

# **SUMMARY**

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## **From Poland to the Greek Islands. An Anthropological Study of the Integration of Polish Resident Migrants in the Ionian Islands**

This study aims to advance the understanding of contemporary Polish migration to Greece by examining the previously unexplored Polish community in the Ionian Islands – a small archipelago located off Greece’s western coast. The research seeks to identify the conditions, causes, processes, and forms of migration within this community, while also analysing various aspects of how its members, as culturally and ethnically distinct individuals, integrate into the host society.

The foundation of this research is nearly a year of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2022 on Zakynthos, Kefalonia, Ithaca, Lefkada, and Corfu, augmented by extensive prior experience in the region. The study adopts an anthropological approach, offering a nuanced and multifaceted reflection on migration. Through the personal narratives of participants, I identify both general patterns that align with global mobility trends and individual responses to the challenges faced by migrants in their new environment.

Presently, the Ionian Sea region is home to a Polish community of approximately 300 individuals, comprising both first-generation settlers and their descendants. In previous years, this group was larger; however, the Greek economic crisis led many Poles to leave, which, alongside the growth of Polish tourism in the region, has shaped the motivations of new Polish migrants. Today, the community consists predominantly of individuals seeking personal development or professional skills in tourism, Polish women forming relationships with Greek islanders, and lifestyle migrants drawn by the local attractions and financially supported from Poland.

Although a 2012 report by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted a prevailing desire among Poles in Greece to re-emigrate, most Polish migrants in the Ionian Islands do not intend to return to their homeland or move to other countries in the near future. Another thesis from earlier studies on the Polish diaspora in Greece remains pertinent,

suggesting that Poles on Greek islands generally occupy a high social status, do not form ethnic enclaves, and integrate smoothly into the new socio-cultural environment. These findings appear to apply equally to the current Polish community in the Ionian Islands.

The Polish community I studied serves as an example of successful integration across multiple dimensions. Several key factors have contributed to the positive trajectory of this process in recent years, including: 1) the legal status of Polish migrants in Greece, linked to Poland's EU membership, which grants them access to Greek public institutions, the labour market, and social welfare systems, 2) the rapid growth of Polish tourism in the Ionian Sea region, 3) the spatial dispersion of Poles among other islanders, 4) the relatively minimal cultural distance between Poland and Greece, coupled with ingrained positive perceptions between the two populations, 5) extensive social networks connecting Polish migrants with members of the host society, 6) the distinctive cultural patterns of island life, 7) the cultural openness of Polish migrants, and 8) advancements in communication and transportation technologies.

However, this does not imply that the integration of Poles in the Ionian Islands is entirely without challenges. Several barriers hinder the dynamics of this process, including: 1) a lack of awareness among Poles regarding certain rights to which they are entitled in Greece, 2) the complexity of many administrative procedures in this country, 3) the absence of active Polish organisations in the Ionian Sea region and limited engagement from Polish diplomatic missions in unifying the migrants, 4) the lingering effects of the Greek economic crisis, 5) the geographical isolation and small size of the islands, along with their limited populations, 6) a strong cultural tendency in Greece to distinguish between "insiders" and "outsiders", 7) a predominant attachment to traditional gender roles in the Ionian Islands, and the region's characteristic patrilocal family structure.

It is also important to consider the variation in integration experiences among different groups of Poles in the study area. While first-generation migrants establish lasting connections with the host society and maintain their own cultural identity, their descendants, particularly those born into mixed Polish-Greek marriages, are often more culturally and structurally embedded almost exclusively within the Greek society. Integration also varies among Polish lifestyle migrants, who have been increasingly attracted to the Ionian Islands in recent years due to the region's cultural and geographical appeal. Unlike Poles who settle for other reasons, lifestyle migrants are less likely to speak Greek, are more reluctant to immerse themselves in Greek traditions, and less inclined to engage in close relationships within the host society.

Moreover, their financial independence allows them to avoid the Greek labour market and bypass formalising their stay in the region.

Beyond the need for further research into new forms of Polish mobility in the Ionian Islands, including the situation of lifestyle migrants and seasonal workers in the tourism sector, it is essential to conduct additional studies on the specific integration experiences of Poles settled in other parts of Greece. Such research would provide a comprehensive update of the current state of knowledge on the Polish diaspora in the country. These studies should adopt a qualitative approach, considering the historical, cultural, and geographical specificity of each region.