

AUSTRALIA

Accessing the promised land

A new wave of Greek migrants desperate to come to Australia to upskill, improve their English and find a job, are being halted by the complex migration process, experts say

LAURA BURGOINE

Increased interest in migration from Greece to Australia has highlighted difficulties and confusion in the migration process, according to CEO of Australian Industrial Systems Institute (AISI) Roula Tsiolas.

"There's a mindset; people think they can just go to Australia through a relative and everything will be fine and unfortunately it's not that easy, but there are other processes people can follow," Ms Tsiolas said.

"We've been inundated with walk in inquiries and it's actually a little bit saddening because people are coming from Greece, especially young people, spending all that money, going into the expense of staying here for tourist visa duration, whereas they could look into other avenues prior to coming to Australia and make better use of expenses," she added.

This follows from Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria (GOCMV) President Bill Papastergiadis writing a letter to Federal Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen, asking for more sensitivity towards Greek migration applicants and for the process to be made more user friendly, as reported in last week's *Neos Kosmos*. Mr Papastergiadis is awaiting a response.

While Greeks interested in migrating to Australia vary vastly, in age and demographic, professionals in their mid-30s are the dominant age group according to Ms Tsiolas. "There's lots of professionals who can't find work in Greece and have even exhausted their options in the EU. They're finding it's not only Greece that's going through these difficulties it's the EU in general," she said.

It's important to note that Greeks coming to Australia does not have to be a permanent arrangement, Ms Tsiolas said. "They can upskill, upgrade and then return to Greece to make a greater contribution. It's something the Papandreou government is pushing for, encouraging people from abroad to provide ideas and skills and so on. This is our way of offering something back, to skill people and equip them with new ideas," Ms Tsiolas said.

Ms Tsiolas will be representing the AISI in Athens in May following an influx of inquiries about migration from Greece. "We thought it best to tap in there and have someone on the ground over there," she said. "People are spending too much time, money and it's all going to waste in terms of what their future plans are. They're making very rash decisions and I think it's reflective of the desperation of them at the moment; it's very sad."

Greeks wanting to migrate to Australia are looking for three things, Ms Tsiolas said. Firstly, they want to upskill as the current situation in Greece has highlighted a lack of skill areas in the country; secondly, they are looking to improve their English language skills; and thirdly, they want to fill their current unemployment void.

As part of the English language requirements for a student visa, Greeks only need to fulfil a level one assessment, as opposed to students from China or India who need level three or four. "Greek applicants for Australian visas are in the lowest risk category which makes it easiest for them with English language requirements," migration agent Penny Dimopoulos said. "They don't actually have to show that they have a certain level of English in order to study in Australia and that's a really big plus for students wanting to come from Greece."

Greek expat John Hatzakis is currently in the process of bringing his brother over from Greece. His brother is a highly skilled electrical engineer, with his own business, who cannot find work in Greece. "It's not only my brother, it's a lot of people, and people with skills," Mr Hatzakis told *Neos Kosmos*. "I went to Greece a couple of months ago and I am actually shocked; there are so many people who want to come here. There are people in Crete, particularly; they're specialists in horticulture and are growing hot house tomatoes using the latest technology, doing two crops a year, and they're giving their tomatoes away, one euro a kilo, they're selling cucumbers at 15 cents a kilo," he said.

Mr Hatzakis has encountered great difficulty in his

brother's migration process. "I've got the government on one side telling me my brother has skills we need here in Australia, but then on the other side they say he has to know about English, writing, speaking, all of these things. At the end of the line, the way it's supposed to be done: nobody knows," he said.

When visiting the Australian embassy in Greece, Mr Hatzakis was among a queue of 200 people but said officers were unable to assist him and he, like many others, was directed to the immigration website for information on migration.

For working visas Greeks must go to the embassy in Germany, while for spousal visas they must go to the embassy in England as there is no embassy to deal with these issues in Greece, highlighting a need for a reference point, Ms Tsiolas said. "Down the track it's going to be necessary to have offices in Greece to assist the migration process. At the moment there is no one reference point where people can go. The queues at the Australian embassy are so long and what they're finding



From L to R: John Hatzakis, CEO of AISI Roula Tsiolas, and Migration Agent Penny Dimopoulos.

PHOTO: PETER KAKALIAS

it, I think we need to be advocates of it and I don't think we're doing that very well at the moment," she said. "All of this is part of the necessary changes and hopefully in the next decade or so it'll all be a lot better and we can

overcome these difficulties in Greece and hopefully we can do it together." For more information on migration visas visit the Department of Immigration and Citizenship website: www.immi.gov.au

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BREAKING DOWN THE VISA BARRIERS

Solicitor and Registered Migration Agent from Orana Migration Group Penny Dimopoulos explains the different types of Australian visas Greek applicants may be eligible for.



STUDENT VISAS

These visas are for study at Primary School, High School, Vocational Education and Training, University (undergraduate and postgraduate), and also for English courses and non-award courses. For Greek nationals these are relatively easy visas to obtain as Greeks don't need a particular English level to qualify for the visa and the financial requirements are less stringent than for some other nationals - e.g. Indians. Student visas allow holders to work for up to 20 hours a week and can provide a stepping stone to some of the work and skills visas described below. Applicants may apply for these visas offshore or onshore.

GENERAL SKILLED MIGRATION (GSM)

This is migration - i.e. a permanent visa. Applicants must have good English language skills (*IELTS score of at least six in each of the following four components - listening, reading, writing and speaking) and have an occupation published on a Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) list of 'in demand' occupations. After the Global Financial Crisis, this list of occupations was narrowed significantly. Further changes to the General Skilled Migration Program will be introduced by DIAC in mid 2011. Applicants may apply for a GSM offshore or onshore. Many international students apply for a GSM once they complete their studies.

TEMPORARY WORK VISAS (SUBCLASS 457)

These visas allow overseas workers to remain in Australia for up to four years. They require sponsorship by an employer in an occupation published on a relevant DIAC list. Both the sponsor and applicant must satisfy certain DIAC criteria for these visas. There is an English language requirement of at least six in each of the four components of an IELTS test (listening, reading, writing and speaking). Applicants may apply for these visas offshore or onshore.

PERMANENT WORK VISAS (EMPLOYER NOMINATION SCHEME OR 'ENS')

These visas allow highly skilled overseas workers to come to Australia and remain permanently. They require an employer to agree to sponsor the applicant for at least three years in an occupation published on a relevant DIAC list (which is different to the temporary list above). Both the sponsor and applicant must satisfy certain DIAC criteria for these visas. There is an English language requirement of at least five in each of the four components of an IELTS test. Applicants may apply for these visas offshore or onshore.

BUSINESS VISAS (SEVERAL TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT VISA OPTIONS)

These visas are for business owners from overseas who intend to own a business in Australia and are less than 55 years of age. Applicants must have a successful business career and have a genuine commitment to be involved as an owner in a new or existing business in Australia. To obtain these visas, applicants must show that they own assets of a certain value and that their business in Greece has a certain annual turnover (starting at AU\$300,000). These visas do not have an English language requirement, which may be attractive to some Greek applicants. Applicants may apply for these visas offshore or onshore.

FAMILY MIGRATION

These visas include (but are not limited to) spouse visas, parent visas and remaining relative visas (which are for single or widowed persons who are in Greece and have no immediate family members anywhere in the world apart from Australia). Applicants may apply for these visas offshore or onshore and there are mostly no English language requirements.

* IELTS stands for International English Language Testing System and is an English test used worldwide to assess English ability. The test consists of four components - listening, reading, writing and speaking. Applicants in Greece can sit the test through the British Council (Athens and Thessaloniki). See: www.britishcouncil.org/greece-about-us-contact-us.htm

WHERE GREEKS CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AUSTRALIAN VISAS:

Greek nationals who want to know how they can apply for an Australian visa may contact DIAC or visit the Hellas Australia Visa Services website: www.hellasaustraliavisa.com.gr
Interested persons can complete the free online assessment, which allows our staff to assess their eligibility for an Australian visa. All visa applicants should be aware that it is unlawful for a person to provide Australian visa advice unless that person is a registered migration agent. To protect themselves, Greek nationals interested in an Australian visa can check the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (OMARA) website to ensure that the person giving them advice is a registered migration agent: www.mara.gov.au/