

The economic and social dimensions of the presence of migrants in the Greek rural regions: evidence from empirical research

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A good number of migrants are settled and employed in the rural areas of Southern European countries in the past fifteen years. This has been caused by the restructuring of both agriculture and rural regions, the deepening of demographic pressures and the social rejection of work and life in the countryside by rural youth. The arrival of migrants offered one the one hand solutions to the pressing labour deficiencies and the problems related to the competitive survival of the agricultural sector and on the other created simultaneously new conditions in the rural labour markets.

For Greece immigration is a substantial new phenomenon, with flows originating primarily from Central and Eastern European countries. It is estimated that the migrant population has grown to approximately 10 per cent of the national and nearly 15 per cent of the economically active population. The extensive and uncontrolled entry of migrants into the country has increased especially rapidly the settlement and employment of this labour force in rural areas. This paper aims at examining the various aspects of the multifunctional roles migrants play in the rural economy and society of Greece. It draws on field research involving both qualitative and quantitative methods carried out in two phases: first in 2000-2002 and second in 2004-2006. The purpose of study was the empirical, interdisciplinary investigation of the economic and social implications of the settlement and employment of migrant labour in rural Greece.

The paper moves from the presentation of the theoretical and methodological framework of the research to the presentation of the findings around two axes: first, the implications of migrant employment upon the operation of the farm and the farm household and second, the wider implications migrant employment has for the maintenance of the economic and social composure of rural regions. Finally, conclusions are drawn as to the role and contribution of migrants to the rural economy and society and some policy recommendations are made in the light of developments in both rural and migration policies.