



ΧΑΡΟΚΟΠΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
HAROKOPIO UNIVERSITY

Social Innovation and Social Sustainability in Migrant Integration

Dr Panagiota Karametou

Member of the Laboratory Teaching Staff

Department of Economics & Sustainable Development

Social sustainability



Social sustainability =
creating inclusive, fair, and
cohesive societies where
everyone has equal
opportunities and feels they
belong



Overview

Migrants in Greece: facts

- ✓ Clarifying definitions: social innovation
- ✓ Topic importance
- ✓ Purpose of the study
- ✓ Methodology
- ✓ Results
- ✓ **Link to Social Sustainability**

Migrants in Greece: some facts

~850,000 – 900,000 legal third-country nationals
(*≈ 8% of total population*)

More than 40% live in the **region of Attica**
(*urban concentration remains very high*)

Migration flows remain **stable but significant**, with Greece as a key entry point to the EU

Migration and Social sustainability



Migration is a key challenge for social sustainability, as it affects inclusion, equality, and social cohesion

Migrants in Greece: some problematic facts

Pre-integration actions mostly (reception, temporary stay, basic needs provision) → insufficient measures

- Lack of two-way interaction with local communities
- Ineffective management → conflicts → impact on social stability and cohesion

What is needed for social sustainability?

- Inclusive and socially sustainable policies*

Defining social innovation (1)

Broad definition

Developing innovative and more effective solutions towards meeting the essential social needs of vulnerable population groups, who face increased difficulties in the face of crisis conditions.

Special features:

- Distinct from technological, financial or business innovation
- Multi-disciplinary (inter-sectoral): relating to transformation, social entrepreneurship, design theory, territorial development and governance
- Relevant to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

(Moulaert & Hiller, 2009; Rodrigo et al, 2024)

- Social innovation is a key mechanism for achieving social sustainability.

Defining social innovation (2)

These elements directly support social sustainability:

Four basic elements of social innovation:

1. Need satisfaction
2. Innovative methods of solving problems
3. Change in social structures and relations
4. Empowerment and activation of marginalized social groups

(Portales, 2019)

Why is social innovation important? (1)

Performing socially innovative actions can lead to:

Inclusion + integration of socially marginalized groups

- Pluralism in decision making → active citizenship
- High levels of social cohesion
- Social structure reform
- Social changes

All these outcomes are core pillars of social sustainability

Social innovation: the role of **regional development** (2)

Significant milestone:

New developmental approach in urban policy:

Integrated Area Development (# traditional models of growth)

- Alternative approaches based on social innovation
- Basic needs satisfaction + civil empowerment / free expression/ self determination
- Regional development → marginalized group integration
- Each citizen actively participating in decision making
- Elimination of racial + national inequalities

(Friedman, 1992; Moulaert et al, 1994; Nussbaumer & Moulaert, 2004)

This approach promotes socially sustainable cities and regions.

Social innovation in migrant inclusion and integration

What migrant inclusion should involve:

- **Pre-inclusion activities** (reception, temporary housing, basic needs)
- **Systemic / Structural Inclusion** (equal opportunities in education, job searching and entrepreneurship, accessibility to digitalization, etc.)
- **Identity integration** (cultural and religious integration, host community sensitization)

Bund et al. (2015)

- Migrant integration is a central component of social sustainability*

Social innovation in migrant inclusion and integration

Social inclusion activities should promote:

- Information campaigns
- Migrant and host population interaction
- Non-discriminatory treatment
- Equal participation in social + cultural life, education, politics of host country

European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals → European Commission, 2011

- These actions strengthen social sustainability through inclusion and equality

Social innovation in migrant inclusion and integration

Social inclusion implementation agents:

- Regional Government
- Central Government
- Non-governmental organizations

Collaboration between actors is essential for achieving social sustainability

Purpose and context of the study

The purpose: To evaluate social innovation stock on social (municipality) level

The Study area: Region of Attica, Greece

- The study contributes to understanding social sustainability at the local level*

Research questions

1. How do citizens perceive the concept of 'social innovation'?
 2. Have they been adequately informed about socially innovative actions and interventions by the agents in charge?
 3. What is their opinion about the importance and necessity of socially innovative actions in coping with serious social issues such as the migrants' integration in the Greek community?
- All research questions relate to the level of social sustainability in local communities

Methodology

Time period: March-August 2023

Place of study: 25 municipalities in the region of Attica

Sample: 2.500. participants (random, native citizens in the municipalities of Attica

male: 56% female: 44%

ages: 18-55

net monthly income: 600 – 1,000 euros

Research instrument: online questionnaire

- 5 questions (demographics)

- 12 questions (social innovation reserve) (open-ended questions)

Descriptive statistics / inferential statistics / SPSS, v. 28.0

Results – Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do citizens perceive the concept of ‘social innovation’?

60.7% : not aware of the term “social innovation”

39.3% aware of the term + believed that social innovation:

- Empowers social cohesion
- Resolves social conflicts + contradictions
- Promotes social action → social change → social benefit / value

Low awareness indicates weak social sustainability engagement

Results – Research Question 2

Research Question 2: Have they been adequately informed about socially innovative actions and interventions by the agents in charge?

74.4%: not informed about the realization of socially innovative actions in the Municipality

- Lack of information reduces participation and weakens social sustainability

Results – Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What is their opinion about the importance and necessity of socially innovative actions in coping with **serious social issues** such as the migrants' integration in the Greek community?

Most important social problems in the Municipalities of Attica

1. economic crisis and high unemployment
2. environmental deterioration
3. lack of solidarity
4. poverty and social marginalization
5. lack of trust in institutions and interpersonal communication
6. use of drugs
7. violence and criminality

These issues reflect challenges to social sustainability

Results – Research Question 3

Social issues of minor importance in the Municipalities of Attica:

- Racial discrimination
- Social conflicts
- Migration
- Insufficient housing conditions
- Corruption

Results – Research Question 3

Most marginalized groups of citizens:

1. disabled
2. long-term unemployed
3. low pensioners
4. unemployed women
5. migrants
6. Roma
7. Prisoners + released from prison
8. HIV positive persons

Social sustainability requires inclusion of all these groups

Results – Research Question 3

Most important **obstacles** in migrants' integration:

1. Lack of infrastructure
 2. Lack of political will
 3. Racism and xenophobia
 4. Citizen's resistance to change
 5. Lack of financial resources
 6. Lack of cooperation with migrants
 7. Migrants' resistance to integration
- These barriers limit the achievement of social sustainability**

Results – Research Question 3

Importance and necessity of socially innovative actions for migrants' integration:

✓ 72.65%: very important

✓ 82.7%: migrants' integration → economic growth in the Municipality

measures towards migrants' integration: ineffective

Conclusion - Implications

- Government + Local Administration:
 - social security measures: migrants' basic needs satisfaction (e.g. housing, education, employment)
- Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union (2005)
- Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (2020).
- **Integration: a two-way mutual process of accommodation by migrants and host societies**
- Promoting social sustainability through inclusive policies

Social sustainability requires long-term, inclusive and participatory strategies

“We will make sure that people who have the right to stay are integrated and made to feel welcome. They have a future to build – and skills, energy and talent”

PRESIDENT VON DER LEYEN, STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS 2020