

## SOCIAL INNOVATION AS A FACTOR FOR THE MIGRANTS' SOCIAL INTEGRATION ON A LOCAL LEVEL

DOI: 10.26341/issn.2241-4002-2024-4a-3-T02155

### **Panagiota Karametou**

*Ph.D., Harokopio University of Athens, Department of Economics and Sustainable Development*

[karametou@hua.gr](mailto:karametou@hua.gr)

### **Eleftheria Nteliou**

*EAP/ESP Lecturer, Foreign Language Centre, University of Thessaly*

[enteliou@uth.gr](mailto:enteliou@uth.gr)

### **Yannis Georgiou**

*BSc Student, Harokopio University of Athens, Department of Economics and Sustainable Development*

[georgiugiannis72@gmail.com](mailto:georgiugiannis72@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*Social innovation as a concept has attracted major attention, because it can contribute to the best possible fulfillment of the current social needs through the processes of integration and co-creation with marginalized groups of people. Social innovation can be defined as the development of innovative and effective solutions to social problems, with the intention of meeting vulnerable people's essential social needs. More specifically, social innovation can be applied in such fields as in the migrants' social integration, which is an issue of great importance, given the increasing number of migrants in Greece as well as in most European countries.*

*This paper aims at assessing the stock of social innovation at a social level, focusing on the 'municipality'. The area of Athens was selected as a case study and the research intended to explore the extent to which the inhabitants of this area were familiar with the concept and importance of social innovation as well as whether they were informed about the occurrence of social events and interventions organized by local government agents, with the purpose of socially integrating the migrants. For this purpose, a specially designed questionnaire addressed to the inhabitants of this area was implemented. The research was carried out from February to August 2023 and the sample consisted of approximately 2,500 participants.*

*According to the research results, the majority of the participants has not been aware of the concept of social innovation and has not been informed about the occurrence of socially innovative events in the area where they live. However, despite the limited information over this topic, the participants consider that social innovation can greatly contribute to inclusive practices and to the migrants' social integration.*

**Key words:** *Social innovation, migrants, social integration, area of Athens*

## **1. Introduction**

Currently, social innovation has garnered significant attention as an effective approach to identifying and addressing new social needs (Audretsch et al., 2022; Eichler & Schwarz, 2019, Moolaert et al., 2005). Social innovation refers to the creation of novel and improved

solutions that effectively address significant social needs faced by vulnerable segments of the population (Portales, 2019). It can also facilitate the fulfillment of existing social needs by promoting integration and collaborative problem-solving with marginalized population groups (Wang et al, 2023).

One of these vulnerable groups in Greece are the immigrants, who constitute a significant group of vulnerable populations, and their integration is a crucial concern, particularly in light of the rising number of immigrants in various European nations. In May 2022, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum reported that there were 910,523 third-country nationals legally living in Greece, which accounted for 8.5% of the overall population. According to KMOP (2022), 41% of the individuals resided in the larger Athens area.

The notable influx of immigrants in the municipalities of Attica appears to have a significant impact on the lives of the local population. Simultaneously, the lives of immigrants are profoundly shaped by the approach and attitude of the local population towards them. Consequently, there exists a reciprocal interaction between them that has a substantial impact on their everyday existence. Poor management of the relationship between these two population groups can result in the emergence of social conflicts that gradually undermine social stability and levels of social cohesion in the Greek society.

Actions that solely concentrate on the pre-accession phase and primarily address reception, temporary accommodation, and meeting the basic needs of individuals who have not yet established permanent settlement are insufficient for achieving immigrant integration. Socially innovative initiatives aimed at integrating migrants should encompass more than just the provision of basic reception services.

In order to narrow down the analysis and capture social innovation within its social context, it was imperative to limit the scope of this thesis to a specific field of social innovation, given the extensive range of fields in which it can occur.

The primary aim of this paper is to evaluate the extent of social innovation at the municipal level. This study specifically examines the citizens' perception and opinion on social innovation as well as their knowledge about the implementation of socially innovative actions by organizations and institutions involved in the social integration of migrants at the municipal level. It also investigates their views on the significance and urgency of implementing socially innovative actions to tackle pressing social issues, such as the integration of immigrants into the Greek society.

Regarding the paper's layout, the following section elucidates the notion of social innovation, examines the significance of social inclusion and integration of marginalized population groups, and explores the role of social innovation in the social integration of migrants. What follows afterwards is the research methodology employed in the current study, including the case study approach, the method of data collection, and the presentation of the research tool utilized. Subsequently, the findings of the study are presented, followed by the formulation of the primary conclusions that have arisen.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Defining social innovation**

Various definitions of social innovation can be found in the literature, reflecting the diverse perspectives of researchers and the specific spatial, social, economic, political, and temporal contexts. In particular, social innovation was initially defined as a novel approach to addressing social imperatives and needs, with examples such as combating poverty and crime (Taylor, 1970). Dreyer et al. (2017) define innovation as the set of actions, attitudes, and methods of working that contribute to bringing about social change. According to the authors,

these factors should be utilized in a manner that produces substantial advantages for social welfare, justice, inclusion, and addressing environmental issues. Moreover, Portales (2019) asserts that social innovation leads to substantial alterations in the social structure.

Although the concept of social innovation encompasses a multidisciplinary approach, it is characterized by four commonly recognized components: addressing a specific need, introducing innovative solutions to the problems being studied, bringing about changes in social structures and relationships, and empowering and activating marginalized social groups (Portales, 2019). Socially innovative actions lead to a profound social transformation, reshaping social structures, fostering new social interactions, and cultivating new interpersonal relationships. This process involves the inclusion, integration, and empowerment of socially marginalized groups (Fontan, 1998; Portales, 2019). Increasing the involvement and integration of diverse stakeholder groups in decision-making processes results in greater consensus, social cohesion, and empowerment of social groups, ultimately leading to significant social transformations (Portales, 2019).

One of the most comprehensive definitions of social innovation was formulated within the TEPSI (Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Building Social Innovation in Europe) project, a European research initiative conducted from 2012 to 2015 (The Young Foundation, 2012). This project involved collaboration between six specialized European institutes focusing on social innovation. According to the TEPSI program, social innovations refer to novel solutions, products, services, models, markets, processes, etc. that not only address a social need more effectively than current solutions but also result in enhanced capacities, relationships, and utilization of resources. Put simply, social innovations have a positive impact on society and empower individuals to take action. The roles of individuals can change, and certain groups within the population who are susceptible to harm can transition from being passive recipients to becoming active agents in promoting social action, driving social change, and gaining empowerment (The Young Foundation, 2012).

Social innovation encompasses novel and improved methods of addressing fundamental human needs and transforming social interactions by empowering social mechanisms. Socially innovative actions and initiatives typically emerge during times of crisis to specifically target the individuals who are directly affected by its consequences, thereby exacerbating their already challenging social position within the society to which they belong (Moulaert & Hiller, 2009).

Choi & Majumdar (2015) propose that social innovations can be categorized into three sub-dimensions: formalization, change processes, and social outcomes. Furthermore, as indicated in the research conducted by Rodrigo et al. (2024), social innovation is a multifaceted concept that can be implemented across various domains, both scientific and non-scientific. These domains include transformation, social entrepreneurship, design, theory, territorial development, and governance. Additionally, there are three emerging categories of social innovation participants: those focused on addressing human-related demographic challenges, and two main groups that integrate specific elements of social technologies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## ***2.2. Social integration of marginalized groups: the case of migrants***

Groups comprising a marginalized portion of the population are those that have been purposefully placed to the periphery of society. Marginalization is a term used to describe the condition in which a particular group, population, or individual is either placed on the periphery or within the boundaries of the dominant society; it can also involve the individuals' placement between two distinct cultures, belonging to neither of them, though (Sasaki & Bada, 2024; Alexander et al, 2023). The circumstances and surroundings that result

from their placement on the periphery of society pose a substantial risk to the social welfare of both the individuals and societies that are subjected to this form of marginalization (Alexander et al., 2003; Hall et al., 1994; Choi, 2001). According to research, populations residing in marginalized environments frequently encounter disparities in health outcomes, education system accessibility, health care services, and labor market participation, among other challenges (Alexander et al., 2003).

Migrants, are among the most marginalized segments of the population. According to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2019), a migrant is defined as any individual and their family members who relocate to another country or region in search of improved material and social conditions, as well as increased life expectancy for themselves and their family. On the basis of the United Nations' definition, in order for someone to be considered a migrant, they must have lived outside of their country of birth or the country they hold nationality from for a period of more than 12 months (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2019). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a migrant is defined as an individual who has relocated or is in the process of relocating to an international border or a state that is far from their usual place of residence (Unicef.es/educa, 2019). This definition applies regardless of the individuals' legal status, whether their move was voluntary or involuntary, the reasons behind their relocation, or the duration of their stay.

The term "social integration" originates from the sociological tradition and should be distinguished from the respective one that implies a political concept. It is centrally located in the study of societal composition and the interaction among its members. It can be described as the basic procedure of social structure and involvement, and is relevant to all groups, irrespective of their nationality, religion, language, and origin (Moisidis & Papadopoulou, 2011). Integration, as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), refers to the acceptance of migrants into a society, both as individuals and as a group, and this process can differ across different countries. The task of integration is not solely the responsibility of a specific group, but rather involves multiple actors, including the migrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2009).

In fact, Heckmann et al (2006) define integration as the gradual assimilation of an individual into a society, accompanied by a gradual adjustment to the prevailing living conditions. In that sense, integration is interrelated with the concept of 'social inclusion', which is commonly employed in the fields of Sociology and Social Policy. Social inclusion refers to the mechanism by which individuals within a common social context share power and advantages as well as a wide range of distinguished social attributes, such as gender, socio-economic status and other factors that mirror the social dynamics within a specific social framework (Avelino, 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). It also refers to the establishment of social connections among individuals within a society, with the aim of fostering their sense of being valued and important members of that society (Gidron & Hall, 2020).

The management of migration and social integration of migrants in the member states of the European Union (EU) presents a complex and compelling challenge, given the ongoing influx of migrants and refugees. From 2012 to 2015, there was a significant rise in the number of asylum seekers, increasing from 300,000 to 1,300,000 (European Commission, 2020). This prompted governments in Europe to develop strategies aimed at effectively integrating migrants. In particular, the relevant plans pertain to participatory education and training, the advancement of employment opportunities and skills validation, the facilitation of access to healthcare, and the provision of suitable and affordable housing (European Commission, 2020).

The review of the existing body of research on the migrants' social integration reveals that there is a lack of consensus regarding the precise definition of the term "social

integration" in relation to this group. Consequently, different countries have different definitions and approaches, depending on the various integration policies that are implemented, as outlined by Mittelstädt and Özen (2015).

Esser (2006) argues that migration leads to the development and strengthening of ethnic inequalities, which is a prominent outcome of the process. According to Bund et al. (2015), in order to achieve a comprehensive approach to integrating migrants, it is necessary to go beyond the actions taken during the pre-accession phase, which primarily focus on their reception, temporary housing, and meeting their basic needs, given that they have not yet established permanent settlement. They argue that additional measures should be implemented to address systemic or structural integration, the incorporation of different cultural and religious practices as well as social integration and a unified sense of identity (Bund et al., 2015).

According to Heckman (1997) social integration is associated with structural integration (e.g. participation in the education system), cultural integration (e.g. cultural knowledge about the immigration country), social integration (e.g. social contacts), and identificational integration (e.g. feeling of belonging) These characteristics are also related to social inclusion, which comprises activities aimed at promoting civic engagement and providing migrants with relevant information regarding matters that affect them. It also involves initiatives to foster social connections and interactions between migrants and the Greek population, particularly in relation to everyday challenges. Additionally, social inclusion encompasses endeavors to ensure fair treatment, equality, and non-discrimination, irrespective of the individuals' ethnic background or religious convictions. Finally, the identity integration stage encompasses measures aimed at enhancing the feelings of "belonging" and "difference", thus preserving and reinforcing cultural and social identity, and securing the migrants' legal and political rights (Bund et al., 2015).

The capability of novel interventions and initiatives to address any type of challenges is a consequence of cultural diversity and distinct initial conditions. Thus, it is crucial to discover innovative methods to engage and enable migrants to actively take part in the social system, such as in education, the job market, in social and political sectors (the pre-accession phase, which primarily focus on their reception, temporary housing, and meeting their basic needs, given that they have not yet established permanent settlement (Hutter et al. 2015).

According to Anagnostou (2016), the integration of migrants into Europe is significantly influenced by the local government. Municipalities and other entities, such as local and regional councils, have become increasingly involved in tackling the difficulties associated with the assimilation of long-term legal migrants, and more recently in the support of newly arrived refugees. Local and municipal authorities, either autonomously or in collaboration with other public entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), offer a diverse array of social services in the areas of healthcare, education, and childcare. Additionally, they are accountable for upholding the social infrastructure of urban areas, which house significant populations of migrants. The European Agenda for the Integration of Third Country Nationals (TCN) of 2011 has intentionally highlighted the importance of involving regional and local authorities in developing and carrying out integration policies for migrants. In practice, municipalities in Greece do not have legal authority in relation to migrant integration. However, they can significantly influence the local environment where integration occurs, either by improving or, conversely, diminishing its chances (Anagnostou, 2016).

The evolution of the process of the migrants' social integration is dependent on the combined efforts of both the migrants and the host society, which is comprised of various social groups. Therefore, migrants themselves should initially be open, assertive, and receptive, actively engaging in the learning and adaptation process to their new environment by participating in creative actions within the local host communities. This presupposes that

they have access to the most accurate and comprehensive information regarding the goals and principles of the planned actions, as well as an increased involvement in their development. Simultaneously, it is crucial for host societies to recognize the imperative and significance of embracing diversity, inclusion, and the integration of migrants (Davy, 2005).

Various indicators are consistently employed to evaluate the level of assimilation of migrants into a society. For example, the study by Ersanilli and Koopmans (2010) highlights the importance of acquiring proficiency in the local language, establishing social connections across different racial backgrounds, and experiencing a sense of ease and emotional well-being in adapting to a new culture and environment. Furthermore, the degree of inclusion can be evaluated by considering indicators such as the provision of private housing and access to essential services like healthcare, education, and public administration infrastructure (Davy, 2005). Social inclusion is assessed based on the degree of integration within society on its whole as well as on each member's integration within society. Upon further examination, it becomes evident that the level of an individual's integration into society can be determined by their perceived level of integration, their level of social interaction with others, and the degree of recognition they receive from other members of society. Social inclusion therefore refers to the establishment of social connections among individuals in a society, thus enhancing their sense of being esteemed members of that society (Gidron & Hall, 2020).

Consequently, central and local government bodies as well as civil society actors can promote the migrants' social integration by implementing socially innovative actions. These actions aim to address any obstacles and difficulties that may arise from host societies and stakeholders themselves (Boelman et al., 2014).

### ***2.3. The role of social innovation in the migrants' social integration***

However, how has the significance of social innovation arisen as a crucial element in supporting and strengthening marginalized population groups, such as migrants? The role of social innovation was emphasized by the new urban policy approach, which focused on redefining alternative development strategies within the framework of Integrated Area Development, which was based on the principle of social innovation (Nussbaumer and Moulaert, 2004).

This novel developmental approach is founded on the notion that development ought to address the fundamental requirements of the most disadvantaged segments of the urban populace, encompassing the necessities of shelter, healthcare, education, and democratic local governance. The exclusion of these marginalized groups exemplifies the negative aspects and the opposite side of the progress of any nation, region, city, or community. In fact, the living conditions of the most marginalized groups within a community are a significant factor in evaluating it. Simultaneously, this new development approach also includes some qualitative criteria. The narrow focus on minimum levels of consumption when addressing inequality has been strongly challenged. Instead, a more comprehensive understanding of needs, functions, and individual rights should be considered to drive renewed efforts to combat poverty (Moulaert 2000). This expanded perspective does not restrict the potential for growth in any manner, but rather enables a focus on the living and working conditions of marginalized segments of the population, thus challenging the conventional approach to development.

Indeed, when considering a more comprehensive theoretical framework for living and working conditions, individuals are regarded as dynamic "factors" that seek to exercise autonomy and self-governance in order for 'alternative development' to be achieved (Narayan, 2005). A top priority of this new growth model is to challenge the requirement that individuals should submit themselves to all the limitations imposed by the traditional growth models. Conversely, novel alternative approaches are proposed to circumvent these

limitations. As stated by Friedman (1992), a crucial indicator of societal empowerment is the "awakening" of its citizens. Within this framework, every household unit could assume an active and impactful function by relinquishing its previous position as a passive consumer. This active role can be maintained by redefining the capacity of individuals to meet their fundamental needs. Groups that were previously marginalized are now pivotal components and pillars in assisting and resolving their challenges. This aspect is in complete accordance with the fundamental goal of local empowerment, which is the self-determination and active involvement of every individual via alternative development processes. Alternative development emphasizes the establishment of effective institutions and is based on the fulfillment of fundamental needs, economic and social mobilization, and the mobilization of political potential. Numerous authors have identified the presence of physical infrastructure and interrelationships among these dimensions (Moulaert et al., 2005; Nussbaumer & Moulaert, 2004).

Primarily, basic needs possess a social nature, encompassing not only the requirement for a secure minimum income, material possessions, and housing, but also the necessity for self-expression, creativity, entertainment, and self-governance. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of basic needs must consider multiple dimensions. Furthermore, as stated by Friedman (1992), it is crucial to highlight the connection between social and political movements: social empowerment cannot exist without first guaranteeing political empowerment. Therefore, this novel alternative development approach entails not only enhancing material circumstances but also, and most importantly, fostering political empowerment. The focus is not solely on desires and preferences, but also on necessities and entitlements. Ultimately, the social interactions among the factors involved in the process of development hold a prominent position.

Moulaert and Delvainquiere (1994) present the notion of social innovation and its significance in the context of regional progress. Social innovation as a term encompasses all the defining aspects of the philosophy behind this new development proposal. Similarly to Ekins (1992), they emphasize the significance of innovation in social relations, surpassing other forms of innovation, such as technological advancements. They argue that only by creating new frameworks for expressing needs, fostering cooperation, and implementing democratic management can the requirements of the most marginalized segments of the population be recognized and fulfilled. While the local level appears to have an advantageous role in promoting innovative development strategies, it is still crucial to collaborate with external development actors. External contribution is crucial for achieving higher levels of efficiency and innovation, not just for harnessing local potential. The concept is most effectively conveyed through the model of integrated development of a region, which serves as an analytical framework for examining the impact of local development on addressing social exclusion in the European Union countries (Nussbaumer & Moulaert, 2004).

Hence, the fundamental concept of integrated area development, predicated on social innovation as a mechanism to empower and integrate significant marginalized segments of society, may substantially contribute to the planning and execution of initiatives aimed at facilitating the social assimilation and integration of migrants.

Given the increasing number of migrants in Greece and the efforts made for their social inclusion, our study aims at evaluating the social innovation stock in municipalities in the area of Athens and its role in the migrants' integration in the host community.

More specifically, our study intends to answer the following 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?

### **3. Methodology**

Our study was conducted from March to August 2023 and took place in twenty-six municipalities in the area of Athens. The sample was random and consisted of native citizens.

The specially designed questionnaire addressed the residents of the area of Athens. In particular, it was distributed online to the citizens of twenty-five municipalities of the area of Athens: Agios Dimitrios, Athens (center), Aigaleo, Argiroupoli-Elliniko, Artemida, Vironas, Galatsi, Glyfada, Dafni-Ymittos, Dionysos, Kallithea, Nea Smirni, Moschato-Tavros, Nea Philadelphia, Paleo Faliro, Papagos-Cholargos, Piraeus, Peristeri, Heraklion, Ilion, Kaisariani, Kifisia, Nea Ionia, Nikaia, Petroupoli. The survey was conducted from March to August 2023.

Regarding its structure, the questionnaire included seventeen questions, five of which concerned demographics, financial and social characteristics (e.g. the participants’ sex, age, monthly income, educational level, profession and area of permanent residence). The rest twelve questions related to the social innovation reserve in the municipalities under study.

Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

Regarding the demographic data, 56% (fifty-six per cent) of the research participants were male and 44% (forty-four per cent) were female. Their age ranged from 18 (eighteen) to 55 (fifty-five). Their net monthly income ranged from 600 to 1,200 euros. They had all completed the basic educational requirements and worked either in the private or state sector (Table 1).

*Table 1: Demographic data*

<i>Gender</i>		
	N	%
Female	1256	56,0%
Male	985	44,0%
<i>Age Group</i>		
18-25	1085	48,4%
26-35	398	17,8%
36-45	249	11,1%
46-55	305	13,6%
56-65	144	6,4%
65+	60	2,7%
<i>Monthly Income</i>		
≤ 600 €	879	39,2%
601-1000	689	30,7%
1001-1500	495	22,1%
≥1501€	178	7,9%
<i>Education level</i>		
Technical/Private Education	354	15,8%
Bachelor	586	26,1%
Basic Education	977	43,6%
PhD	43	1,9%
MSc	281	12,5%

Occupation		
Businessman	152	6,8%
Private Employee	787	35,1%
Public Employee	369	16,5%
Student	657	29,3%
Unemployed	116	5,2%
Housekeeping	67	3,0%
Pensioner	93	4,1%

Concerning the questions about the assessment of the social innovation stock in the municipalities under study, an interesting fact revealed was that 60.7% of the participants were not aware of the term “social innovation”.

*Table2: ‘social innovation’ awareness facts*

Is this the first time that you hear the term Social Innovation?		
	N	%
YES	880	39,3%
NO	1361	60,7%

However, after informing the participants about *Social Innovation* characteristics, they presented higher than the average scores concerning the importance of its role in empowering social cohesion (M = 3.51, S.D. = 1.02), as well as in handling social conflicts and contradictions among different social groups (M = 3.64, S.D. = 1.10). Moreover, they believed that social innovation could help in empowering social action (M = 3.65, S.D. = 1.08), in achieving social change (M = 3.62, S.D. = 1.09), and finally in producing social benefit or value in the area where they lived (M = 3.61, S.D. = 1.06) (Table 3).

*Table 3: Perceived importance of the role of social innovation*

	N Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Handling social conflicts and contradictions among different social groups	2240	1	3,64	4,00	1,104
Producing social benefit or value	2241	0	3,61	4,00	1,062
Achieving social change	2241	0	3,62	4,00	1,086
Empowering social action	2241	0	3,65	4,00	1,078
Social cohesion	2241	0	3,51	4,00	1,018

Regarding their information about the realization of socially innovative actions which aim in the alleviation of existing social problems in their Municipality, 74.4%of the participants had not been informed and were not aware of the actualization of relevant actions (Table 4).

*Table 4: Information about social innovative activities*

*Are you aware of any social innovative actions being implemented in your municipality to address existing social problems?*

	N	%
YES	597	26,6%

NO	345	15,4%
I am not aware of	1299	58%

In relation to the most important social problems that the Municipality of their residence faces, the participants believed that the greatest of them in terms of hierarchy were the economic crisis and the high levels of unemployment, the deterioration of the natural environment and the lack of solidarity, followed by poverty and social marginalization, lack of trust in institutions and lack of trust in interpersonal interactions, the use of drugs and other substances as well as the outbreak of violence and criminality (Table 5, Figure 1). As issues of minor importance were considered those of racial discrimination, social conflicts, migration and insufficient housing conditions as well as corruption. It is worth noting that although migration as such is considered an issue of minor importance, its severity should not be ignored, because if migrants are not integrated in the host community, then they may become unemployed, poor and socially marginalized, thus creating severe social disruption (Table 5, Figure 1).

*Table 5. Most and least important social problems, as perceived by the residents of the area of Athens.*

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
Most important Social Problems <sup>a</sup>			
High levels of unemployment	868	7,6%	38,8%
Economic Crisis	1092	9,6%	48,8%
Natural Disasters	306	2,7%	13,7%
Epidemics (e.g. Covid 19)	398	3,5%	17,8%
Poverty & Social Marginalization	815	7,1%	36,4%
Racial Discrimination	694	6,1%	31,0%
Social Conflict	669	5,9%	29,9%
Immigration	561	4,9%	25,1%
Inadequate Housing Conditions	441	3,9%	19,7%
Violence & Criminality	859	7,5%	38,4%
Use of Substances	609	5,3%	27,2%
Lack of Institutional trust	646	5,7%	28,9%
Lack of Interpersonal trust	587	5,1%	26,2%
Corruption	562	4,9%	25,1%
Lack of Solidarity	881	7,7%	39,3%
Weak civil society	666	5,8%	29,7%
Degradation of the natural environment	759	6,7%	33,9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11413</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>509,7%</b>

Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

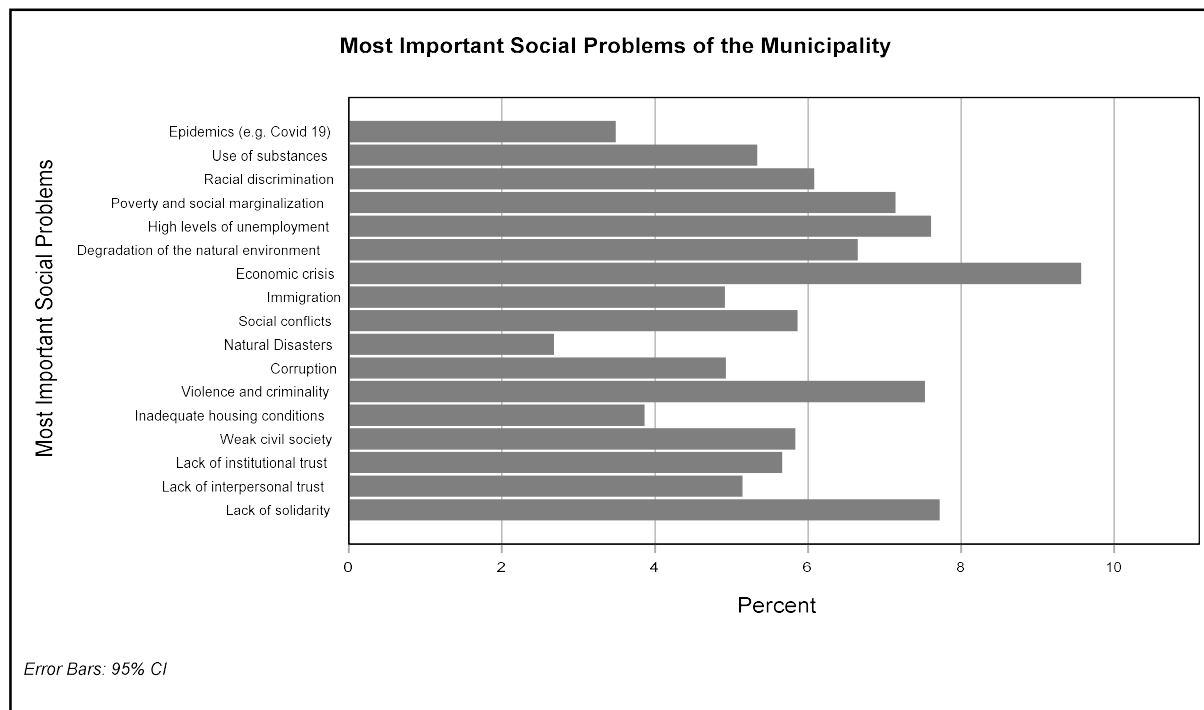


Figure 1: Most and least important social problems, as perceived by the residents of the area of Athens.

In relation to the question of which were considered the most marginalized groups of citizens, the majority of the participants supported that the most isolated groups in terms of hierarchy were the disabled followed by the migrants, the long-term unemployed, the Roma, the low pensioners, the unemployed women, the prisoners and those released from prison and finally the HIV positive persons (Table 6, Figure2).

Table 6: Most and least marginalized groups of citizens, as perceived by the residents of the area of Athens.

MostMarginalizedGroups <sup>a</sup>		Responses		
		N	%	% of Cases
MostMarginalizedGroups <sup>a</sup>	Long term unemployed	895	14,4%	42,3%
	Unemployed Women	615	9,9%	29,0%
	Low pensioners	793	12,7%	37,4%
	Individuals with disabilities	1085	17,4%	51,2%
	Immigrants - Returnees	1002	16,1%	47,3%
	Roma	853	13,7%	40,3%
	HIV-positive individuals	365	5,9%	17,2%
	Incarcerated/released/juvenile offenders	616	9,9%	29,1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>6224</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>293,9%</b>

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

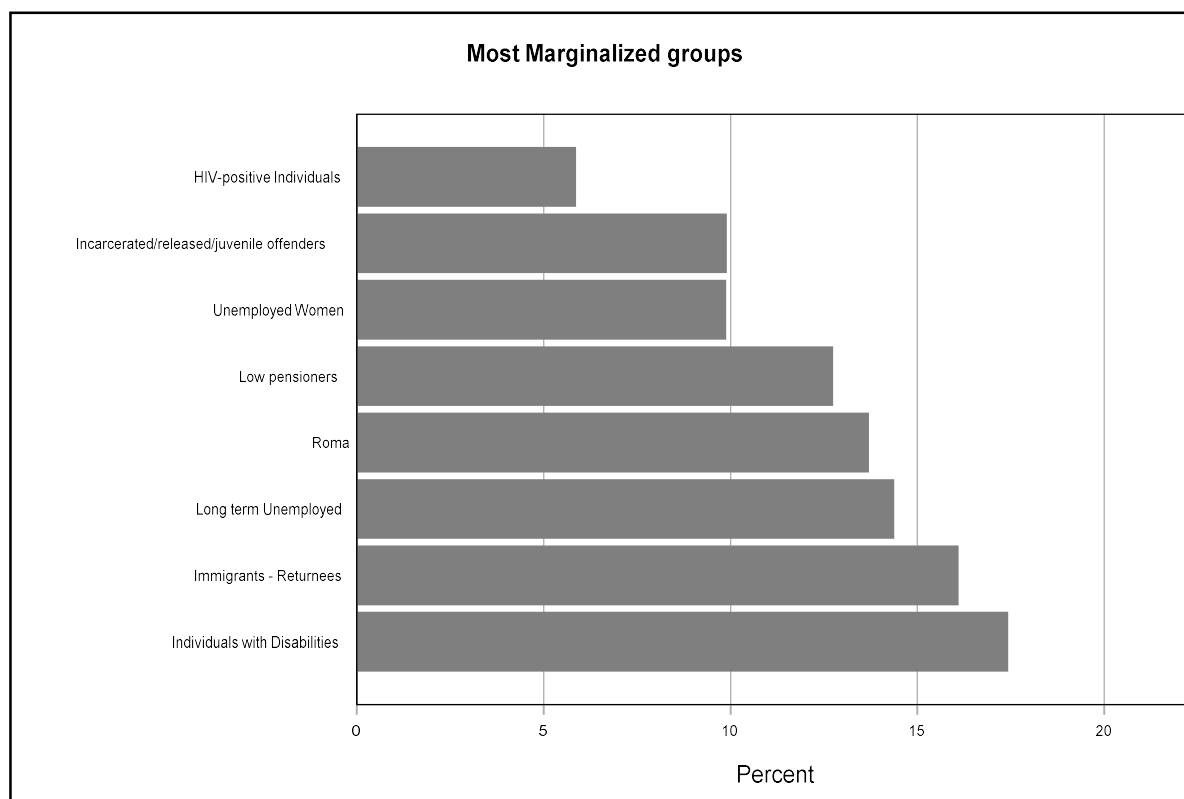


Figure2: Most and least marginalized groups of citizens, as perceived by the residents of the area of Athens.

In relation to the most serious obstacles in the migrants’ smooth integration in their municipality, the participants mentioned the following ones in terms of importance: the lack of suitable infrastructure, the lack of political will, racism and xenophobia, the citizens’ unwillingness to change, the lack of financial resources, the lack of cooperation with the migrants and the migrants’ unwillingness to integrate themselves.

Concerning the significance of supporting the most marginalized groups of the population, the majority of the participants (72,65%) confirmed its importance. Moreover, 82,7% of those questioned considered the migrants’ social integration very important in relation to the economic growth of the Municipality where they live. In the meanwhile, they regarded as ineffective the measures taken by the municipal authorities towards the migrants’ smooth integration.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed to examine the perspective of Athens area residents regarding social innovation and its significance in facilitating the successful integration of migrants.

Based on our data analysis, most of the survey participants lack awareness of the concept of social innovation. However, through their participation in this survey, they gain understanding of its content and importance. They also recognize its significance in improving the well-being of marginalized population groups, such as migrants, by empowering them politically, enhancing social cohesion, improving quality of life, and reducing social conflicts and confrontations among different social groups. They also comprehend the role of social innovation in generating substantial social advantages and value by fostering social transformation through the actions of citizens.

On the other hand, most participants express a lack of awareness and information regarding the implementation of socially innovative initiatives aimed at integrating migrants in their municipality. Nonetheless, they acknowledge the importance of supporting marginalized population groups through socially innovative actions for immigrant integration. They believe that such actions should be developed through collaboration between local government bodies, civil society, and the active involvement and consent of both citizens and migrants.

The regional and governmental actors should cater for social security measures that can satisfy the migrants' basic needs for housing, education and employment, thus providing them with opportunities to become members of the host community with equal rights. Besides, this need is also a necessity, which complies with the framework for EU co-operation on integration through the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union, which were presented by the Commission in 2004 as well as in the Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. What should be highlighted, though, is that the integration process should be a two-way process of mutual accommodation by migrants and the societies that receive them.

Therefore, the successful integration of migrants presupposes the collaboration among local government bodies, civil society actors, the local community, and the migrants themselves. This will ensure a more focused and effective implementation of integration efforts. At the local community level, it is crucial for local authorities to comprehend the significance of incorporating migrants through focused and unified measures. Effective integration of migrants requires the implementation of participatory processes, which involve informing all relevant local interest groups about the presence of migrants and their specific needs. This will help to gain their support and cooperation with local authorities in designing targeted integration actions. Such actions will benefit migrants and the local community, as well as its citizens. The citizens' active involvement in the design and implementation of socially innovative actions is crucial for their success. In fact, if citizens are provided with accurate information about the importance of these actions and are encouraged to substantially contribute, indifference, criticisms, and negative reactions can be minimized. This approach ensures that citizens become co-shapers and co-responsible for the effective planning and execution of migrant integration actions.

## **References**

- Alexander G. L., Kinman, E., L., Miller, L. C., Patrick, T., B. (2003). Marginalization and health geomatics. *J Biomed Inform.* 2003 Aug-Oct;36(4-5):400-7. doi: 10.1016/j.jbi.2003.09.021. PMID: 14643736.
- Anagnostou, D. (2016). *Local government and migrant integration in Europe and in Greece*. Retrieved January 7th, 2024 from: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). Athens, Greece. <https://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/LOMIGRAS.report.No1-1.pdf>
- Avelino, F. (2021). Theories of power and social change. Power contestations and their implications for research on social change and innovation. *Journal of Political Power*, 14(3), 425–448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1875307>
- Audretsch, B. D., Eichler, M. G., & Schwarz, J. E. (2022). "Emerging needs of social innovators and social innovation ecosystems," *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Springer, vol. 18(1), pages 217-254, March.
- Boelman V., Kwan A., Lauritzen J., Millard J. & Schon R. (2014). Growing Social Innovation: A Guide for Policy Makers. A deliverable of the project: "The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe" (TEPSIE),

- European Commission – 7th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research.
- Bund, E., Gerhard, U., Hoelscher, M. & Mildenerger, G. (2015). A methodological framework for measuring social innovation. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 48-78.
- Choi, N. & Majumdar, S. (2015). Social Innovation: Towards a Conceptualisation. In: Majumdar, S., Guha, S., Marakkath, N. (eds) *Technology and Innovation for Social Change*. Springer, New Delhi. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-2071-8\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-2071-8_2).
- Choi H. (2001). Cultural marginality: a concept analysis with implications for immigrant adolescents, *Issues Compr. Pediatr. Nurs.*, 24 (2001), pp. 193-206.
- COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, Justice and Home Affairs (2004). Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU, 14615/04 (Presse 321), [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/jha/82745.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/jha/82745.pdf).
- Davy, U. (2005). Integration of immigrants in Germany: A slowly evolving concept. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 7(2), 123-144. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1571816054762214>.
- Dreyer, M., Chefneux, L., Goldberg, A., Heimburg, J. V., Patrignani, N., Schofield, M., & Shilling, C. (2017). Responsible innovation: A complementary view from industry with proposals for bridging different perspectives. *Sustainability*, 9(10), 1719. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su9101719>.
- Eichler, G., & Schwarz, E. (2019). What Sustainable Development Goals Do Social Innovations Address? A Systematic Review and Content Analysis of Social Innovation Literature. *Sustainability*, 11(2), 522. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11020522>.
- Ekins, P. (1992). A four-capital model of wealth creation. In: Ekins, P., Max-Neef, M. (Eds.), *Real-Life Economics: Understanding Wealth Creation*. Routledge, London/New York, pp. 147/155.
- Ersanilli, E. and Koopmans, R. (2007). ‘The cultural integration of Turkish immigrants in Germany, France and the Netherlands: a controlled comparison’. New York: paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Sociological Association, 1114 August.
- Esser, H. (2006). *Sprache und Integration: Die sozialen Bedingungen und Folgen des Spracherwerbs von Migranten*. 580 S., Frankfurt am Main und New York, Campus, 2006, ISBN: 978-3-593-38197-8.
- European Commission (2020). COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, COM/2020/758 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0758>.
- Fontan, J. M. (1998). Innovation sociale et société civile québécoise. *Possibles*, 22(3-4), 116-135.
- Friedman, J. (1992). *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*. ISBN: 978-1-557-86300-3.
- Gidron, N., & Hall, P.A. (2020). Populism as a Problem of Social Integration. *Comparative Political Studies*, 53, 1027 - 1059.
- Hall, J.M., Stevens, P.E. & Meleis, A.I. (1994). Marginalization: a guiding concept for valuing diversity in nursing knowledge development, *ANS Adv. Nurs. Sci.*, 16 (4), pp. 23-41.
- Heckman, J., Stixrud, J. and Urzua, S., (2006). The Effects of Cognitive and Noncognitive Abilities on Labor Market Outcomes and Social Behavior, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 24, (3), 411-482.

- Hutter, M., Knoblauch, H., Rammert, W., & Windeler, A. (2015). Innovation society today: the reflexive creation of novelty. *Historical Social Research*, 40(3), 30-47. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.40.2015.3.30-47>.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2009). Διεθνές Μεταναστευτικό Δίκαιο. Γλωσσάριο για την Μετανάστευση, [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_20.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_20.pdf), Accessed 01.04.2024.
- KMOP (2022). *National Report: Greece WP2\_D2.1\_KMOP & Neapolis Sykeon Municipality Greece "Migrants & Refugees in Greece: Limited political and civic participation, Best practices of Migrants Councils"*. [https://www.kmop.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/MVH\\_NATIONAL-REPORT\\_GREECE.pdf](https://www.kmop.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/MVH_NATIONAL-REPORT_GREECE.pdf).
- Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2019). *Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Ένταξη Διαδικτυακός Τόπος Διαβουλεύσεων*, <http://www.opengov.gr/immigration/?p=798> Accessed 01.04.2024. Accessed 01.04.2024.
- Mittelstädt, A. and Özen O. (2015). "Social Media Use and Social Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Germany: A New Interdisciplinary Framework." <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Social-Media-Use-and-Social-Integration-of-Ethnic-A-Mittelst%C3%A4dt-Odag/9a5832bf6accdc1a6a7b423649167c20138c795f>.
- Moulaert, F. and Delvainquiere, J.C. (1994), "Regional and sub-regional trajectories in Europe: the role of socio-cultural innovation", in L. Bekemans (eds.) *Culture: Building Stone for Europe 2002*. Brussels: European Interuniversity Press
- Moulaert, F. (2000). *Globalization and integrated area development in European cities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moulaert, F. , Martinelli, F. , Swyngedouw, E. & Gonzalez, S. (2005). Towards alternative model(s) of local innovation, *Urban Studies*, 42 (11) (2005), pp. 1969-1990, 10.1080/00420980500279893.
- Moulaert, F., & Hillier, J. (2009). *What is social innovation? And why is it politically relevant?* Oxford, UK: Ashgate.
- Μουσιδης, Α. & Παπαδοπούλου, Δ. (επιμ.) (2011). *Η κοινωνική ενσωμάτωση των μεταναστών στην Ελλάδα: εργασία, εκπαίδευση, ταυτότητες*. Αθήνα: Κριτική.
- Narayan, Deepa (Editor) (2005). *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. 500 pp. World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e597202012-001>.
- Nussbaumer, J., & Moulaert, F. (2004). Integrated Area Development and social innovation in European cities: A cultural focus. *City*, 8(2), 249–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360481042000242201>.
- Portales, L. (2019). Social Innovation: Origins, Definitions, and Main Elements. In: *Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13456-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13456-3_1).
- Rodrigo, L., Ortiz-Marcos, I., & Palacios, M. (2024). A typology of social innovation: A comparative study of clustering methodologies. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 1-40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-023-00924-8>
- Sasaki, I., & Baba, S. (2024). Shades of Cultural Marginalization: Cultural Survival and Autonomy Processes. *Organization Theory*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877231221552>.
- Taylor, J. B. (1970). Introducing social innovation. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 6(1), 69–7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002188637000600104>.
- The Young Foundation (2012). *Social Innovation Overview: A deliverable of the project: "The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe"* (TEPSIE), European Commission – 7 th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research.

- Ulrike, D. (2005) Integration of Immigrants in Germany: A Slowly Evolving Concept, *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 7, pp. 123-144.
- unicef.es/educa (2019). *Γλωσσάριο: Μετανάστης, Αιτών Άσυλο, Πρόσφυγας*, [https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/4\\_SECONDARY-EDUCATION-GLOSSARY-migration-refuge-asylum\\_GR\\_Formato.pdf](https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/4_SECONDARY-EDUCATION-GLOSSARY-migration-refuge-asylum_GR_Formato.pdf). Accessed 11.04.2024.
- Wang, J., Weng, Y., Shidujaman, M., Ahmed, S.U. (2023). A Multilevel Perspective for Social Innovation: Three Exemplary Case Studies in Collaborative Communities Toward Sustainability. In: Kurosu, M., Hashizume, A. (eds) *Human-Computer Interaction. HCII 2023. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol 14014. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35572-1\\_25](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35572-1_25).
- Zhou C, Zhan M, An X, Huang X. (2022). Social Inclusion Concerning Migrants in Guangzhou City and the Spatial Differentiation. *Sustainability*, 14(23):15548. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142315548>.