The causes of this brain drain are mainly financial-related and often associates with the economic loss for those countries experiencing high rates of high-skilled workforce mobility (Marinakou et al., 2016). However, other social, political, and professional circumstances could also associate with an individual's willingness to become a migrant worker. Overall, much of the relevant literature places greater emphasis on the perspective of organisations and governments with a tendency to overlook individuals (Ewers, 2007; Zhang, 2003). This is an important element to consider bearing in mind that well-educated and highly-skilled migrant workers could demonstrate their own sets of reasons of emigrating. As to that, the paper aims to explore individuals' perceptions and experiences over diversity training and its impact on workplace integration.

Taking all into consideration, this study examines the extent to which diversity training is being used in workplaces in the UK to better integrate migrant workers. The paper also aims at assessing the perceived challenges and benefits that diversity training may produce for individuals in an era of economic and social uncertainty and insecurity. The underlying reasons that made many highly-skilled individuals to emigrate would also be highlighted. Most importantly though, the paper aims at initiating a discussion as to what extent diversity training could facilitate their social integration at the workplace. Thus, to better serve its purpose, the study explores Greek and Portuguese migrant workers' perceptions of the phenomenon under investigation.

Literature Review

The extension and opening of borders in European Union through the Schengen agreement has resulted in extensive labour flows between European countries. This phenomenon, coupled with the recent economic crisis, has propelled the attention of academic and policy researchers in investigating its impacts on societal, economic and workplace levels (Cerna, 2014; Meardi, 2012; Trappmann, 2011).

Brain migration could be described as an intense process that affects many and different individuals and/or population groups (Harvey, 2012). According to Iravani (2011), brain migration can be categorised into a four-tier classification, namely the "brain-expert", the "brain-exchange", the "brain overflow", and the "brain-drain". The author suggests that due to demand and supply declinations, there is always a surplus ("brain overflow") of highly-skilled individuals within a local/national employment market, which might be absorbed from

a different one (ibid). The "brain-drain" refers to the outflow of competent professionals to a different country, while a "brain exchange" could occur between two or more countries when individuals from one country emigrate to another one (and vice versa) so for a knowledge and expertise transfer to take place (ibid). In that case, this phenomenon might be temporary as the "brain losses" are compensated by the respective "brain gains" (ibid). Both today and in the past, a significant growth of highly-skilled workforce mobility was recorded for a variety of reasons. In most cases though, economic factors have been the root of this work migration (ibid). Further to that, brain mobility associates with the intention to look for new career opportunities elsewhere due to push factors such as the inadequate organisational budgets for staffing, training and developing the workforce, unfavourable employment conditions, unattractive remuneration packages, ineffective utilisation of a country's workforce expertise, political interference and/or corruption etc. (Marinakou et al., 2016; David et al., 2012; Iravani, 2011; Hilderbrand and Grindle, 1997). In addition, Dalla et al. (2013) argued that pull factors (e.g. greater career advancement opportunities, and career development incentives etc.) being offered from the host labour markets constitute the main reasons of most "work immigrants" willingness to emigrate. Today, the term is also used in order to describe international work migration with brain inflows and outflows from one country to another so for the brain losses to be compensated by the respective brain gains (David et al., 2012). Yet, the extent to which this brain mobility could cause the loss of cultural and social capital between the sending and receiving countries is a matter of debate.

The large majority of brain outflows (both from Greece and Portugal) were recorded as brain inflows for UK. Precisely for UK, brain inflows aimed at filling in the gap of severe labour market shortages, particularly in low skill and low paid sectors, such as manufacturing, hospitality and construction (McDowell, 2009). Yet, in contrast to that, many highly skilled individuals immigrated to UK as well in an attempt to seek for new employment opportunities sine their countries could not offered these to them. Greater brain mobility was noticed within the construction industry (both for low- and high-skilled individuals), yet with brain inflows to be noticed within the health (e.g. doctors & nurses), education, banking and finance and shipping sectors (ONS, 2017). However, following the results of the UK referendum to leave EU, these developments have recently fostered political debate about the role and flows of migration within the UK. In most cases though, work emigration results from a combination of "push factors" (home country) and "pull factors" (host country). Further to that, there is also a social loss for them that relates to the exodus of its most capable and well-educated professionals (Smith, 2016; 2015). Taking all into account, such a social phenomenon becomes increasingly a matter of concern within the EU and across the globe, as in many cases, this brain mobility is not entirely exploited and for the benefit of both countries, while in some other cases work migrants' overflow from one country to another has also resulted to workplace-related problems such as lack of individuals' social embeddedness in the workplace (David et al., 2012).

Ongoing international competition in global labour markets, along with the aftermath of the global economic crisis (e.g. increase in unemployment rates, job and social insecurity, poverty etc.) could both take the credits in bringing brain migration on the fore front again (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2016; Koulouris et al., 2014; Ifanti et al., 2014; Giousmpasoglou, 2014; Christopoulos et al., 2014). Such a "brain-outflow" is expected to have major long-term implications for both countries' economic growth and competitiveness if it is not compensated from a respective "brain-inflow" (Theodoropoulos et al., 2014; Gropas and Triantafyllidou, 2013; Verma et al., 2008). For instance, a loss of national human capital resources could be noticed as the host countries receive the respective educational return on

investment of those individuals who choose to emigrate (Ifanti et al., 2014; Iravani, 2011, Marinakou et al., 2016). Further to that, brain migration is interrelated with several pressing global concerns (e.g. trade, human rights, development, security etc.) followed by a diverse set of actors with contradicting interests (Harvey, 2012; Kuhn and McAusland, 2006). Therefore, the consideration of the migration literature becomes central to this research. The Neoclassical theories of workforce immigration emphasise on the employment opportunities being offered to individuals both within their home countries and across borders, and their intention to emigrate so as to secure better work earnings (Kubursi, 2006). Thus, it is believed that brain mobility is driven by individuals' willingness to maximise the positive outcomes of their career decisions (Joly, 2004). Dual Labour Market Theory suggests that the pull over the push factors play a more significant role in individuals' willingness to emigrate due to the greater labour demands on behalf of the host countries (Jennissen, 2006). The world systems theory suggests that workforce immigration is capitalism's by-product by simply arguing that labour migration depends on where feasible and better opportunities are offered (Bonifazi, 2001). Network theory proposes that interactions between individuals and their network of relatives and friends in the host countries associate with their decision to emigrate (IOM, 2004). This theory could constitute the basis to explain the large brain-inflows to specific countries across the globe (e.g. Greek and Portuguese to UK). Overall, migration literature describe brain mobility as a process that relates with supply and demand in labour markets, by further suggesting that these can help reduce the supply and demand imbalances being presented within the labour markets, to remove pay inequalities amongst countries, and for promoting the economic growth of both the sending and the hosting county. To a large extent, immigration theories suggest that brain mobility do not just occur owing to social and economic circumstances (and/or due to the push and pull factors), but other factor are also at play (e.g. government policies etc.) of similar importance.

Indeed a number of research studies have also indicated that the role of national political frameworks towards migration policies is crucial in understanding the problems faced by migrants in the workplace. Much of academic research has focused on the consequences of migrants not entering the labour market and failing to integrate into the society (Hakak and Ariss, 2013). Scholars have also given extensive attention on the organisational benefits and challenges of workforce diversity for organisations (Shen et al., 2009). However, little attention has been given to the experiences and perception of integration of individuals who have been able to enter the labour market. Although previous research has focused on national policy frameworks to understand the integration of migrant labour into the society, recent studies also began to recognise the role of employers (McGovern, 2007; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). For instance, Rodriguez (2006: 453) argues that in the US "employers play an important if not critical role in the development of immigrant labour streams, ranging from passive hirer to central organizer". Employers, then, become key gatekeepers to the entry of migrant labour into the labour market and to their further integration within the workplace and society as a whole. It is natural that researchers have been increasingly acknowledging the key role that the relationship created between the employer and the migrant worker has in the process of understanding migrant individuals within the society and workplace (Fellini et al., 2007; McGovern, 2007; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Thompson et al., 2013). The key argument is that to understand migrant workers' social integration at the workplace, one has to include the workplace context within the analysis.

In some other cases, individuals' social integration at the workplace is not successful due to unexpected and unfavourable working conditions, poor management, inadequate training budgets, limited social integration due to the social change related to migration etc. (Favell,

2014; Agrawal et al., 2011; Gurria, 2011). As to that, it is widely agreed that companies' decision of hiring migrant labour is rooted in coping with labour shortages and minimising labour costs (Fellini et al., 2007). Although this argument is logically and empirically sound, Dench et al. (2006) suggests that deeper reasons could lie beneath the more cost-driven forces. The literature proposes an image of migrant labour being more motivated committed and disciplined and having more work ethic compared to the national worker (Rodriguez, 2006; Dench et al., 2006; CIPD, 2017). This image of "good worker" is particularly well illustrated in MacKenzie and Forde's (2009) study. They report the managerial perception on European migrants as having a great attitude towards work and their willingness to work successive hours without stopping. This image resonates with that of a vulnerable migrant worker who is often subject to extensive employer control and exploitation in both the working and personal lives (Dundon et al., (2007). For instance, Anderson (2010) reports that migrant workers often experience forms of employment characterised by uncertainty, atypical contracts and insecurity. Therefore, the key determinant of social integration at the workplace associates with diversity management and strategic thinking of people-centred policies (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006). One of the key areas in managing a diverse workforce is training (Shen et al., 2009).

Diversity training refers to all the strategies focusing on managing diversity at the workplace (Herring and Henderson, 2015). It involves creating a supporting climate of all employees' social integration at the workplace so to contribute collectively to organisational goals (ibid). It further represents an important social network and structural aspect that can determine social support, cohesion and social capital (Song, 2012; Berkman and Glass, 2000). Effective diversity training programmes could also facilitate business communication. Eventually that could facilitate individuals' bonding within their workplace colleagues so as to reach a consensus on their roles and goals (Song, 2012). In the UK, professional bodies of HRM have been increasingly concerned with the challenge of implementing HR-related diversity programmes (CIPD, 2017). A significant part of these programmes are related to training that aim at better integrating migrant and minority groups to mitigate the organisational and societal problems raised previously in this paper. For instance, affirmative organisational action practices such as diversity training have been introduced to counter integration problems, discrimination, and harassment episodes (Shen et al., 2009; Stewart and Tansley, 2002; Swart et al., 2003; Nafukho et al., 2004; Swanson, 2001). The diversity training programmes that have been widely used by consultancy firms are often seen as means of fostering the integration of migrant labour and minorities through decreasing levels of cultural and language marginalisation (Bhagat and London, 1999). Employees' social integration at the workplace can also directly associate with many other functional and/or structural aspects of work-related networks that relate to employees' mental health such as peers' social support, social cohesion and interaction, and social regulation and/or control (Schmidt and Muller, 2013; Song et al., 2011; 2010). In that case, Kessels and Poell (2004) argues that organisations should promote the appropriate strategies in helping their employees developing their social skills through relevant training which in turn will facilitate their social integration at the workplace, along with enhancing organisational competitive advantage (Mankin, 2009; Wang and Holton, 2005).

Although there has been relevant academic analysis on the importance of brain mobility (either through a brain-drain or brain-exchange process) and employees' social integration at the workplace (Larner, 2007; Saxenian, 2006; Iredale et al., 2003), relevant research on the experiences and perception of integration on behalf of those who have been able to enter the labour market is nascent. Further to that, our research looks at how diversity training could

facilitate the social integration of migrant workers at the workplace through the respective perceptions of our research participants.

Research Methodology

Following this research study's focus on "brain-drain" and the role of training in managing diversity at the workplace, individuals who emigrated from Greece and Portugal to Britain (UK) to search for career opportunities were identified as our target audience. As it was difficult to directly (face-to-face) approach all of them, as many were scattered across Europe (some even beyond European boarders), various web-based social and professional networks appeared as the best solution in accessing our research participants. For instance, Facebook offered access to various Greek and Portuguese community groups. Additionally, several professional sub-groups within Linkedin allowed the researchers to approach additional research participants. A survey questionnaire was distributed focusing on identifying demographic information and other statistics (e.g. age, sex, recipient country, educational level and work occupation etc.), along with highlighting the factors that made those individuals to emigrate, their intention to return back home, what will make them return and their perceptions of how training may facilitate their social integration at their new workplace in the host country and organisation.

The snowball technique was also utilised (recommendations from existing participants). Such technique assures that all participants share those characteristics being required from the research (e.g. individuals who migrated abroad), along with possessing the desired knowledge to address the survey questions. Eventually, that helped the researchers to increase their participants' pool, and thus to enhance their research's outcomes through their respective insights. Yet, only 56 individuals have successfully completed the survey questionnaire so far, and thus for the researchers to look for alternative ways to increase the participation rates.

Discussion and conclusion

The research project in which this study is embedded has proposed three main research objectives: (i) examine the extent to which diversity training is being used in workplaces in the UK to better integrate migrant workers; (ii) assess the perceived challenges and benefits that diversity training may produce for individuals in an era of economic and social uncertainty and insecurity; (iii) and examining the extent to which diversity training could facilitate their social integration at the workplace. These have been partly addressed in the current study, whereas others are yet to be addressed and finalised in future studies.

The study identifies the large majority of our participants as constituting "Generation Y", based upon their demographics and profile characteristics (fig.1).

Figure 1: Participants demographics
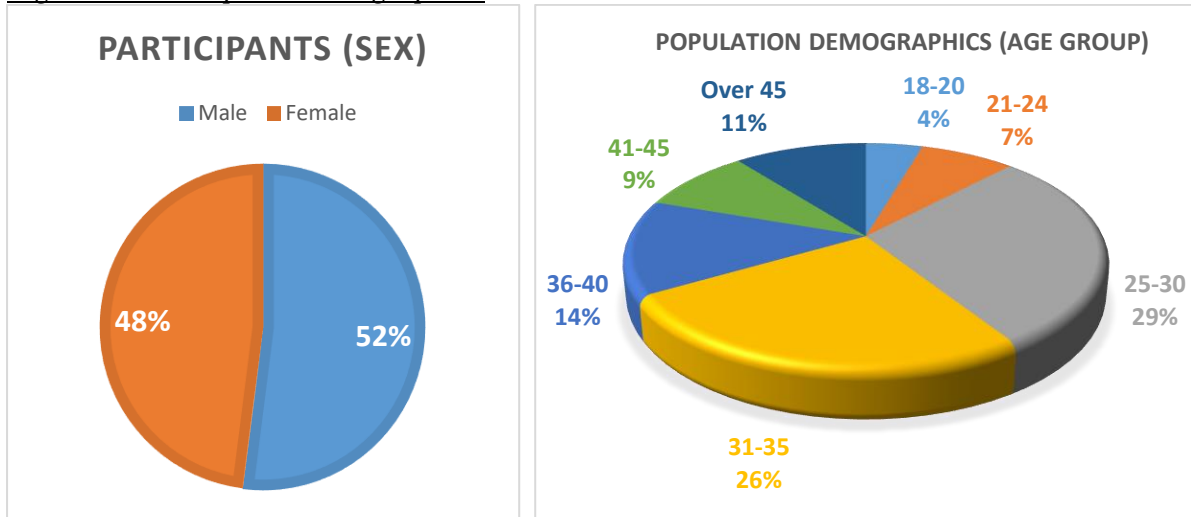
That could offer a clear indication that the youngest and brightest brains have emigrated from Greece and Portugal. All research participants outlined that they have chosen to emigrate so as to look for better career opportunities abroad. To them, moving to UK seemed the best solution. As to that, much of them chose UK over other European countries to start a new career and a new life respectively (fig.2)

Figure 2: Participants choice of host country
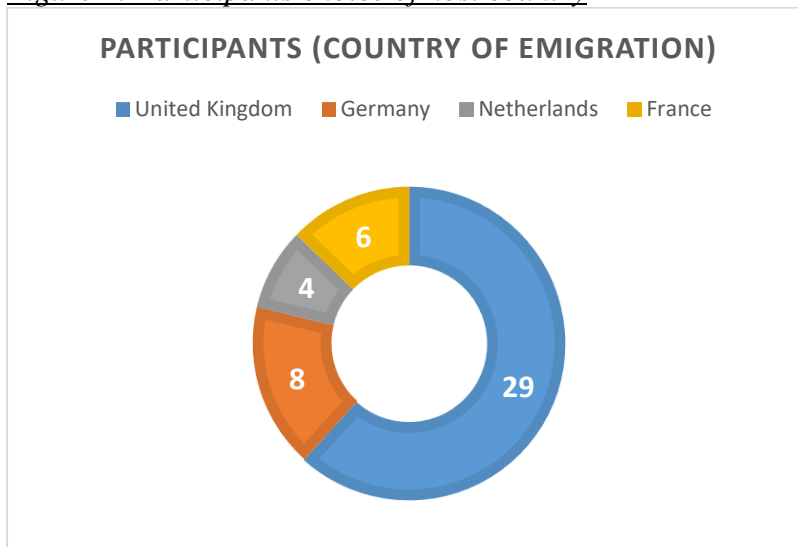
The large majority of the participants aged between 20-35 years old suggested that they used to work before leaving Greece and Portugal, yet they thought their life and work prospects could be improved elsewhere. Further to that, much of them decided to move abroad as either because they have been made redundant due to the economic crisis or in order to secure a better future for their family (mostly referring to their children – providing them the opportunity to study and look for work in a more stable economy).
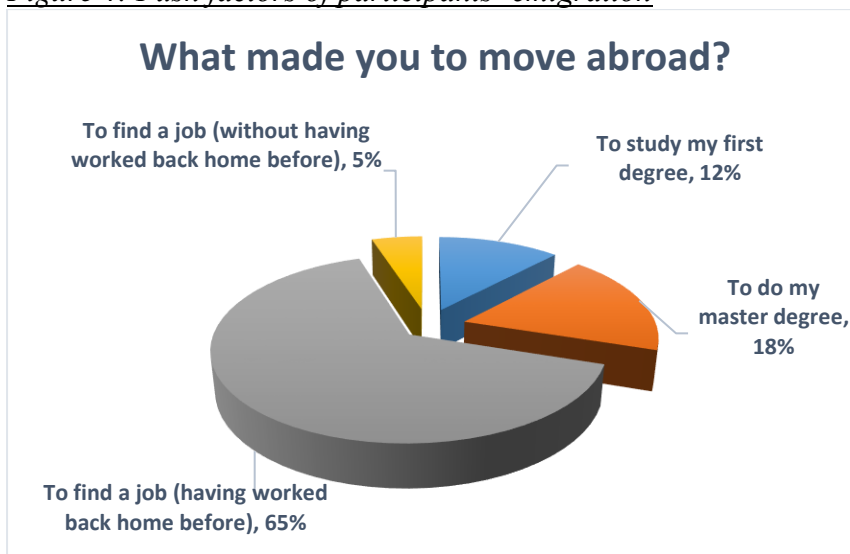
It is not a surprise that most participants' educational level was quite high as well, with much of them holding a master's degree, followed by those with a PhD, a bachelor etc., further supporting our previous point that the brightest brains are leaving both countries (fig.3).

Figure 3: Participants educational level

Educational Level

7% | 11% | 18% | 39% | 25%

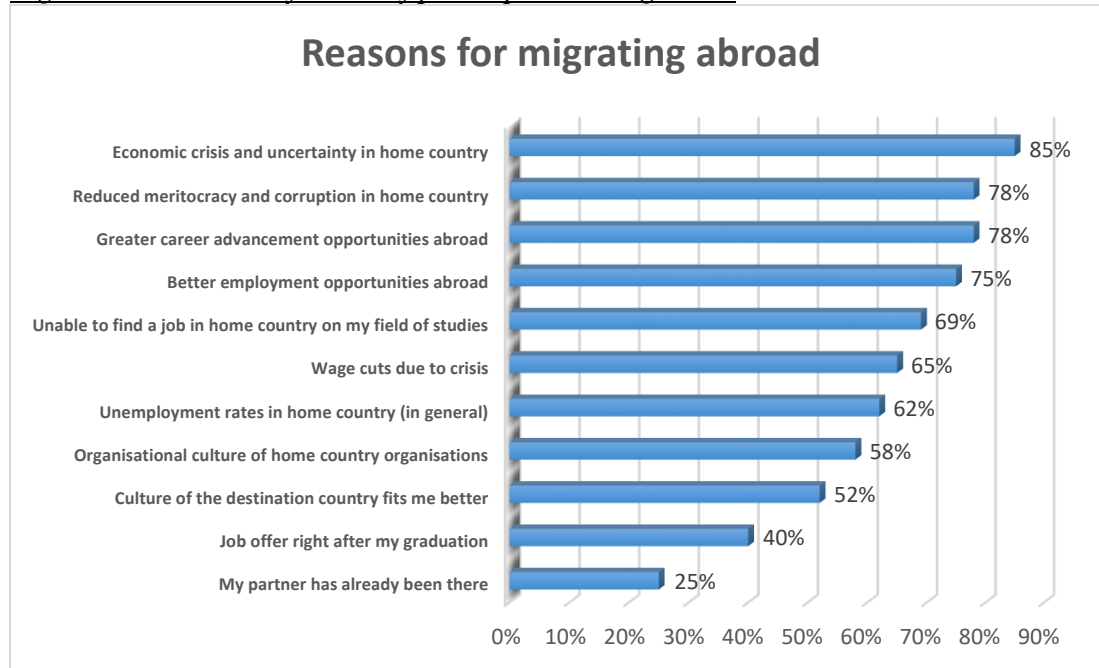■ Master (MSc, MA) ■ PhD ■ Bachelor ■ College ■ No degree
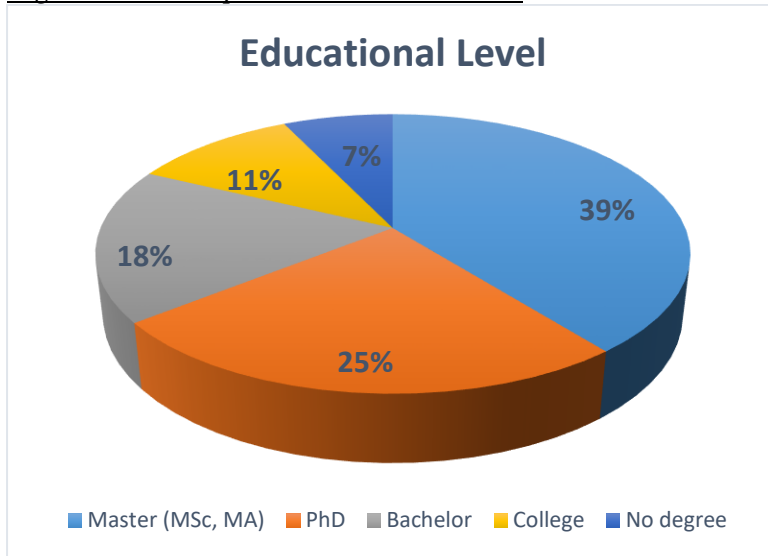
Having being asked to indicate the push factors of their decision to emigrate, their responses indicated the obvious: "to find a job – while having worked back home before" (fig.4).

Figure 4: Push factors of participants' emigration

What made you to move abroad?

To find a job (without having worked back home before), 5%

To study my first degree, 12%

To do my master degree, 18%

To find a job (having worked back home before), 65%

Other emerging push factors related with the economic crisis and the employment uncertainty both in Greece and Portugal, followed by the reduced meritocracy and the political corruption (fig.5).

Figure 5: Extra Push factors of participants' emigration

Reasons for migrating abroad

Reason	Percentage
Economic crisis and uncertainty in home country	85%
Reduced meritocracy and corruption in home country	78%
Greater career advancement opportunities abroad	78%
Better employment opportunities abroad	75%
Unable to find a job in home country on my field of studies	69%
Wage cuts due to crisis	65%
Unemployment rates in home country (in general)	62%
Organisational culture of home country organisations	58%
Culture of the destination country fits me better	52%
Job offer right after my graduation	40%
My partner has already been there	25%

Moving beyond those basic yet interesting observations, in relation to the first aim of this research project, there is anecdotal evidence that shows diversity training as increasingly receiving attention from organisational management. For instance, Maxwell et al. (2001) argues that people in the UK public sector normally regard diversity training as providing more equal opportunities for the whole workforce. Indeed, a recent survey of individuals within UK organisations charged with diversity management responsibilities found that 94% of respondents said their organisation employed some sort of diversity awareness training, and 77% mentioned offering diversity training to employees in managerial roles (CIPD, 2017). However, as the literature review highlighted many organisations have not yet been successful in training and retaining migrant employees (Goodman et al. 2003). Managers in organisations where there is a lack of effective HR diversity polices are likely to promote or rate highly subordinates who have similar cultural backgrounds and experience (ibid).

In relation to this research study, the preliminary findings do not yet allow a full picture of whether the analysed workplaces (through participants' perceptions of them with regards to diversity training) do indeed apply effective diversity training programmes. A large majority of our research participants (42 out of 56) though outlined the importance of diversity training as a means of social integration at work. However, research data offered from participants' perceptions of diversity training and social integration at work suggests that diversity training and diversity awareness training varied according to sector and the organisation's size. Thus, on one hand, some research participants (16 out of 56) reported an overall mediocre or inexistent diversity training programmes implemented within their workplaces. There were many highlighting that although a diversity and inclusion policy exists within their organisations, this is more for legitimate purposes so as to meet the legal requirements of the UK labour law. Therefore, having not an actual diversity training approach in place (beyond meeting legal obligation), participants outlined that their social integration was difficult, with some of them indicating high levels of marginalisation within their workplace. That also emerged as of their limited daily social networking with their native colleagues.

In contrary, the large majority of our participants (40 out of 56) argued that diversity training have offered them the social support being required to effectively integrate within the organisational and work settings. They have recalled various experiential training interventions (e.g. on-the-job training, role playing, sensitivity training etc.), either individual or group and beyond that required as part of their induction, targeting in enhancing their workplace behaviours, along with others focusing on increasing their cultural awareness. All training aimed at highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion within the workplace, along with how to treat diverse stakeholders. Following their comments, they have also reported increased levels of productivity and organisational efficacy; fully supporting Herring and Henderson (2015) suggestion that diversity training does pay off. Further to that, those participants were also the ones indicating high levels of daily social interaction/networking with their colleagues which actually made it easier for them to socially integrate both within their work and life in the UK. Based upon this evidence, the research could make a strong argument that diversity training can be viewed as a means to better integrate migrant workers at the workplace.

In line with those participants who argued against their organisation's efforts to social integrate them through their diversity policies, this research study is also able to preliminary propose some explanations for the absence of good diversity training within the studied population. Firstly, workforce diversity and diversity awareness has only assumed the status of a key success factor in business and society only since the 80s (D'Netto and Sohal, 1999), and has only come into the national legal framework since 1970 and in a final version with the Equality Act in 2010. Thus, the actual acceptance and integration of workforce diversity practices may take more time to be considered as crucial for a business. Secondly, the data and literature reviews suggests that British managers do not yet pay attention to workforce diversity due to the role and overall perception attached to the migrant worker as "the good worker". This group of workers tends not to create many problems and appears to comply easily with organisational rules, or overlook any disadvantageous employment, contractual or relationship condition.

However, it is also suggested that diversity training and the development of migrant employees' skills may reduce the feeling of alienation and foster integration in the organisation and society. The preliminary results of this research study indicates that while identification of training needs is positive by the respondents, relevant diversity training programmes to deal with diversity-related issues are rather inadequate. The findings are not yet able to reveal which types of training programmes are inadequate or absent from the studied organisations. Moreover, respondents suggested that their organisations do not appear to be focusing on developing English language skills of migrant employees. This may be due to employers not regarding language barriers as a problem. However, unless migrant employees possess a good understand of English, they will not be able to participate effectively in team discussions or socially mingle with colleagues. Such inability often results in migrant employees being perceived as being "too quiet" by managers, or not completely integrate into workforce. This may impact on the promotion prospects of this group of workers.

All in all, having assessed participants' perspectives on the role of diversity training in managing their social integration at the workplace, the study highlights a positive association between diversity training and social integration at the workplace on behalf of migrant

workers. This study theoretically and methodologically extends the relevant literature in three ways. First, it advances our understanding of the role of diversity training (and of its consequences) with regards to migrant workers' social integration at the workplace. Therefore, employees who are more socially integrated at the workplace report higher productivity and lower levels of psychological distress. Second, this study merges the institutional perspective on diversity training with the social integration paradigm so as to demonstrate their positive correlation. Finally, it sheds light onto a different aspect of social integration at work through employees' diversity training. Since this research is a working paper, its final results are subject to change. Yet, future research might be benefited from a comparison of more than two countries operating under different socio-economic circumstances so as to offer a more holistic view of the role of diversity training in managing social integration of migrant workers. In addition, future research could also place greater emphasis on the "brain-exchange" phenomenon so as to address its focus from a different, yet relevant to our scope, angle.

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