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Research Article

Attitudes Towards Refugees & Immigrants in Greece: a national-local comparative analysis

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Keywords

Immigration attitudes, Public opinion, Local-national, Localities, Thessaly

Abstract

Over the past decade, Greece has received a significant number of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who, due to specific decisions taken at both the EU and the national levels, have been “trapped” in Greece for an indefinite period. Dealing with this situation was, and still is, a hot issue, with state policies remaining focused on reception and control rather than on integration. Moreover, the spatial allocation of refugees in specific places throughout the country raised further debate, as they often provoked reactions (of substantial political costs), given that different localities tend to exhibit different attitudes and views towards refugees and immigrants. Since these perceptions seem to exert a significant effect on the direction of public debate and state policy there have been a number of nationwide surveys that have sought to shed light on them. These studies certainly advance our understanding on how Greeks in totality perceive those issues, but they also suffer from serious limitations regarding the specificities that different localities exhibit. On their grounds, the current works seek to provide a comparative analysis between the results of a nation-wide survey and a locally contacted one, contrasting perceptions between people living in Athens metropolitan area and in three small-medium size cities in central Greece (Trikala, Larisa, and Volos), in order to identify similarities and differences in views between the different spatial scales.

Highlights:

- Immigration policy should take into account the views of localities
- Attitudes towards immigration may differ significantly across different spatial levels
- There is a lack of surveys regarding the views of localities on immigration
- Comparative analysis between local and national



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1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, Greece has received a substantial influx of refugees, coming mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. This so-called 'refugee crisis' peaked in 2015, when about 1,000,000 people crossed the Greek borders. The majority of these people headed towards Northern and Western European countries, constituting Greece a transit country, rather than a place for permanent settlement. Given the volume of the flows and the intended destination, the policies of the Greek state placed emphasis on the reception and documentation of incomers. The closure of the so-called Western Balkans route and the EU-Turkey Agreement on refugee and migrants in the Spring of 2016 have confined uncontrolled and irregular movements within the EU (European Council, 2016), but has left around 76,000 refugees and asylum seekers trapped in Greece for an indefinite period (UNHCR, 2019). That situation has given rise to reasonable concerns to both Greek citizens and the State authorities alike, regarding the spatial allocation and settlement of refugees, and the conditions of their living.

Yet, even after 2016, the official policies remained focused on reception and control measures (the success of which has been contested - Medzini and Lev Ari, 2018), rather than on integration. One of the key aspects of the policies concerns the accommodation of refugees and thus two kinds of reception facilities were developed in the mainland. Camps, mainly at the outskirts of cities or in rural areas, and social housing in urban areas (mainly through the UNHCR's ESTIA accommodation program). Local authorities in most cases played either a minor or, at best, a coordinating role, letting other local actors (NGOs and international institutions) to be heavily involved in the implementation process, especially when local population perceived refugees as a threat to personal and community security and stability. This non-uniform treatment to the refugee crisis has resulted in different approaches towards integration in many cities, corresponding to different levels of engagement and cooperation of the local actors (municipal authorities, civil society, NGOs, etc.). In some cases, innovative ways of social inclusion and acts of solidarity were made prevalent, whereas, in others, instances of social exclusion and marginality have been documented (Arvanitidis et al, 2020). In all cases, the integration dynamics of refugees have been substantially affected by the attitudes of the local people.

The perception and stances of local communities towards incomers and reception policies have been examined by a number of studies. Focusing on specific cases, some researchers explored perceptions regarding the Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) and their location (in terms of the NIMBY syndrome) (Hubbard, 2005; Fragopoulos and Hatziprokiopou, 2020), others placed emphasis on the local solidarity movements (Papataxiarchis, 2016; Tsavdaroglou, 2018; Tsavdaroglou et al, 2019) and others examined the marginalization effect of local media (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017). On a different perspective, another strand of research (e.g. Borkert and Caponio, 2010; Anagnostou, 2016; Caponio, 2018; OECD, 2018; Heiman et al, 2019; Bartzokas-Tsiompras and Photis, 2020; 2019; European Committee of the Regions, 2020; Frangiskou et al, 2020) discussed the effects of immigration on localities at different spatial scales, whereas other scholars sought to delineate public attitudes towards refugees and immigrants through national surveys and opinion-poll (PEW, 2016; European Commission, 2018; Dennison and Dražanová, 2018; Dixon et al, 2019; Scipioni et al, 2019; diaNoesis, 2020).

Aiming to contribute to, and enrich, this last strand of the literature the current paper places focus to local, in perspective with the national, to shed light on the attitudes towards immigrants and refugees held by people living in small-medium size cities. It does so by providing a comparative analysis between the results of a nation-wide survey and a locally contacted one, contrasting perceptions between people living in Athens metropolitan area and in three small-medium size cities of central Greece (Trikala, Larisa and Volos), in order to identify similarities and differences in views between the different spatial scales.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section provides a succinct review of the perspectives towards immigration policy at local and national levels. Section 3 specifies the

methodology that this work follows and how analysis was conducted. Section 4 presents and discusses the results of the analysis and section 5 concludes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social inclusion and integration of migrant populations has become an explicit goal in the policy agenda of the European Union, especially after the 2000s, mainly because of changes in the nature of immigration over time (Givens, 2007). At that point approaches have shifted towards the notion of “integration” as something distinct from assimilation. Imbued with liberal democratic ideals (Millers, 1981; Hollifield, 1992; Soysal, 1994) European policies towards incomers have striven to keep a balance acknowledging common individual rights (civil, political and social) and sociocultural differences. The European Union’s Common Basic Principles (CBPs) on Integration in 2004, are indicative of how integration has been conceptualized as “...a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States” (CBP no.1)¹, which “...implies respect for the basic values of the European Union” (CBP no.2), allowing and guaranteeing the practice of diverse cultures and religions under the Charter of Fundamental Rights, “...unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law.” (CBP no.8). Furthermore, the principles highlight learning of the native language, as well as familiarity with the history and political institutions of the host country (CBP no.4), as indispensable tools for participation in the labor market (CBP no.3), in education (CBP no.5) and civic engagement in its most general meaning (access to institutions, goods and services; interaction with native population; participation in democratic processes).

Even though the adopted approach might seem fundamentally different from cultural assimilation, it was nevertheless permeated by an instrumental logic aimed at rendering the state more competitive in the global terrain (Joppke, 2007). That was indeed the case, because: (1) immigration is considered as a permanent feature, if not indispensable, due to the negative impact of demographic ageing and labor-force shortages at the labor markets of European states; (2) immigrants to be integrated are mainly those legally residing in the territory of the Member States; and (3) the flow of immigrants is to be orderly and well-managed (Council of the European Union, 2004). What is more, the non-binding nature of the Principles has resulted – as expected– in significantly different policies between different Member States, given, on the one hand, that the host societies differ in terms of history and institutions, and, on the other, that they set different objectives and target diverse audiences (for example, permanent residents, temporary incomers, immigrants’ offspring, refugees, long-established third-country nationals, etc.).

In sum, integration has become the mainstream concept for immigration policies, which nevertheless remains difficult to define in a concrete way. It is recognized though, as crucial for social cohesion and economic growth in the host countries, given that the inclusion of immigrants constitutes an essential precondition for the alleviation of inter-ethnic and inter-racial tensions. Yet, the structure of the European Union regarding the sovereignty of the member states, makes immigration policy more or less the sole responsibility of national governments. This stands at odds with the increasingly recognized reality that migrant integration takes place, first and foremost, at the local level, that is where people are, in their workplaces, in their neighborhoods, and in the schools where they send their children (Borkert and Caponio, 2010; OECD, 2018). Local authorities are in practice and by and large administratively responsible for dealing with the demands and effects of migration and integration of migrants into local societies and economies. Furthermore, local formal authorities constitute only one among different other local actors, ranging from different

¹ The originally conceived *two-way process* has been rearticulated as a three-way process since 2011, adding the countries of origin of Third-Country Nationals as a third key actor in the process of immigrants’ integration (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016).

members of the municipal council or employees in the municipality's administrative services, NGO's, religious or cultural institutions, civic organizations and political parties, to the individual native, who are also involved directly or indirectly in the integration process.

Nevertheless, the focus on local integration policies does not imply that the national context is irrelevant. It is indeed the national policies which set a crucial and, in many cases, inescapable framework, for understanding local migration policy or actions undertaken by other local actors. Existing studies on the local government's role in migrant integration policy have shown that the local government has become increasingly proactive in this sphere, yet relevant policies that cities pursue (for example in countries like the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany) often tend to diverge from official national policy and discourse (Borkert and Bosswick, 2007; Poppelaars and Scholten, 2008; Jorgensen, 2012). On the other hand, even though a decentralization trend in decision-making and implementation of migration policy was been noted long time ago (in countries such as France, the Netherlands and Denmark) (Guiraudon and Lahav, 2000), some recent studies observe a national (re)-turn of such policies (Emilsson, 2015). Overall, it remains inconclusive to whether there is some convergence in integration policies between national and local level as well as between local approaches. Researchers argue that local policies oscillate between pragmatic, context-based, problem-centered solutions, and actions aiming to compromise different political positions and mitigate ideological oppositions and confrontation (Anagnostou, 2016) In any case, the specific stance of localities towards immigrants seems to be heavily affected by the views that local people hold (Caponio, 2010). In a rather simplified manner, favorable measures towards immigrants' integration are promoted by local politicians only when these policies: (1) are in consensus with the general-public opinion of their electorate, (2) are in line with the local administrative culture and can be easily implemented by the local administration, and (3) get acceptance and support from the civic society.

Given that immigration affects greatly the socioeconomic characteristics of the host countries, there is a growing body of empirical research that explores natives' perceptions on these issues (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; European Commission, 2018). Although there are many factors that appear to determine people's attitude towards immigration, public attitudes differ, depending on: (1) contextual factors (i.e. government policy and politics, media narratives, civil society strength), (2) migrant characteristics (i.e. country of origin, reasons of migrations, cultural differences), and (3) respondents' personal characteristics (i.e. age, gender, education, social and moral values, life experiences) (Dennison and Dražanová, 2018; Verkuyten, 2021). This literature draws on various theoretical perspectives, is extensive, and, in most cases, consistent in its findings. Critics identify a number of weaknesses, such as, being US-centric, conflating negative attitudes to immigration with immigrants as individuals, suffering from endogeneity methodological problems (e.g. explaining attitudes with other attitudes) and mixing aggregate and individual level explanations (as being interchangeable) (Dennison and Dražanová, 2018). Last, the majority of these studies focus on understanding cross-national and individual differences, ignoring the local context. This is somewhat expected, since that policies are determined by, and constitute more than often the main responsibility of the nation-state.

There have been a number of studies, opinion-polls and surveys, examining the attitudes of Greeks towards immigrants (at a national level or in comparison to other countries) especially after the pick in refugee arrivals in summer 2015 (PEW, 2016; European Commission, 2018; Dennison and Dražanová, 2018; Dixon et al, 2019; Scipioni et al, 2019; diaNoesis, 2020). Even though these studies focus on slightly different aspects of immigration, there seems to be some kind of convergence in their findings, which can be summarized as follows. According to the Standard Eurobarometer (No83-Spring 2015 to No95-Spring 2021), immigration constantly constitutes the fourth or fifth most important issue of concern for Greece (it becomes the first most important in Spring 2019) among thirteen other factors. There is a clear dissatisfaction with migration when countries of origin are not European (especially when are Islamic countries), with the Greek percentage being much higher than

the European average, though not the highest. Furthermore, Greeks mostly tend to believe that immigrants do not contribute to the country's development (nor economically neither culturally), immigration is more of a problem than an opportunity (which threatens national identity, customs and tradition) and the proportion of immigrants is constantly overestimated by around 2.4 times (EU28: 2.3 times). Thus, additional measures to combat illegal immigration are regarded as among the main priorities that should be addressed at the national and at the EU level. On the other hand, the relevant surveys reveal that Greeks, in most cases, hold a humanitarian perspective and thus they consider that Greece should provide at least basic or necessary help towards refugees. Last, regarding integration of immigrants, almost one out of two disagree in fostering integration of immigrants as a necessary long-run "investment" for the country, and most will argue that the government is already doing more than enough towards that direction.

3. METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The paper uses primary data collected by two independent surveys, one national and one local, to shed light on the attitudes towards immigration and immigrants-refugees held by people living in small-medium size cities located in Thessaly. It employs (1) statistical analysis to assess differences in views between different spatial levels (at a local level and in contrast to the national and metropolitan levels) and (2) econometric modelling to explore how respondents' socioeconomic characteristics affect their views towards immigration and immigrants.

The nationwide survey was conducted by an officially accredited poll-company, for Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung & diaNoesis² in order to map the beliefs of Greek people on issues related to immigration-refugee in Greece. The survey was conducted in February 2019, through multistage random sampling, using quota based on gender, age and geographical distribution, throughout Greece. Data were collected through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and a total sample of 1,005 individuals answered 23 main questions (apart from demographics). Both the report presenting the results and the raw data have been publicly available³. The specific nation-wide survey was selected for the comparative analysis, because: (1) it was temporally close to the second (local) survey (was conducted some months before) (2) a number of key questions were pretty much the same to those of the second (local) survey, and (3) the raw data were publicly available, thus allowing for primary, statistical and comparative analysis.

The second survey was conducted by the authors' research team from the University of Thessaly, in the context of a wider research project entitled "The integration of refugees into local society: the case of small and medium-sized cities"⁴. The survey was conducted from December 2020 to February 2021, in three small-medium size municipalities (Larisa, Volos and Trikala), at the region of Thessaly - Greece. Due to covid-19 restrictions, the questionnaires were disseminated through formal and informal networks in snowball sampling manner to be completed on the spot. A total of approximately 2200 printed questionnaires were delivered, of which 1226 were eventually collected, a rather expected return rate given the circumstances.

For the comparative analysis of the two surveys, we first combined the datasets of the two surveys into a single dataset making the proper adjustments so that responses could be

² diaNoesis is a non-profit think-tank based in Athens Greece. It produces research on the most important issues of our time, providing concrete policy proposals. It also conducts in-depth investigative journalism reports and finally produces open data research and related projects (<https://www.dianeosis.org/en/about/>).

³ <https://www.dianeosis.org/research/oi-ellines-kai-to-prosfygiko-provlima/>

⁴ The authors of the present work are members of the project which has been financed by the Ministry of Development and Investments - Special Secretariat for the Management of European Social Fund Programs - Operational Program "Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning"

comparable. Then we examined the perception of Greek people towards the following questions which were coded as depended variables (DV) accordingly. The first variable (DV1) regarded the attributed significance of migration and refugee flows among other socioeconomic issues of national concern, such as unemployment rate, economic situation, living conditions, crime and citizens' security, education quality and relations with neighboring countries. The answers were coded as a binary variable [0: immigration was not selected as a main issue of concern, 1: immigration was selected]. The second variable (DV2) refers to the perceived number of immigrants residing in the country. The answers were coded in an ordinal 1-5 scale [ranging from 1: extremely high, to 5: extremely low]. The third question (DV3) regards the impact of immigrants on the Greek economy. The answers were also coded in an ordinal 1-5 scale [ranging from 1: positive impact, to 5: negative impact]. The fourth question (DV4) referred to whether the presence of immigrants culturally enriches the Greek society. Given that wording and possible answers to the question was slightly different between the two surveys (see Table 1), answers were coded as a binary variable [0: other or negative, 1: culturally enriches]. The fifth variable (DV5) regards whether the presence of immigrants in Greece increases crime. Similar to the previous one, answers were coded as a binary variable [0: other or negative, 1: increases crime]. The last question (DV6) refers to what policy Greece should follow regarding refugee flows. The answers were coded in an ordinal 1-3 scale [1: stricter, 2: the one that is today, 3: less strict]. The recorded profile of the respondents included: gender (0: male, 1: female), age (ordinal 1-6 scale), education level (ordinal 1-6 scale), income level (ordinal 1-6 scale) and political ideology (ordinal 1-7 scale, ranging from 1: far left, to 7: far right). Finally, we distinguished and analyzed six different populations groups, corresponding to: Greece, Athens metropolitan area, Thessaly cities in total, Volos, Larisa, and Trikala.

Table 1. Wording of questions in the two surveys

Question (variable)	diaNOEsis	University of Thessaly
1 (DV1)	Which of the following do you regard as the most significant challenge that Greece is facing? (Up to 2 choices from a list of 12 options)	Which of the following do you regard as the most significant challenge that Greece is facing? (Up to 3 choices from a list of 12 options)
2 (DV2)	In your opinion, the number of immigrants in Greece is: (Five-point Likert scale ranging between extremely low and extremely high)	In your opinion, the number of immigrants in Greece is: (Eleven-point Likert scale ranging between extremely low and extremely high)
3 (DV3)	What is the impact of immigrants on the Greek economy? (Five-point Likert scale ranging between negative and positive)	What is the impact of immigrants on the Greek economy? (Eleven-point Likert scale ranging between negative and positive)
4 (DV4)	Do you consider that the presence of immigrants in Greece culturally enriches Greek society or poses threats to our national identity? (Two possible answers)	Do you consider that the presence of immigrants in Greece culturally enriches Greek society or undermines it? (Eleven-point Likert scale ranging between the culture of the country undermined and the culture of the country is enriched)
5 (DV5)	Do you consider that the presence of immigrants in Greece increases crime or there is no difference between Greeks and foreigners? (Two possible answers)	Do you consider that the presence of immigrants in Greece increases crime or decreases it? (Eleven-point Likert scale ranging between the crime decreases and crime increases)
6 (DV6)	What policy Greece should follow regarding refugee flows: (As is today, Stricter, Less Strict)	What policy Greece should follow regarding refugee flows: (Allow many to come and stay, allow a few, allow less than a few, do not allow anyone to stay)

Source: authors' elaboration

The comparative analysis refers to the comparison of the answers given to the aforementioned questions by the populations of the different spatial scales: Greece in total, Athens' metropolitan area (Athens MA), the urban Thessaly (i.e. the three small-medium cities of Thessaly altogether) and each one of the Thessaly cities individually, i.e. Volos, Larisa and Trikala. In particular, we conducted six main comparisons (of all questions-variables DV1-6) between different population groups (that correspond to independent variables – IV) - see Table 2 below. The first (IV1) examines if there are statistical differences in perceptions between Greeks residing in urban Thessaly (i.e. in small-medium size cities) to those residing in Athens' metropolitan area. The second (IV2) comparison tests for statistical differences between Greeks residing in urban Thessaly (small-medium size cities) and in Greece as a whole. The third (IV3) comparison examines statistical differences in the views between the populations of the three Thessaly cities.

Table 2. Comparisons and statistical tests applied

Comparison no	Variable/question	Group compared	Statistical test applied
1	DV1: Immigration as a main issue in Greece (binary, 1: yes, 0: no)	IV1: urban Thessaly vs. Athens MA IV2: urban Thessaly vs. Greece IV3: Volos vs. Larisa vs. Trikala	Chi-Square Chi-Square Chi-Square
2	DV2: the perceived number of immigrants residing in the country (ordinal, 1: too high, 5: too low)	IV1: urban Thessaly vs. Athens MA IV2: urban Thessaly vs. Greece IV3: Volos vs. Larisa vs. Trikala	Mann-Whitney U Mann-Whitney U Kruskal-Wallis
3	DV3: the impact of immigrants on the Greek economy (ordinal, 1: positive, 5: negative)	IV1: urban Thessaly vs. Athens MA IV2: urban Thessaly vs. Greece IV3: Volos vs. Larisa vs. Trikala	Mann-Whitney U Mann-Whitney U Kruskal-Wallis
4	DV4: the presence of immigrants culturally enriches Greek (binary, 1: yes, 0: no)	IV1: urban Thessaly vs. Athens MA IV2: urban Thessaly vs. Greece IV3: Volos vs. Larisa vs. Trikala	Chi-Square Chi-Square Chi-Square
5	DV5: the presence of immigrants increases crime (binary, 1: yes, 0: no)	IV1: urban Thessaly vs. Athens MA IV2: urban Thessaly vs. Greece IV3: Volos vs. Larisa vs. Trikala	Chi-Square Chi-Square Chi-Square
6	DV6: the policy Greece should follow regarding refugees and refugee flows (ordinal, 1: stricter, 3: less strict)	IV1: urban Thessaly vs. Athens MA IV2: urban Thessaly vs. Greece IV3: Volos vs. Larisa vs. Trikala	Mann-Whitney U Mann-Whitney U Kruskal-Wallis

Source: authors' elaboration

Furthermore, in order to explore what determines people's attitudes towards immigration we conducted econometric (logit) analysis examining the likelihood of a causal relationship between the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, education, income and ideology) and their attitudes towards immigration as a main issue of national concern (DV1). Models were developed for each one of the six spatial units examined, i.e. Greece, Athens metropolitan area, Thessaly cities in total, Volos, Larisa, and Trikala.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

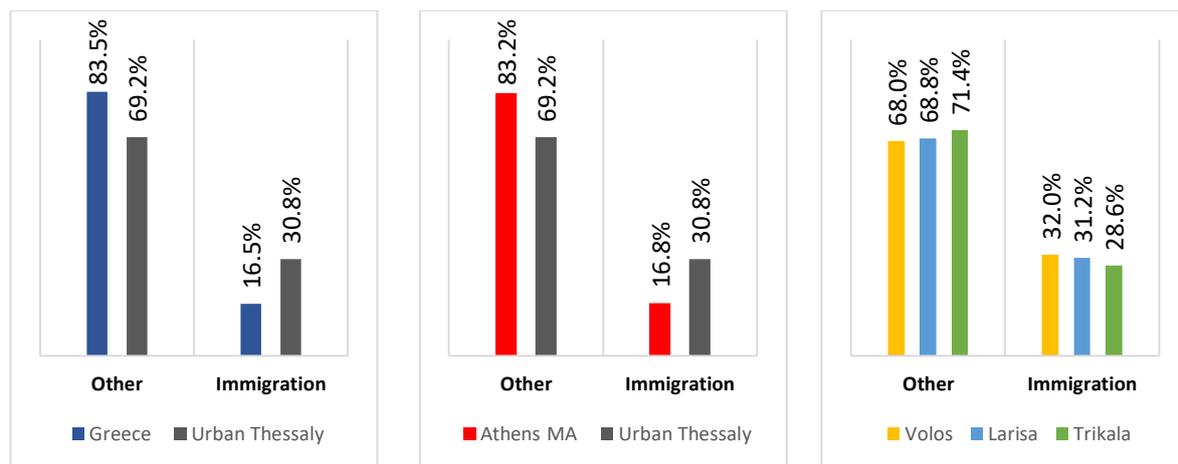
4.1 Descriptive analysis

The first question (and our first dependent variable) asked participants to determine the most significant issues that are troubling the country (Figure 1), from a list of twelve available answers. In both surveys unemployment scores as the most important issue. 'Migration and refugee flows' stands also very high, but it scores much higher in the three small-medium size cities, with only slight differences among them. Furthermore, people living in urban Thessaly,

do not consider crime or citizen’s security to be among the top issues, in sharp contrast to the results of the nation-wide survey, which highlights it as the second most important topic of national concern.

The second question (and dependent variable) regarded the perceived number of immigrants in the country (Figure 2). People in both surveys believe that the number of immigrants in Greece is either high or extremely high. Yet, in the nation-wide survey the sample is much more polarized. The comparison between Athens MA and the three Thessaly cities also suggests that the views might be related to the size of the urban area; the bigger the city, the higher the perceived number of immigrants appears to be. Yet, given that the national average is higher than this of Athens and the fact that Athens is the largest city of the country, one can also assume that other cities or localities also believe that Greece is hosting too many immigrants. Furthermore, given that immigrants who came to Greece before 2010 are about evenly distributed throughout the country (more or less in proportion to the local population), these views might highlight that the distribution of the current flux of refugees is rather uneven between different locations (there might be much more refugees in Athens MA and Larisa than in Volos or Trikala). Regarding the three Thessaly cities, people in Volos and Trikala hold almost identical views, while those in Larisa (which is the largest city of the region) tend to believe that the number of immigrants is higher.

Figure 1. Question 1: Which of the following issues do you consider the most important for Greece?



The third question (and dependent variable) refers to the perceived impact of immigrants on the Greek economy (Figure 3). More than half of the respondents at the national level identify a negative impact, and this same applies to Athens MA. In contrast, the people living in the small-medium size cities of Thessaly have a rather indifferent view, with a slight inclination towards a more positive stance. Regarding each one of the three Thessaly cities, people in Volos and Trikala once again seem to hold almost identical views, while there is a greater percentage in Larisa highlighting the impact on the economy as being rather negative.

The fourth question (and dependent variable) examines the cultural impact of immigration (Figure 4). Given that the prespecified answers provided in the two surveys were somewhat different (see Table 3), we only compared the answers clearly stating that the presence of immigrants culturally enriches the Greek society. Clearly all respondents in all of the six examined spatial scales have a rather negative view. Yet, more favorable are those of Athens MA, which their views contrasting sharply with those living in the three Thessaly cities. Given that opinions in the Thessaly cities are pretty much the same, one could possibly argue a difference of attitudes between metropolitan-large and small-medium urban scales.

The fifth question (and dependent variable) examines the perceived relation of immigrants with criminal activities (Figure 5). In both surveys people tend to believe that the presence of immigrants increases crime, though there is significant difference between people residing in Athens MA and in urban Thessaly. Almost three quarters of those residing in Thessaly cities highlight that the presence of immigrants increases crime. Yet, perceptions among Thessaly cities differ. People in Volos and Larisa hold the same views, while those residing in Trikala seem to be less polarized. An interesting point comes up when we see these answers vis-à-vis the answers provided in the first question, regarding the hottest issues troubling Greece. Even though people in the small-medium cities do not consider crime to be among the most important issues, they tend to associate immigrants with criminal activities, something which reflects a kind of prejudice.

Figure 2. Question 2: In your opinion, the number of immigrants in Greece is?

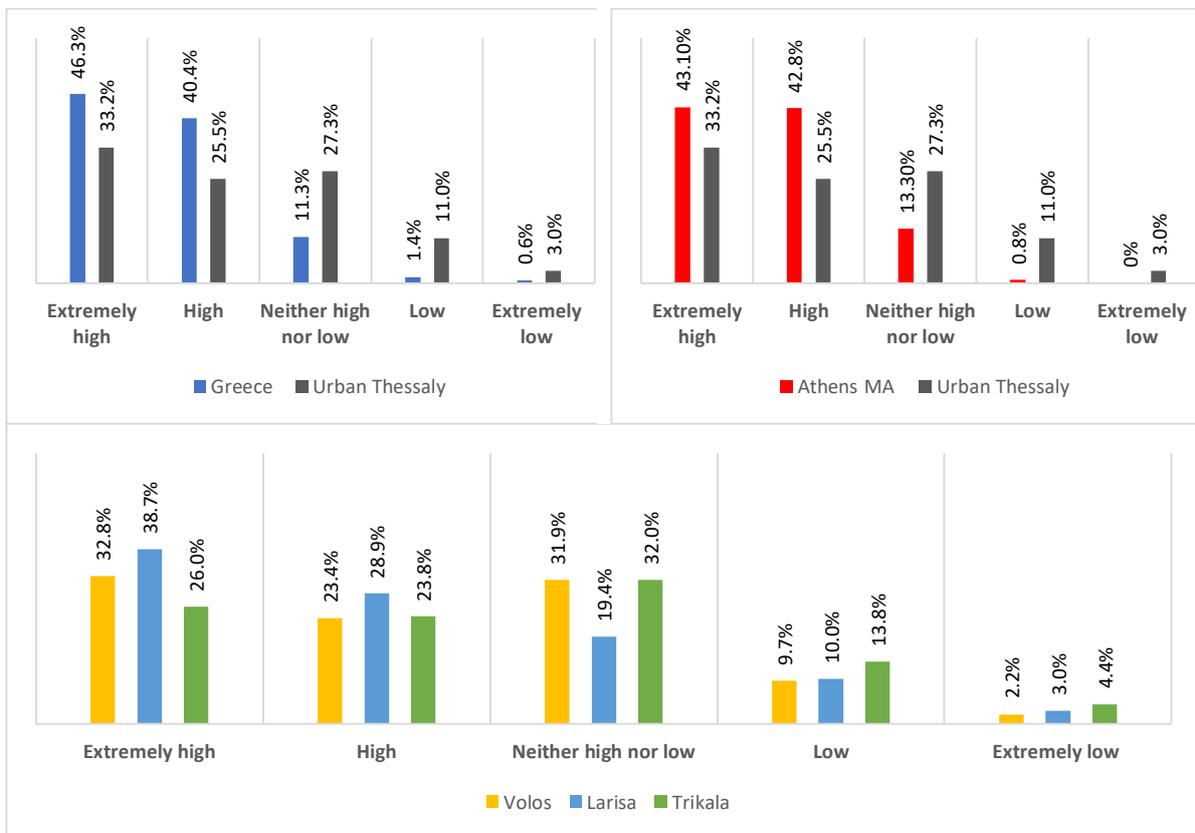
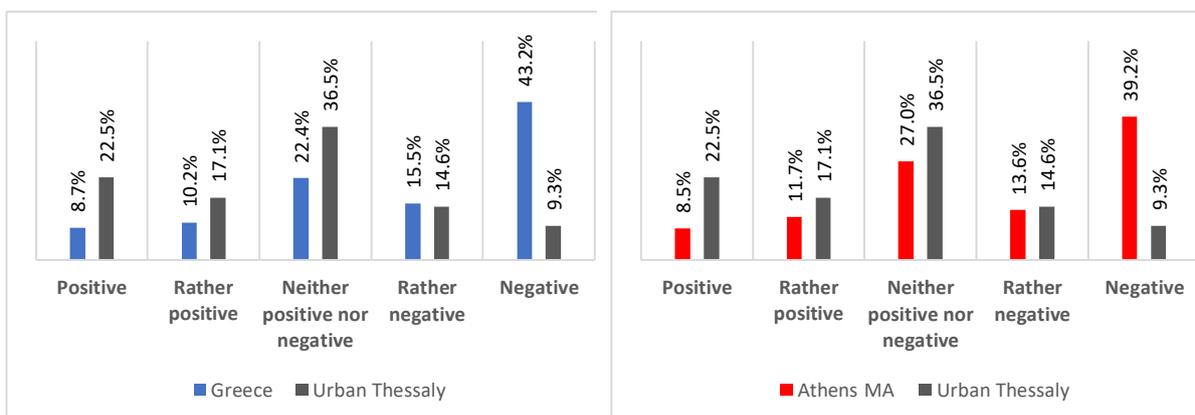


Figure 3. Question 3: What is the impact of immigrants on the Greek economy?



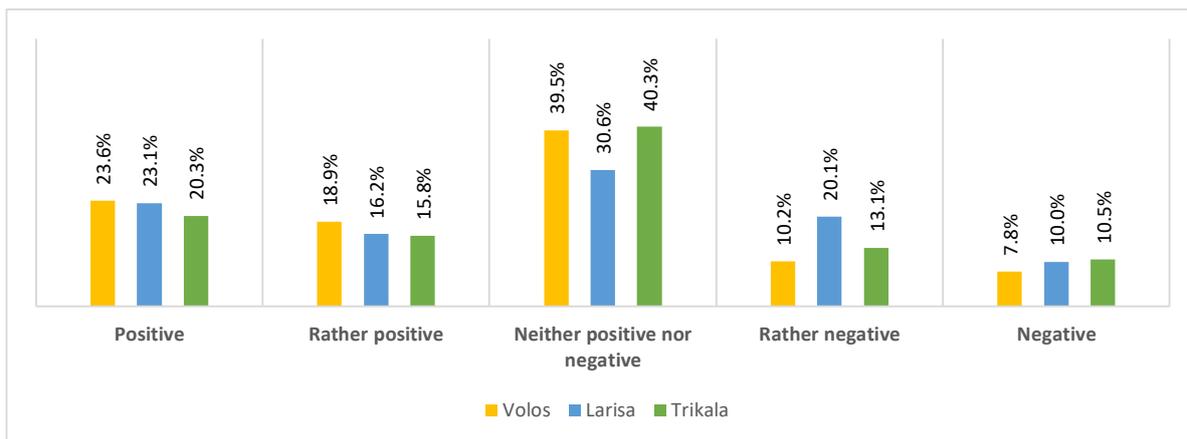


Figure 4. Question 4: Do you consider that the presence of immigrants culturally enriches the Greek society?

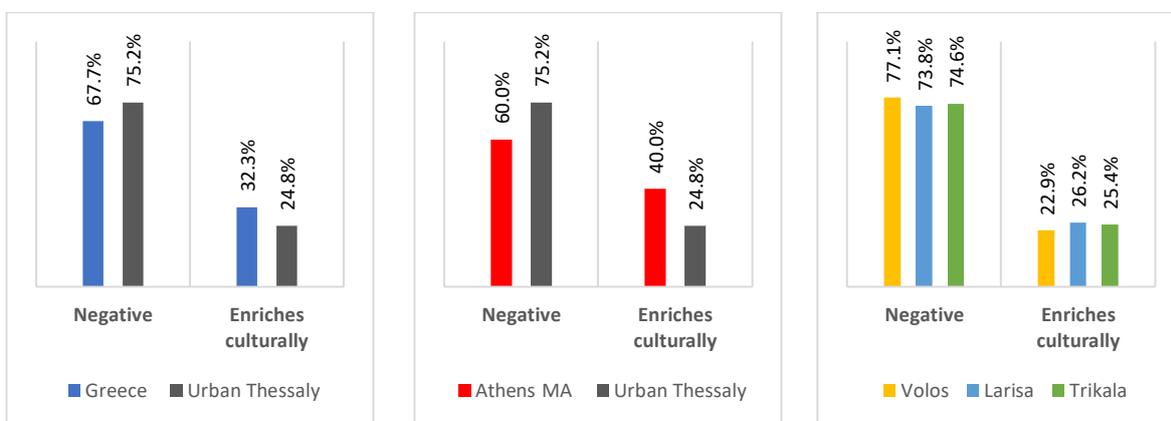
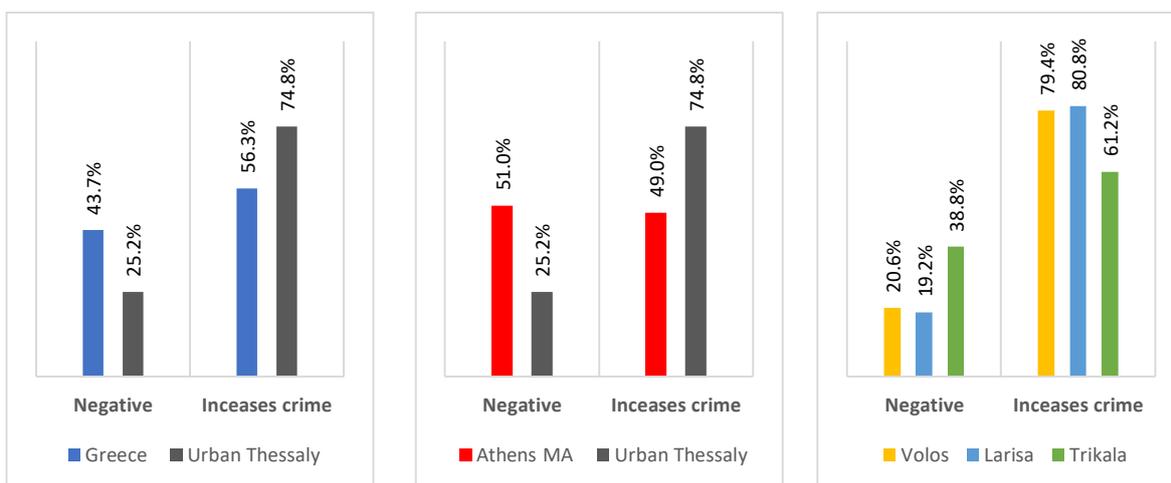


Figure 5. Question 5: Do you consider that the presence of immigrants in Greece increases crime?

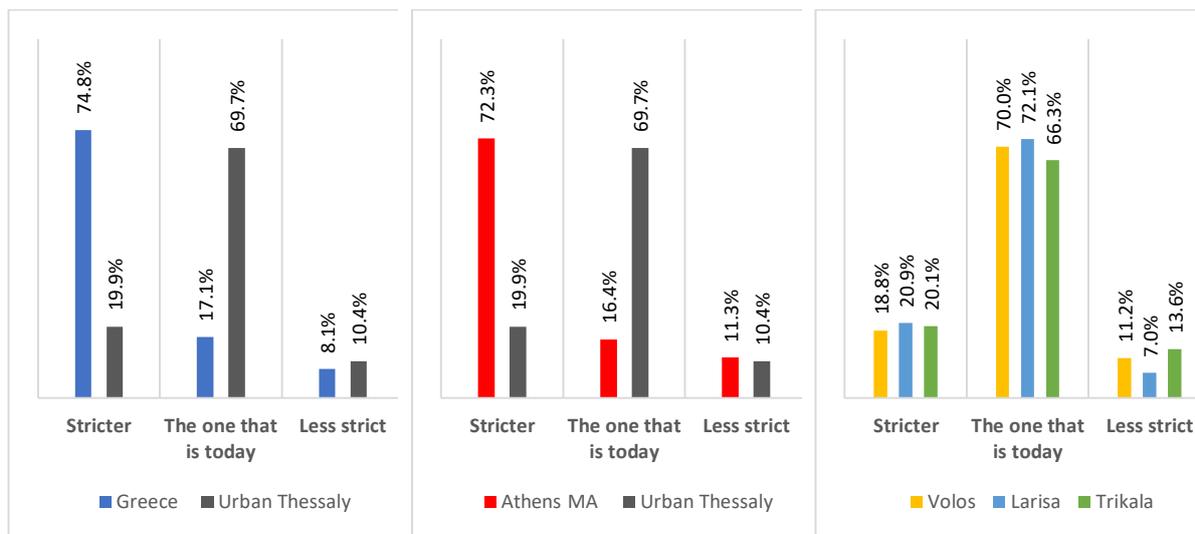


The last question (and the sixth dependent variable) refers to the what policy Greece should follow dealing with refugee flows (Figure 6). The two surveys present substantial differences which could possibly be attributed to the different time period (and time gap) that they were conducted. Furthermore, accounting for the covid-19 pandemic which broke out in Greece in the time interval between the two surveys, it is obvious that the overall context, public discourse (and the media framing) were quite differentiated. Refugee flows were also much lower at the time of the second survey (as compared to flows at the time when the diaNoesis

survey was conducted). All these may account for the fact that respondents living in urban Thessaly opt for no policy changes, whereas both national and metropolitan samples argue for stricter policies.

Summing up, the descriptive analysis of the results reveals substantial differences in all six questions, especially between the first two comparison groups (i.e. urban Thessaly compared to national and to Athens MA). On the other hand, there are also differences between the three Thessaly cities, especially regarding the questions about the perceived number of immigrants, the impact of immigrants on the Greek economy and the relation of immigrants to criminal activities.

Figure 6. Question 6: Do you think that Greece's policy regarding refugee flows should be?



4.2 Statistical and econometric analysis

In addition to the visual and descriptive analysis the paper also employed statistical analysis to examine whether the observed differences in views towards immigration between different spatial scales (national, metropolitan, small-medium urban) are in fact statistically significant. As discussed in section 3, for all variables comparisons were made (1) between urban Thessaly and Athens metropolitan area, (2) between urban Thessaly and Greece, and (3) among the three Thessaly cities.

The first set of tests examines the hypotheses (H0) that there is no difference in the distribution of views between respondents residing in small-medium size cities (urban Thessaly) to those residing in Athens metropolitan area (IV1) for the Dependent Variables 1 to 6. Chi-square and Mann-Whitney tests were applied for binary and ordinal variables (DV) respectively. The results (see Table 3a-3b) lead us to reject the null hypothesis (since the p-value of tests is 0.000), indicating that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups for all six depended variables; a finding which is also in line with the descriptive analysis.

The second set of tests checks the hypotheses (H0) that there are no significant differences in the views between people residing in small-medium size cities (urban Thessaly) and all Greeks (IV2) for all Dependent Variables 1 to 6. Chi-square and Mann-Whitney tests were also applied for binary and ordinal variables respectively. The results (Table 3a-3b) reject the null hypothesis (p-value of 0.000), suggesting that there is a statistically significant difference in the views of the two groups for all six depended variables.

The final, third, set of tests examines the hypotheses (H0) that there are no differences in the perceptions of the respondents residing in the three small-medium size cities of Thessaly, for all Dependent Variables 1 to 6. Chi-square and Kruskal-Wallis tests were applied for binary and ordinal variables respectively. The results (Table 3a, 3c) suggest that the people residing in the three cities hold similar views regarding the significance of the immigration issue at the national level (DV1), the cultural impact of immigrants on Greek society (DV4) and the direction that Greek policy should follow in dealing with refugee flows (DV6). On the other hand, there is a statistically significant difference regarding the perceived number of immigrants in the country (DV2), the impact of immigrants on the Greek economy (DV3) and the effect of immigration on crime levels (DV5). Given the spotted differences we also run similar pair tests between the cities (Table 3c second part) to identify which cities actually differ. The results indicate a statistically significant difference of views between Trikala (the smallest city of the three) compared to both Larisa and Volos regarding the perceived number of immigrants in the country (DV2).

Table 3. Results of statistical tests examining difference among spatial levels – localities

(Table 3a)	IV1- DV1	IV1 - DV4	IV1 - DV5	IV2 - DV1	IV2 - DV4	IV2 - DV5	IV3- DV1	IV3 - DV4	IV3 - DV5
Pearson Chi-Square	19.652	18.994	61.687	141.051	14.213	82.503	1.115	1.1312	46.437
P-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.573	0.519	0.000
Phi value	0.105	-0.113	0.199	0.251	-0.083	0.195	0.03	0.033	0.196
P-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.573	0.519	0.000
H ₀	Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject	No reject	No reject	Reject

(Table 3b)	IV1 - DV2	IV1 - DV3	IV1 - DV6	IV2 - DV2	IV2 - DV3	IV2 - DV6
Mann-Whitney U	130636	118437	97254	420651	336989.5	279463.5
Z-statistic	-6.451	-8.653	-12.352	-11.628	-17.496	-22.569
P-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
H ₀	Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject

(Table 3c)		IV3 - DV2	IV3 - DV3	IV3 - DV6
Kruskal-Wallis		21.379	6.299	3.799
P-value		0.000	0.043	0.15
H ₀		Reject	Reject	No reject
Larisa- Volos	Test Statistic	51.277	-49.204	-
	P-value	0.063	0.127	-
Larisa -Trikala	Test Statistic	-110.227	-51.285	-
	P-value	0.000	0.071	-
Volos - Trikala	Test Statistic	-58.95	2.082	-
	P-value	0.043	1	-

Source: authors' elaboration

Given the difference in views towards immigration issues between different spatial levels we moved on to explore how the personal characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, education level, income level and political ideology) affect these attitudes. For that purpose, econometric analysis was conducted (logit models) to assess the likelihood of a causal

relationship between the aforementioned socioeconomic characteristics and their views regarding immigration as a main issue of national concern (DV1). Models were developed for each one of the six spatial units examined, i.e. Greece, Athens metropolitan area, Thessaly cities in total, Volos, Larisa, and Trikala. Table 4 presents the results.

Model 1 examines what determines the attitudes of the people residing in the three cities of Thessaly altogether (urban Thessaly). It reveals that views are not affected by either gender or education. In turn, age, income and political ideology are statistically significant determinants. In particular, people who are older, have lower income and place themselves politically in the right-wing, have higher probability to perceive immigration as among the main challenges that the Greek society faces. The second model, which refers to the whole Greece, indicates that attitudes towards immigration as a main national concern are not significantly affected by none of the individual attributes of the respondents. The same finding also stands for those residing in Athens metropolitan area (model 3). Gender, education level and income level do not affect perceptions about immigration in Volos (model 4), but older people and those with a right-wing political ideology are more likely to perceive this as among the main issues of national concern. Regarding the city of Larisa (model 5) only age constitutes a possible determinant, with older people having a higher probability to perceive immigration as the main problem of Greek society. Last, in Trikala (model 6), the only statistically significant determinant is political ideology; people on the right wing of the political spectrum are more likely to perceive immigration as a national problem.

Table 4. Determinants regarding immigration as among the main issues of concern for Greece (logit models, dependent variable DV1)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>variable</i>	Urban Thessaly	Greece	Athens MA	Volos	Larisa	Trikala
Gender (F)	0.0128	0.1357	-0.5048	-0.1258	-0.09555	0.4767
Age	0.1514***	-0.054	-0.1016	0.1725**	0.17109*	0.1252
Education	0.0079	0.0178	-0.2303	0.0103	0.0870	-0.1458
Income	-0.0935**	-0.0379	0.0082	-0.0756	-0.0930	-0.0817
Ideology (right)	0.3584***	0.0637	0.1319	0.374***	0.1831	0.5483***
<i>Pseudo R2</i>	0.027	0.0035	0.031	0.0323	0.014	0.075
<i>N</i>	979	1534	205	348	374	257
<i>AIC</i>	1.2234	1.1418	0.8979	1.2775	1.2488	1.1571
<i>BIC</i>	1.2533	1.1626	0.9951	1.3439	1.3118	1.24

Significance (p-value): *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$

Source: authors' elaboration

4. CONCLUSIONS

The particular interest of the present work stem from the observed shift in the literature concerning the spatial level of immigrants' integration, which highlights the need for localities to be involved in the relevant processes, in order outcomes to be mutually beneficial for both refugees-immigrants and the local society, in terms of social cohesion, alleviation of inter-ethnic or inter-racial tensions and locally-regionally adapted economic development. Towards this direction, the opinions that local people hold towards refugees-immigrants and the processes of their integration, alongside the determinants that form such opinions constitute the cornerstone for the adoption and adaption of any locally specified processes. Nevertheless, given that in most cases immigration policy remains a responsibility of national governments the relevant surveys and studies regarding the attitudes of natives are conducted

at the national level. In this respect, integration policies (even locally sensitive) are at best informed by nation-wide datasets and consequent findings regarding the attitudes of people towards refugees or immigrants.

On the basis of the above point, the current work has set forth to explore the attitudes towards immigrants –refugees of natives in small-medium size cities and to identify to what extent these differ from the national average or from larger spatial units. The analysis we conducted has made apparent a number of remarks. First, in terms of the literature, it was highlighted that there is a lack of adequate surveys regarding the views of native population at the local level. Similar studies have been conducted mainly by or for NGO's and other independent organizations and they lack a coherent and a unifying approach. This makes comparisons between different studies a challenging endeavor, both in terms of content and longitudinal analysis. Second, the analysis identified statistically significant differences between metropolitan-large and small-medium size spatial units. Thus, it is argued that there no uniformity between views on immigration among different localities and spatial levels. Third, although there are differences in perceptions among the small and medium size localities, units of similar size seem to hold similar views on basic issues concerning immigration and immigrants. Last, exploring how the individual attributes of the respondents (gender, age, education, income and political ideology) affect their views on immigration, we did not find any of these characteristics to determine people's perceptions both at the national and at the metropolitan level. On the contrary, the analysis at the locally level (urban Thessaly) highlighted that older people, those with lower income and those with a right-wing ideology are more likely to view immigration as among the main issues of concern of the Greek society.

Taking into consideration that immigration constitutes a multifaced and dynamic phenomenon, it is rather difficult to suggest a solid policy proposal in the context of a single paper. Yet, it is obvious that if localities are to assume any substantial role towards the integration of immigrants, then policy should be at least informed in a bottom-up manner. Furthermore, given that the decentralization of responsibilities has never been a prime characteristic of the Greek state and administration, localities should first and foremost understand and properly communicate to different actors and stakeholders the expected benefits of successful integration for their local communities. Innovative, mainly cross-sectoral policies which must involve different actors from the local community are also expected to have the greatest impact. On the other hand, national governments that refuse to assign rights and responsibilities towards localities, should at least allow for flexible policies which can be then adapted at the local level. Last, it should be clear that empirically based knowledge and further research on how immigration and immigrant-integration issues are presently treated and resolved day by day in different localities, should be among the priorities of both national and subnational governing bodies.

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