



GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY OF MELBOURNE & VICTORIA

IMMIGRATION REPORT

JUNE 2011

GOCMV

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Penny Dimopoulos - Solicitor, Registered Migration Agent, ORANA MIGRATION GROUP and HELLAS AUSTRALIA VISA SERVICES

Elizabeth Hagiefremidis – Principal Consultant – bwp consulting

Mike M. Zafiropoulos AM - Board Chairman of Melbourne Community Television Consortium (Ch31) and President of Fronditha Care

GOCMV

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Introduction

The Greek economic crisis has led to a sharp increase in the number of highly skilled and educated Greek nationals seeking opportunities outside Greece. The main destinations of choice for Greeks include the UK, US and other European nations. There has also been a significant rise in the number of Greeks seeking to work and study in Australia.

The purpose of this report is to outline the ways in which Greek nationals can make a valuable contribution to the economic and social fabric of Australian society and to suggest practical reforms to the Australian immigration process to facilitate the entry of Greek visa applicants to Australia.

At present, the main avenues through which Greeks are seeking entry to Australia are the permanent and temporary visa programs, including the business skills program, skilled migration program, student visa program and family migration program.

A significant proportion of Greeks are skilled, highly educated and largely fluent in English. They are attractive candidates for Australian migration.

People of Greek descent have unquestionably integrated well into the Australian community and assisted in the social and economic development of Australia. The 2006 Australian Census records 109,980 Greece-born migrants, and 365,145 people of Greek ancestry living in Australia (based on country of birth of parents). Some estimates suggest the Greek community in Australia could be as large as 600,000. The Greek population is concentrated in Melbourne (41 per cent) and Sydney (30 per cent). Melbourne, Sister City to Thessaloniki, has been described as the third largest 'Greek city' in the world and is an important overseas centre of Hellenism.

Australia has embraced Greek people and Greek culture and this has benefitted Australian society socially, culturally and economically. In short, Greeks 'fit into' the Australian community and contribute to its prosperity.

Despite this, Greek Nationals are facing significant challenges in applying for entry to Australia under the existing visa streams.

By introducing and implementing a number of key changes to the Australian visa application and processing system, Greeks will be able to more easily and effectively enter Australia to meet skills shortages and make a positive impact to the economic and social landscape in this country. We understand that Australia's migration legislation, policies and procedures are non-discriminatory in nature and we are not seeking any special or preferential treatment for Greek visa applicants. Rather, we are suggesting some small scale practical reforms to the current system to allow Greeks to more easily apply for the visas for which they are eligible.

The key changes required are expressed within the body of this report and summarised in the 'Recommendations' section at the end of the report. The report includes data directly relevant to the levels of tertiary education attained by Greek students studying abroad. The statistics present a clear picture of what these graduates have to offer with respect to language and skill sets. Information about the current Greek economic crisis is also included. By all indications unemployment levels in Greece will increase for the year 2011; at this point in time no official statistics have been released for the first quarter of the year by the OECD. The below indicators provide us with a clear picture of the difficulties faced by a large proportion of Greek citizens.

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne & Victoria (GOCMV) has first hand experience and knowledge in dealing with Greeks who are interested in transferring their skills and knowledge to Australia. The GOCMV has established links with individuals, lawyers, migration agents, educators, businesses, recruiters and Government bodies in Australia and Greece and is therefore well placed to inform and advise the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) about practical steps that can be taken to facilitate the entry of Greek nationals to Australia who will positively contribute to Australian society.

Background – About the GOCMV

GOCMV is the largest member-based Greek organisation in the Southern Hemisphere with over 5,000 individual members and a network that incorporates over 120 Greek-based organisations in Victoria.

From its establishment in 1897 it has, and continues to serve as the peak organisation in representing the interests of the Greek community in Victoria. Throughout its long history it has played a pioneering role in advocating the rights of migrants and refugees, as well as a foundational role in the development of multiculturalism. During both the pre and post war migration period our organisation was the focal point for newly-arrived migrants from Greece. Its history is rich in examples of the Greek Community's close collaboration with relevant government departments in regard to matters of migration; from informing the Australian public in the early 1900s of the benefits of migration, creating hubs that sought employment and housing for newly arrived Greek immigrants, to sending delegations to Bonegilla migrant camp. It is clearly evident that the GOCMV has extensive knowledge and experience in regard to the matter of immigration and continues to have an active voice in the matter.



The Minister for Home and Territories Senator Pearce with a representatives of the Greek community of Australia. Photo 1925, Argus Newspaper.

In the past 12 months, our organisation has been receiving requests from Greek citizens who have expressed their interest in migrating to Australia. The majority of these enquiries are from skilled and educated individuals. As an indication of this we note that our organisation (GOCMV) has received over 1,000 enquiries from Greek citizens relating to the possibility of migrating to Australia. These enquiries not only include questions with respect to how

one can apply for a visa but they also include individuals who forward their resumes and are actively pursuing

employment prospects in Australia and enquiries from Australian citizens who wish to move their Greek partners and children to Australia or apply for Australian citizenship by descent for their children. Furthermore, in their correspondence they have highlighted the associated difficulties in the migration process.

The following report is tabled to provide a broad understanding of the current availability of skilled and educated Greek citizens with a comprehensive knowledge of the English language who, due to the current financial situation of their country, have little or no prospect of finding employment in the short to medium term.

1. Greek Nationals – A highly educated and highly skilled people

The population of Greece is 11.2 million. According to Greek Government figures, over 74,000 Greek high school students attain a position in a tertiary institution in Greece annually to study in their chosen field. However thousands more apply to study abroad. In 2010 the number of Greek students studying abroad reached 34,196 which was the highest per capita in the world. Below are statistics which show the total number of degrees completed, students' countries of preference for study, the degree of study and the most popular courses for Greek students.

Table 1.1: Degrees submitted to the Organisation for Recognition of Academic Degrees and Titles during the period 2005 - 2010

Degree type	No. of degrees	% of total
Undergraduate	27,169	54.6
Postgraduate	19,247	38.7
PhD	3,318	6.7
Total	49,734	100

Figure 1.1: Degrees submitted to the Organisation for Recognition of Academic Degrees and Titles during the period 2005 - 2010

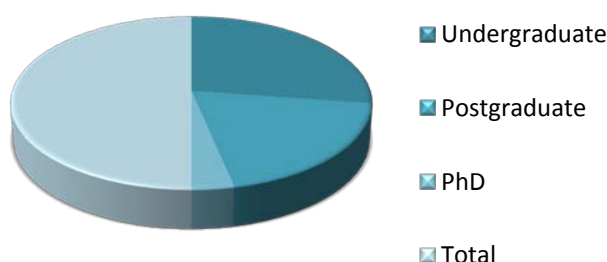


Table 1.2: Country in which degree was attained

Country	Degree type	No. of degrees
E.U + Switzerland & Norway	Undergraduate	21,906
	Postgraduate	17,536
	PhD	2,747
	Total	42,189
U.S.A & Canada	Undergraduate	1,928
	Postgraduate	1,376
	PhD	492
	Total	3,796
Other European Countries	Undergraduate	2,579
	Postgraduate	246
	Total	2,825
Asia		392
Oceania		284
Africa		194
Central & Latin America		54
Total		49,734

Figure 1.2: Country in which degree was attained

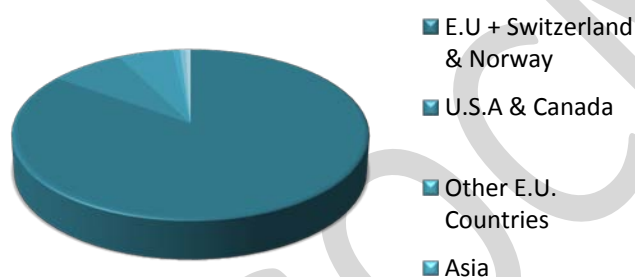


Table 1.3: Country of preference for study

Country	% of total	Country	% of total
<i>Undergraduate</i>		<i>PhD</i>	
Great Britain	50.97	Great Britain	51.01
Italy	11.25	U.S.A	13.55
Germany	4.37	Germany	11.02
Bulgaria	4.02	France	7.77
France	2.78	Other	16.65
Other	26.61	Great Britain	51.01
<i>Postgraduate</i>			
Great Britain	69.21		
U.S.A	7.11		
France	7.02		
Germany	3.67		
Other	12.99		

Table 1.4: Most popular degrees studied by Greek students

Country of study	Course
Great Britain	Engineering, economics, business management, law & psychology
USA	Engineering ,economics, business management, psychology & English language
Balkans (Bulgaria/Serbia/Russia)	Medicine
South Africa	English language, psychology & economics
Egypt	Engineering, veterinary science & law
Syria	Engineering, fine arts & law
Jordan	History, biology & dentistry
Australia	Teaching, English language, engineering, psychology & biology

At a glance, from the above figures we can conclude that:

- there is a high number of graduates from overseas tertiary institutions and that of these, over 50% are from British institutions
- over 76% of postgraduate Greek students and over 64% of doctoral Greek students receive their degrees from Great Britain and the USA
- the statistics indicate that the majority of students studying abroad must have a comprehensive knowledge of the English language in order to study abroad

Even prior to entering tertiary education, Greek students at primary and secondary level are taught English as a foreign language. According to Eurostat, in 2008, the percentage of all pupils in upper secondary education learning English was 95%. In her article 'An Expose of 'What Is An English Teacher' in the Asian EFL Journal, Susan Carmichael states that over 7,600 private institutions exist in Greece to teach the English language. This is in addition to the English language taught within foreign language programs in the public school system.

The statistics in regard to Greek students attaining a tertiary education abroad clearly indicate that these students have a comprehensive command of the English language (the majority of them study in English-speaking countries) and other European languages. The benefits of multilingual education should only enhance their prospect of employment; however the current financial crisis of Greece deters such prospect. The statistics that correlate to unemployment rates indicate that the opportunity for employment of both graduates and post-graduates in this category is becoming limited. Currently, Greece has a vast pool of educated youth in a variety of fields that have little prospect of employment.

From the above information it is clear that Greek citizens can offer the Australian workforce a range of skills and qualifications that have been attained in other countries and can be utilised as impetus for the potential economic growth of Australia. These individuals have high level English skills and in many cases extensive skilled work experience both in Greece and in countries where they have studied, in particular, the UK and US. Skills and qualifications from these nations are generally well regarded by the Australian Skills Assessing Authorities responsible for providing skills assessments to DIAC for visa purposes.

Recommendation – the Australian Government should arrange for Australian Skills Expos to be held in Greece in the coming months similar to the Skills Expos that have been held in the U.K in recent years. This will provide an opportunity for skilled and qualified Greeks who are interested in working in Australia to speak to potential employers and the Department about work and visa options.

2. Current Economic Status

2.1 Unemployment - Europe

According to Eurostat data, the current unemployment rate in Europe is 9.9% (March 2011). The level of unemployment has increased significantly in the past five years particularly in the following countries: Spain (20.7%), Latvia (17.2%), Ireland (14.7%) and Greece (14.1%). Youth unemployment in Europe is significantly higher than that of the general population. The figures reflect the difficulties faced by youth seeking employment.

Long-term unemployment is one of the main concerns of European policymakers. Apart from its financial and social effects on personal life, long-term unemployment negatively affects social cohesion and, ultimately, may hinder economic growth

2.2 Unemployment - Greece

In the European context, Greece is one of the many countries in the midst of an economic crisis. Greece's unemployment rate for the December 2010 quarter was 14.1%; it was one the three highest increases recorded in Europe. The highest increases were registered in Greece (10.2% to 14.1% between the fourth quarters of 2009 and 2010), Bulgaria (9.7% to 11.4%) and Ireland (13.1% to 14.7%). While the total unemployment rate was 14.1% the youth unemployment rate during that period was significantly higher at 36.1%. (All above statistics were derived from Eurostat).

In January of 2011 the Greek Bureau of Statistics noted that the unemployment rate for men was 12.4% and for women 18.8%. Below are statistics displaying the unemployment rates for youth, males and females as well as total unemployment rates for the period March 2010 to December 2010.

Table 2.1: Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates (%) - Eurostat

	March 2010	Dec 2010
Youth (under 25s)	29.9	36.1
Males	8.3	11.4
Females	14.8	17.8

Figure 2.1: Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates (%)

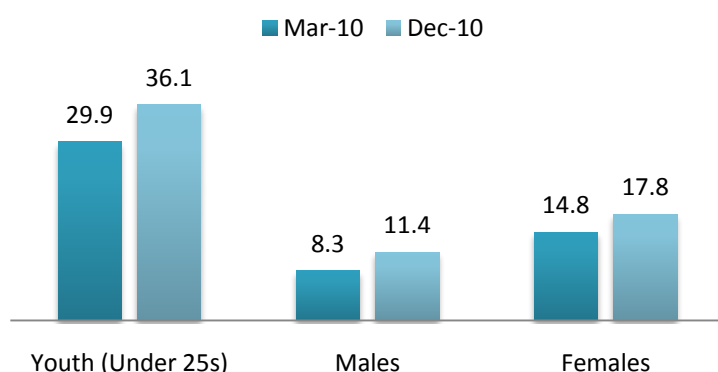
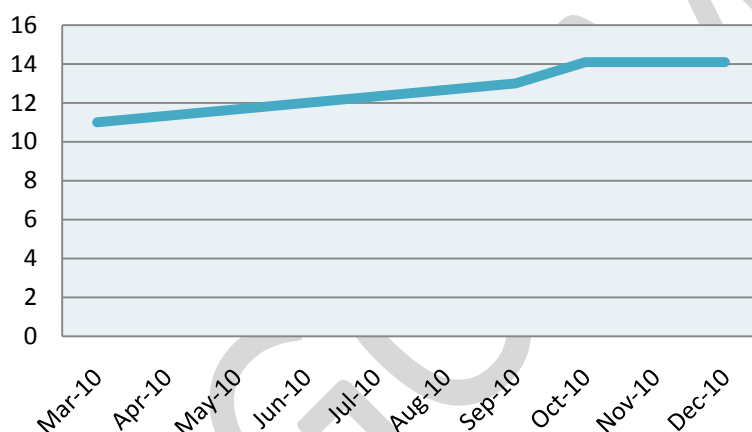


Table 2.2: Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates (%) Totals – Eurostat

March 2010	September 2010	October 2010	November 2010	December 2010
11.0	13.0	14.1	14.1	14.1

Figure 2.2: Seasonally Adjusted Total Unemployment Rates (%) - Eurostat



According to the Authority of Greek Statistics, the unemployment rate in Greece in the first quarter of 2011 reached 15.9%.

3. Australian Visa Streams – A snapshot

There are currently hundreds of visa subclasses for which overseas nationals can apply to enter Australia. The main Australian visa streams include family migration, skills migration, business migration, employer sponsored migration, temporary work visa programs, student visa programs and the refugee and humanitarian visa stream. Detailed information about these visa streams and the eligibility requirements for the visas available under these streams can be found on DIAC’s website at www.immi.gov.au.

Based on the information and statistics below regarding the skills and educational qualifications of Greek nationals, the most suitable avenues for Greeks to apply to Australia are under the permanent

and temporary visa programs, including the business skills program, skilled migration program, student visa program and family migration program.

By improving the way in which Greeks are informed about their visa options and the method in which their visa applications are processed, Greeks can more easily apply for the visas for which they are eligible. Moreover, by strategically promoting Australia's visa programs to Greeks (in particular, the student visa and skills programs) Australia can more effectively tap into the wealth of skills and experience that Greek nationals can bring to our shores.

4. Greek citizens applying to migrate to Australia

In terms of Australia's migration program, a strong preference for skilled workers has been demonstrated by the Government.

In the recent Federal budget announcement it was announced that Australia's migration program, will see 185,000 places in 2011-12 - up from 168,700 places the year before. Almost 16,000 of these will be skilled migration places.

In his April 2011 paper titled Key Issues in Skilled Migration to Australia, Kruno Kukoc the First Assistant Secretary of the Migration and Visa Policy Division of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship stated:

"Skilled temporary and permanent programs are a key factor behind the resilience and strength of Australia's economy which continues to outperform most other OECD countries."

He also highlighted that:

"In 2008 – 2009 the Government commenced a series of reforms to temporary and permanent programs to ensure that we have the right mechanisms in place to select the best skilled migrants in each category to boost Australia's productivity and participation rate. These reforms, such as the new Skills Occupation List, the transformation of the subclass 457 temporary visa skilled program, reviews of several of our temporary and permanent skilled visa programs, gave priority to meeting Australia's labour market needs and optimising the benefit to Australia from each permanent program place."

The following visas were noted by Mr. Kukoc:

4.1 Temporary Business (Long Stay) - Standard Business Sponsorship (Subclass 457)

This pathway is facilitated by fast-tracked temporary and permanent employer sponsored skilled visas. In this situation, the visa applicant fills an immediate skilled vacancy which cannot be filled locally and the demand is driven by the sponsor employer.

As announced in the 2011-2012 budget, an additional \$10million has been allocated to the 457 visa program in order to reduce the processing times. The Australian Government has highlighted that as skill shortages emerge in some parts of the economy, it is critical that businesses can gain access to overseas labour for genuine skill vacancies which cannot be filled from the Australian labour market. The Department has expressed a commitment to providing the best possible processing times for its clients.

From a survey conducted for and on behalf of KPMG, the main countries of origin for workers recruited under 457-visas were the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States. These findings are aligned with official DIAC figures. Below is a table of the main source countries of skilled migration under the 457-visa scheme.

Table 4.1: Most common source countries of skilled migration

Country	%	Country	%
United Kingdom	26	Indonesia	2
South Africa	13	France	1.5
USA	9	Brazil	1.5
Philippines	6.5	Zimbabwe	1.5
India	5.5	Singapore	1.5
Germany	5	New Zealand	1.5
Canada	4	South Korea	0.75
China	4.5	Italy	0.75
Japan	3.5	Denmark	0.5
Ireland	3	Netherlands	0.5
Malaysia	3	Other	5

We note that Greece does not feature in the above table. In fact, for the period 1 July 2010 until 30 April 2011 only 8 Greek citizens obtained a skilled migration visa. Additionally, from DIAC sources from August 2006 until 30 April 2011 only 88 Greek citizens obtained a skilled migration visa.

Furthermore, an analysis conducted for and on behalf of KPMG indicated that the main skills being brought into Australia on the 457 visa scheme are engineers. Shortages in tradespeople, manufacturing/operations and construction also paint a picture true of labour shortages and this is most likely to continue due to the ongoing resources boom.

Table 4.2: Skills most sought from overseas through the 457 visa scheme

Skill	%	Skill	%
Engineering	21	IT	4
Tradespeople	12	Advertising/media	3.5
Manufacturing/operations	6.5	Mining	3.5
Construction	6	Senior management	2.5
Healthcare/medical	5	Consulting/corporate strategy	2
Sales/marketing	5	Education and training	2
Baking/financial	5	Hospitality/tourism	2
Oil/gas	4	Administration	1
Accounting	4	Science	1
		Other	10

In relation to the above table we note that from a sample of 150 Curriculum Vitae that the GOCMV has collated, 23 are qualified engineers.

Most indicators suggest the re-emergence of serious skills shortages in Australia. These pronounced shortages will increase with an ageing population. The surveys conducted in relation to the 457 visa pathway clearly reinforce that Greece – despite the availability of skilled labour – does not feature as a source country in the DIAC figures.

4.2 Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (Subclass 119/857)

Applicants in this case are sponsored by State or Territory Governments via their respective migration plans to address skill shortages within their jurisdiction.

4.3 Skilled – Independent (Migrant) Visa (Subclass 175)

Individuals applying for this visa must realise that there is a significant amount of time involved in regard to securing a visa. Applicants in this case are not sponsored but their skills can be beneficial in the long term.

Other visas that may be suitable for Greek citizens include:

4.4 Skilled – Sponsored (Migrant) visa (subclass 176)

To obtain this visa, skilled applicants require sponsorship by an eligible relative living in Australia or by a participating State or Territory government agency.

4.5 Skilled - Regional Sponsored (475 or 487) –Regional Areas

Skilled state sponsorship provides priority processing and an extra ten points for this visa application. Applicants who receive sponsorship require 100 points (including the ten sponsorship points) compared to 120 points required by general skilled migration applicants.

Sponsorship is granted on the condition that applicants live and work in Victoria for a minimum of two years and complete five short email surveys over that period.

4.6 Student visas (Subclasses 570 – 576)

There are a wide range of visas in this stream, including visas for primary students through to postgraduate research students. These visas also apply to students undertaking intensive English language courses and Vocational training. Under this particular visa stream individuals must apply for a course and are permitted to work 20 hours per week while studying. The work limit does not apply during vacation times.

4.7 Working Holiday Visas (Subclass 417 & 462)

(Greek nationals are currently not eligible for this visa)

The Working Holiday visas are for young people aged 18-30 who wish to work during their holiday in Australia. In all instances reciprocal agreements have been signed between Australia and the respective participating countries.

Recommendation – that Australia and Greece sign a reciprocal agreement that will allow Greek nationals to travel to Australia under the working holiday visa program. This will strengthen the cultural links between our two nations and allow for young, highly skilled and educated Greek migrants to enter Australia relatively easily. This visa can provide a stepping stone for other Australian visas such as skills visas or student visas that can ultimately address Australia's labour shortages.

4.8 Special Program Visa (Subclass 416) - Application lodged and processed in Australia

This particular visa is of particular interest to the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne & Victoria and to other Australian-Greek language and culture providers. The visa is available to persons under 31 years of age who have a genuine intention to stay temporarily in Australia to undertake the Special program to which they have been invited to participate in. The visa is valid for a period of 4 to 12 months and can be extended under exceptional circumstances.

Individuals can be invited by a community based non-profit organisation that has an ongoing program of activity outside its normal administrative operations that bring cultural enrichment or community benefits to the broader Australian community.

4.9 Business Visas

This is another visa stream which may be attractive to some Greek business people. The visa allows persons with a successful business history and the required level personal and business assets to make a commitment to establishing a business in Australia.

4.10 Family visas and citizenship applications

Other visas for which Greeks are applying in increasing numbers include those under the family migration scheme (such as partner visas). Australian citizenship by descent (for the children of Australian citizens) is another area that is of interest to many Greeks who have returned to Greece after becoming Australian citizens and have had children with Greek partners.

5. Greeks applying for student visas to Australia

DIAC figures indicate that the number of Greek citizens applying for Australian student visas has traditionally been low. Given the propensity of Greek nationals to study outside Greece, it is submitted that Australia should be doing more to promote study in Australia as an attractive alternative to studying in the countries discussed above.

There is no statistical data to show why more Greeks do not choose to study in Australia, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that our geographical distance is one factor. Another factor is the comparatively high costs associated with studying at an Australian university or vocational institution. Greeks need to be made aware that despite these two factors, studying in Australia is an attractive option. Reason for this include the following factors – the strong Australian economy (particularly in comparison to Europe) excellent education system, easy online student visa application process for Greek applicants, low unemployment rate, the ability to work up to 20 hours a week while studying, critical skills shortages and a structured pathway for overseas students to apply for permanent residence upon completion of their studies. This last factor is of particular relevance in light of the fact that around 80% of Greeks who study abroad find employment abroad. Importantly, Australia is an English speaking nation with a large Greek population that is extremely well integrated and capable of providing meaningful support to new Greek arrivals.

Financially, Australia can benefit significantly by promoting our student visa program to Greeks. As indicated above, it is common for Greeks to study in other nations. It is a practice that has been widely occurring for many decades and is not a new phenomenon for Greek people. Greeks have

demonstrated their willingness to spend their education dollars in foreign countries and the question Australia should be asking is – Why Not Study Here?

DIAC classifies Greeks as ‘Assessment Level 1’ applicants with respect to student visas. Assessment level 1 applicants pose the least risk to Australia in terms of breaching their visa conditions and are thus the most highly sought after student visa applicants.

By studying in Australia, Greeks can acquire valuable skills and qualifications that can be utilised in Australia to meet skills shortages or back in Greece for those who choose to return. Australian qualifications are highly regarded around the globe and Greeks should be informed that they are an asset worth investing in.

Recommendation - *Australia should be promoted as a quality study destination for Greeks, particularly given the recent downturn in overseas enrolments by international students from traditional source countries such as India and China.*

6. Changing the way in which the Australian Embassy in Athens operates

Many of the visas for which Greeks are eligible (eg. skills and work visas) can be applied for online, via DIAC’s website. This is the most straightforward and simple visa application process.

However, there are some types of visa applications that are processed by the Australian Embassy in Athens. These include **most paper applications** for temporary visas (eg. Short stay business visas (subclass 456) and student visas).

Other visa subclasses (including permanent visa subclasses in the family visa stream) must be applied for and / or processed by the Australian Embassy in Berlin, Germany. For example, currently all Greek citizens wishing to apply for partner and other family visas must do so via Berlin.

“From 14 December 2009, all Partner and Other Family Migration applications for citizens and residents of Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and Kosovo will be processed at the Australian Embassy in Berlin, Germany.” (Australian Embassy Greece website)

Applicants for partner visas (such as subclass 309) are facing delays for up to 10 months. In many cases, partners of Australian citizens remain in Greece in order to obtain a permanent partner visa because one of the requirements for grant of this visa is that the applicant be offshore at the time it is granted.

Recommendation – *The processing of paper visa applications for Greek nationals that is currently occurring in Berlin should be moved to Athens. Sufficient DIAC staff and resources should be provided to the Athens Embassy to ensure that the visas of Greek nationals can be lodged and processed with minimum delays. This is particularly important in the interests of Australian citizens and their families who are experiencing difficult circumstances in Greece and wish to return to Australia.*

Applications for Citizenship by Descent (for Australian citizens with Greek children) are currently processed by the Australian High Commission in London.

Recommendation – *the lodgement and processing of Citizenship by Descent for the Greek children of Australian citizens should occur at the Australian Embassy in Athens. Sufficient DIAC staff and resources should be provided to the Embassy to process these applications with minimum delays for Australian citizens and their families.*

At present, the Australian Embassy's operating and counter hours in Athens are as follows:

"Australian Embassy Athens

Telephone enquiry line: (30) 210 870 4127 (8.30am – 12.30pm)

Facsimile number: (30) 210 870 4125

Counter Hours:

The Visa counter is open Tuesday and Thursday from 8.30am to 12.30pm by appointment. For an appointment, please contact the Visa Section on the above telephone number or e-mail address. All clients are advised to phone or e-mail the Visa Section in the first instance to discuss their requirements. In many circumstances the assistance required can be provided by phone or e-mail, without the need to make an appointment and attend the Embassy. Except for public holidays". (Australian Embassy Greece website).

The times of operation of the Australian Embassy in Athens are limited with phone calls only being taken from 8:30am – 12:30pm and information in person only being available on Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:30am – 12:30pm and by appointment only.

Recommendation - *Given the significant increase in the number of Greeks seeking Australian visas, the Embassy's office and counter hours ought to be extended. This would particularly assist non-English speaking Greeks who are seeking Australian visa advice.*

Recommendation - *the Australian Embassy website should include a Greek translation. Greeks should be able to access the information on the website in their mother tongue. Translated websites have been provided for the Australian Embassies in many other nations including France, Italy and Spain. The Greek website should also be translated, particularly given the recent rise in Greeks seeking visas to Australia.*

7. Skills Shortages Noted by GOCMV

Australia is facing employment shortages in many fields. According to Skills Australia, by the year 2015 Australia will need an additional 2.4 million skilled people in the workforce.

A specific example of skills shortages that exist in the Greek community is in the area of aged care workers. The Greek community itself, in particular welfare agencies, are currently experiencing shortages in staff in relation to aged care services. The majority of Australian residents born in Greece are now entering retirement age and will require services directly related to aged care. Service providers in this field have informed us of the shortage of skilled aged care workers and in particular, those who possess knowledge of the Greek language.

Occupations that relate to the aged care sector are included on DIAC's Skilled Occupation Lists. The occupation of Registered Nurse (Aged Care) is an example of a listed occupation, as is medical practitioner, social worker, counsellor and several others.

By increasing awareness in Greece of the type of workers that are in demand both within the Greek community and the wider Australian community, significant skills shortages can be addressed. As noted above, holding an Australia Needs Skills Expo in Greece will allow qualified Greeks who are interested in working in Australia to speak to potential employers and DIAC about work and visa options.

8. Recommendations

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria requests that the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Mr. Chris Bowen MP, consider the following recommendations as soon as practicable:

1. The GOCMV proposes to establish a taskforce that will assist skilled Greeks to make contact with Australian employers and seeks funding for this purpose. The taskforce will establish an online hub whereby Australian employers and community organisations can communicate with interested Greeks about job and study opportunities in Australia and assist in engaging suitable Greek candidates to meet Australian skills shortages. The taskforce will include representatives from the Hellenic Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, educators, migration lawyers, employers, recruitment agencies and welfare and community agencies. GOCMV has liaised with the above groups in relation to this proposal and has received an overwhelmingly positive response. In this endeavour, GOCMV will work collaboratively with our sister organisations in other states, particularly NSW.
2. An Australian Skills Expo should be held in Greece in the coming months, as they are held in the U.K. This will provide an opportunity for skilled and qualified Greeks who are interested in working in Australia to speak to potential employers and DIAC about work and visa options. In this instance, Thessaloniki may be the most suitable location in this regard, given that this city is acknowledged as the Balkan Centre.
3. The Working Holiday Visa Program should be expanded to include Greece. We propose that a reciprocal agreement be signed between Australia and Greece to allow both Australian and Greek citizens to apply for Working Holiday Visas.
4. The visa applications by Greek nationals that are currently being processed by posts outside Greece (Eg. the Australian Embassy in Berlin) should be processed by the Australian Embassy in Athens. This also applies to applications for Citizenship by Descent, which are currently processed in the UK. The Embassy in Athens should have adequate DIAC staff and resources in order to effectively manage these additional applications and minimise delays. Assisting Australian citizens and their eligible family members to enter Australia with minimum delay should be a priority.
5. The operating and counter hours of the Australian Embassy in Athens should be extended to deal with the recent increase in enquiries for Australian visas. This should also apply to the Consulate in Thessaloniki. There are examples where DIAC has employed additional DIAC

staff at the Consulate on a temporary basis in the past. The role and function of the Australian Embassy in Greece should be adapted to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of Greeks at the present time. Persons who are eligible for Australian visas or citizenship should be able to more easily obtain information from the Embassy about these matters. The Embassy should have adequate DIAC staff and resources to provide this information.

6. The Australian Government should invest in promoting Australia as a quality study destination for Greeks. Greeks have a demonstrated tendency to study outside Greece and are attractive candidates for Australian student visas, for the reasons outlined above. The Australian economy can significantly benefit from more Greeks studying in Australia.
7. The Australian Embassy Greece website should be in both the English and Greek languages, as it is for all other non-English speaking European countries.
8. The GOCMV and other sister organisations to become sponsors for special program visas and to invite Greek citizens to assist in Greek language programs.

Conclusion

Greek nationals have a wealth of skills and experience that they are currently unable to utilise in Greece. They can assist Australia in meeting its skills shortages and can make a valuable contribution to our economy and society. The Greek financial crisis provides a unique opportunity for Australia to tap into potential work and student visa applicants from Greece. The Australian government should invest in attracting more Greeks to our shores under the General Skilled Migration Program, Employer Sponsored Visa Program, Working Holiday Program and Student Visa Program. The Government should also provide increased assistance to Australian citizens who are seeking entry of their partners, children and other family members to Australia during this difficult time. This can be done by changing the role and function of the Australian Embassy in Athens, and possibly the Consulate in Thessaloniki. The Embassy should be adequately staffed and resourced to ensure that it can meet the current needs of Greeks and Greek-Australians and their families who are seeking to enter Australia.

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