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# Socio-Economic Characteristics of Immigrants in Western Greece Region: Urban – Rural Continuum or Divide?

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#### Abstract

This paper aims at an investigation of factors of differentiation of basic social and economic characteristics of foreign immigrants in the Region of Western Greece. The paper explores whether the thesis of urban-rural divide is relevant for the differentiation of immigrants' socio-economic characteristics in a typical Region of Greece, where there is a strong interplay between major urban centers and large rural areas. Findings show that spatial factors play a very limited role in the differentiation of socio-economic characteristics of immigrants and indicate that other factors are more important. Thus, and as regards socio-economic characteristics of immigrants, the overall picture is that of urban-rural continuum rather than divide.

**Keywords:** Immigrants' socio-economic characteristics; rural-urban continuum; rural-urban divide

#### 1. Introduction

Rural areas in Greece have been considered for a long time as unattractive because of the dominance of the low productivity primary sector and due to the 'undesirability'

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of agriculture-related employment by the young. Furthermore, the widespread sense of 'remoteness' and 'isolation' in rural areas of Greece, exacerbate their unattractiveness for settlement and employment. Nevertheless, during the last 15 years, some rural areas (mainly lowland areas or areas in the urban fringe) increased their population and enhanced their economic diversification by decreasing their dependence on the primary sector (Labrianidis, 2004). The vast inflow of immigrants in the country in the early 1990s played a major role in reversing, to some extent, the powerful trends of depopulation and labour force ageing in Greek rural areas, affecting positively not only the primary sector but almost all other sectors as well (Iosifides and King, 1996; King et al, 1998; Kasimis et al., 2003). The basic aim of this paper is to explore the socio-economic characteristics of immigrants in the Region of Western Greece<sup>2</sup> and to investigate possible differentiations in those characteristics between urban and rural areas of the Region. Thus, the basic research question to be addressed is whether there is an urban-rural divide as regards immigrants' socio-economic characteristics in the Region or an urban-rural continuum<sup>3</sup>, where other factors

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The examination of the causes and implications of the relatively recent transformation of Greece - along with the other countries of southern Europe - from traditional emigration to mass immigration areas exceeds the scopes of the present paper. For indicative debates on this issue see Iosifides and King, 1996; Iosifides, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The importance of the differentiation between rural-urban divide and continuum is related to the gradual weakening of the role of pure spatial factors in determining the socioeconomic distance between urban and rural areas. Thus, 'urban-rural continuum' means the gradual 'urbanization' of rural space as regards employment and labour market characteristics, social values and people's lifestyles. For immigrants, 'continuum' means similarity in life and working conditions, while 'divide' means significant differences. Thus, social change from 'divide' to 'continuum' plays an extremely important role in the direction of public policies towards both immigrants and Greek rural space. Anthopoulou (2001) and Gousios (1999) discuss in greater depth the continuities and divisions between the 'rural' and the 'urban' in a similar tone

apart from place of residence (such as place of origin, gender, age, education, legal status, years of stay in the country and so forth) are more important.

#### 2. Methods and Data

The findings presented in this paper derive from a research project implemented from November 2005 to February 20064, concerning the investigation of a series of social, economic and employment characteristics of foreign born immigrants in the Region of Western Greece. In total 221 face-to-face interviews with immigrants were conducted in the capital urban centers of the three Prefectures of the Region and in selected rural areas. The selection of rural areas<sup>5</sup> was based to our prior knowledge of significant permanent or semi-permanent immigrant presence and employment there. Sampling procedures have not followed the standard random process because of the particular characteristics of the immigrant population in the Region and in Greece in general. These particular characteristics - namely the relatively large proportion of undocumented and non-registered foreign workers, the constant change of legal status over time, geographical mobility and extreme difficulties of accessing official databases - lead to the absence of a reliable sample frame for immigrant population in Greece. Thus, sampling was based mainly on the 'snowballing' technique

and Papadopoulos (2004) offers a wide array of socioeconomic factors that rural development strategies in Greece should take into account, including the changing role of place of residence of immigrants (see also Kasimis et al. 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Research was funded by the European Union Initiative EQUAL: 'Investigation of the Role of Immigrants in Local Labour Market and their Institutional and Socio-Economic Integration (Western Greece Region)'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The division between urban and non-urban areas followed the official population-based definitions of the National Statistical Service of Greece, according to which all areas with population above 10,000 inhabitants are characterised as urban while the rest are characterised as rural. In total, 58 interviews were conducted in rural areas and 163 interviews in urban areas.

(Cornelius, 1982; Bilsborrow et al 1984; Foddy, 1993; Hay, 2000) with the use of various initial contact points in the Region (employment centers, employer's organisations, non governmental organisations and local public agencies such as Prefectures and Municipalities). Our effort was to capture the widest possible picture of the immigrant population in the area by spreading our contacts and by trying to include various aspects of the multi-dimensional immigrant experience in the Region in terms of gender, age, education, employment sectors and places of residence<sup>6</sup>. Our main research tool, apart from some informal conversations and indepth interviews, was a structured questionnaire which included five thematic areas: personal data and information, education and training in the country of origin and in Greece, employment and labour market issues, income and social reproduction issues and future plans. The scope of research was analysed in detail in the prospective interviewees and total anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed. Those actions, together with the basic sampling procedure (snowballing) resulted to a very low non-response rate (about 5 per cent).

### 3. Basic Findings

### 3.1 The Western Greece Region

The Region of Western Greece is located in the west of Greece and includes three Prefectures: Ahaia, Aitoloakarnania and Ilia. It covers a surface of 11,350 km<sup>2</sup> (8.6% of the total country surface) and it is mountainous (45.3% of the area), but with irrigated lowland areas (29.1%) as well. It is not a highly urbanized area with 57% of its population living in urban centres while the country average is 73%<sup>7</sup>. Regions' population reaches 740,506 people, 43% of which in Ahaia, that is the only Prefecture in the Region that displays con-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> This spread allowed the identification of certain trends both in urban and rural areas along with the associated comparative analysis.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> All data come from the National Statistics Service of Greece (ESYE, 2003).

stant population growth since the 1960s (greater than the county's average), due to the presence of Patras, a major regional urban centre and international port to Italy. Aitoloakarnania Prefecture still loses population, while Ilia is gaining some population again after the 1980s, but at a low rate. Natural population movement indicators are negative, revealing that population growth is mainly a result of internal and external migration. The attractiveness of urban centres in the Region, and especially that of Patras, is evident from the age distribution of population as well. Thus, 42.2% of the population of Patras is between 15 and 40 years of age (country average is 37%), while in the rural areas of the Region almost 20% of the population is older than 65 years of age (country average is 16%).

Common economic indicators reveal a picture of relative under-development, as GDP per capita (in PPS for 2000-2002) reaches 56.4% of the EU25 average, the lowest of all 13 Greek Regions (country average is 74.7%). Economic stagnation in the Region resulted mainly by the intense deindustrialization process of the 1980s and 1990s, especially in Ahaia. The other two Prefectures are characterized by significant employment in the primary sector (more than 30% of total labour force), especially in rural areas, where it surpasses 50%. Unemployment is high (about 15%) and the percentage of active labour force has remained stable from 1991 to 2001, when at country level it increased by 15% in the same period.

# 3.2 Immigrants in Western Greece Region

Overall, 25 different nationalities were taken into account in the sample. Three of them (Albanians, Bulgarians and Romanians) constitute the majority with 47.5%, 12.2% and 9.5% respectively. The rest (not a single nationality is represented by more than 4%) have been classified in 4 groups according to broad area of origin - Eastern Europe (5.9%), Western Europe (2.3%), Africa (4.5%) and Asia (18.1%).

The majority of immigrants are men (70.6%). Their spatial distribution in the Region shows that most immigrants that come to Greece in order to move to Italy and Western

IMMIGRANTS IN WESTERN GREECE REGION Europe (mostly Asians) stay in the urban center and international port of Patras. On the contrary, immigrants who come for labour reasons (mostly from the Balkans and from Eastern Europe) are found being scattered in all Prefectures and types of spaces (rural and urban). Spatial distribution according to gender confirms the above finding, as most women (the majority not of Balkan origin) were found residing in Patras (differences are statistically significant for both men ( $x^2 = 44.3$ ,  $s=0.000^8$ ) and women ( $x^2 = 22.4$ , s=0.033)). Furthermore, differences of place of residence and place of origin are statistically significant for both rural and urban areas, as most immigrants from Africa and Asia live in the latter (see Table 1).

		Albania %	Bulgaria %	Romania %	Eastern Europe %
Rural	Men	50.0	13.9	0.0	5.6
areas	Women	19.0	28.6	33.3	14.3
alcas	Total	38.6	19.3	12.3	8.8
Urban	Men	56.3	2.5	5.0	2.5
areas	Women	34.1	29.5	18.2	11.4
alcas	Total	50.3	9.8	8.6	4.9
		Western	Africa	Asia %	Total %
		Europe %	%	Asia 70	(N)
Rural	Men	8.3	0.0	22.2	100 (36)
areas	Women	0.0	0.0	4.8	100 (21)
alcas	Total	5.3	0.0	15.8	100 (57)
Urban areas	Men	0.8	7.6	25.2	100 (119)
	Women	2.3	2.3	2.3	100 (44)
	Total	1.2	6.1	19.0	100 (163)

Table 1. Region of origin, gender and place of residence

For rural areas  $x^2 = 49.5$ , s=0.000; for urban areas  $x^2 = 22.2$ , s=0.000

Younger immigrants are overrepresented in rural areas (79% are younger than 35 in rural areas compared to 65% in urban areas) in a statistically significant relationship ( $x^2 = 11.1$ , s=0.048). Most immigrants are married (58%), whereas

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> x<sup>2</sup> stands for Pearson Chi-Square tests.

35% are single, 5% are divorced and 2% are widows. There is no statistically significant relationship between marital status and place of residence or between numbers of children and place of residence.

Most immigrants have completed secondary (40%) or primary education (38%), whereas only 15% have declared higher or technical education qualifications and 6% declared no formal education skills. The educational pattern is not differentiated according to place of residence. Knowledge of spoken Greek is declared as satisfactory for the majority of immigrants (56%) and only 13% of them have declared a non-satisfactory level. There is no statistically significant relationship with place of residence, but there is such relationship with region of origin ( $x^2 = 81, 1, s=0,000$ ), reflecting the differences between immigrants such as the Albanians, that have stayed longer in Greece, and Asians and Africans, that reside in Greece for shorter periods of time. All immigrants speak Greek better than write (only 12% declared a satisfactory level in written Greek). It is important to note that the vast majority of immigrants (93%) have not participated in any kind of formal language education program in the country.

Most immigrants (60%) reside in Greece and in the Region for more than 5 years. This finding reflects the presence of Albanians as the major nationality of foreign born immigrants in Greece, who moved in Greece in a relatively earlier period of time (between 1990 and 1995). Most immigrants report that seeking improvement of living conditions led them to move to Greece. Other major reasons for migrating in the country include job seeking, family reunification, and ease of access (see Table 2).

Services are the most important employment sector for immigrants, followed by construction, agriculture, the secondary sector and tourism. In rural areas, the service sector is still very important<sup>9</sup>, but employment in the primary sec-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The relatively high percentage of immigrant service employment in rural areas is another indication of 'urban-rural continuum' that is the gradual 'urbanisation' or rural areas in Greece in terms of

tor is dominant (the relationship is statistically significant, see Table 3).

	N	Family reuni- fication %	Labour rea- sons %	Ease of ac- cess %	Study reasons %	Improvement of living conditions %	Other %
Rural areas	57	15.8	49.1	10.5	0.0	49.1	1.8
Urban areas	163	14.1	35.6	16.0	1.8	54.0	6.1
Total	220	14.5	39.1	14.5	1.4	52.7	5.0

Table 2. Reason for migrating to Greece

Table 3. Labour market sector and place of residence

	Primary sec- tor %	Industry %	Construction	Tourism %	Services %	Unemployed or house- work %	Total % (N)
Rural areas	36.8	3.5	21.1	1.8	35.1	1.8	100 (57)
Urban areas	9.2	10.4	33.1	1.8	35.0	10.4	100 (163)
Total	16.4	8.6	30.0	1.8	35.0	8.2	100 (220)

 $x^2 = 28.1$ , s=0.000

There is also a statistically significant relationship between the region of origin and the employment sector ( $x^2 = 82.2$ , s=0.000). This finding reflects ethnic labour market specialisation<sup>10</sup>, with Albanians working primarily in the construction and the primary sector depending whether they

employment and labour market characteristics, values and lifestyles (Spilanis et al, 2004; Papadopoulos, 2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> 'Ethnic labour market specialisation' refers to the gradual formation of labour market segments which are predominately characterised by ethnic features. In those segments, channelling of immi-

struction and the primary sector depending whether they live (either in urban or rural areas respectively).

As regards job satisfaction, the highest levels are found in the services and the construction sector and the lowest in the primary and again in the construction sector. This finding reflects the diversity of the construction sector as regards employment conditions, seasonal instability and generation of incomes. Highest incomes are declared from the construction and service sector in general. Men earn more than women for all employment sectors ( $x^2 = 58.8$ , s=0.006) but they work more hours ( $x^2 = 24.7$ , s=0.000). Most immigrants work between 6 and 8 hours per day and one fourth of them between 8 and 10 hours. Rural immigrants work less than those in urban areas and the relationship is statistically significant ( $x^2 = 19.7$ , s=0.001).

The majority of immigrants declare that they are very satisfied or satisfied form their job position and there is no statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction and area of residence. Job satisfaction depends mainly on years of presence in the country and in the Region ( $x^2 = 51.5$ , s=0.009), but not on income level, as other factors such as working conditions, job security and stability and good relations with employers are considered to be more important. Most immigrants claim that these conditions have not changed significantly since they moved in the Region (54%) while 35% claim that they have improved (no statistically significant relationships with area of residence, gender or region of origin is observed).

Most immigrants find their jobs 'tiring'; especially in rural areas where the primary sector predominates (see Table 4). The second most frequent characterization is 'necessary evil', and the third is 'pleasant'. Other job characterizations that urban residents declare more often than rural ones are 'profitable', 'dirty' and 'interesting'. It is worth mentioning that most of those characterizing their job 'tiring' find it also a

grants in working positions is done usually through informal social networks and irrespectively of educational background, previous training and other skills (Iosifides et al, 2007 forthcoming).

IMMIGRANTS IN WESTERN GREECE REGION 'necessary evil' and 'underpaid'. Those characterizations are overrepresented in immigrants residing and working in rural areas.

	N	Tiring %	Necessary evil %	Pleasant %	Under-paid %	Profitable %
Rural areas	57	61,4	28,1	17,5	22,8	10,5
Urban areas	163	50,3	24,5	26,4	21,5	21,5
Total	220	53,2	25,5	24,1	21,8	18,6
	Ordinary %	Interesting %	Dirty %	Monotonous %	Un-pleasant %	Other %
Rural areas	15,8	7,0	1,8	8,8	3,5	3,5
Urban areas	17,2	14,1	11,0	8,0	1,2	6,1
Total	16,8	12,3	8,6	8,2	1,8	5,5

Table 4. Characterization of job and area of residence

The majority of immigrants (61%) enjoy social and labour security benefits depending on region of origin ( $x^2 = 38.9$ , s=0.000). This pattern is positively connected with job satisfaction ( $x^2 = 11.7$ , s=0.03); with gender, as men are more often insured than women ( $x^2 = 6.0$ , s=0.01); with income, as job positions generating higher incomes are also insured ( $x^2 = 18.1$ , s=0.006); but it is not related with area of residence.

Social networks and social capital play the most significant role in job finding practices. Thus, 40% of respondents stressed that they found their jobs through social networks of friends of the same nationality and 18% through social networks of friends of Greek nationality. Other sources of job placement include personal search (12.5%); former employers (7.5%); and various kinds of advertisements (10.5%).

Networks of immigrants of different nationalities play a very limited role in job placement (only 1%), revealing an extremely low level of communication and cooperation between immigrants of different nationalities. The ways of job finding are not differentiated as regards the place of residence. Women appear to be more dependent on these networks for finding a job than men ( $x^2 = 33.6$ , s=0.009) whereas finding a job through personal search is connected with higher levels of job satisfaction ( $x^2 = 138.4$ , s=0.000). This finding reflects the ethnic specialisation effect of social capital that is the job placement in certain sectors through networks irrespectively of educational and other skills.

A significant proportion of immigrants (33%) had been unemployed in the Region for some time. This proportion is slightly higher in rural areas (36%) due to the seasonal character of the employment in the primary sector. Unemployment experience is not linked with gender and with place of residence but it is connected with region of origin ( $x^2 = 21.9$ , s=0.001); Albanians are overrepresented in unemployment experience.

In general, incomes of immigrants are low in comparison with the mean income at country level (63% have declared incomes lower than 10,000  $\in$  per annum). Income level, as reported by the interviewees, is not differentiated according to employment sector, region of origin and place of residence. Methods of payment vary greatly, from weekly payments (39%), to hourly (22%) and monthly (20%) payments, reflecting the extensive variability of immigrant working regimes. Place of residence plays no role in methods of immigrant labour payment. Almost half of our respondents send remittances at their home country, the vast majority of which directed to parents or other family members and some to personal savings accounts. Immigrants that do not send remittances blame low income generation in Greece or stress the presence of their family in the country.

Legal status of immigrants and relations with public agencies and authorities are issues of significant concern for the research participants. Although the majority of our respondents hold a work and stay permit in the country, the

constant interplay between legality and illegality is a common experience. According to immigrant's responses their relations with public agencies and authorities are uneasy. They stress the high cost of regularisation procedures and the extreme difficulties they face when contacting public agencies and the police in order to collect various documents necessary for the completion of the process. Legal status is not connected with place of residence but it is linked with employment sector (overrepresentation of non documented immigrants in the primary sector,  $x^2 = 19.7$ , s=0.003), with region of origin (overrepresentation of Bulgarians and Romanians in the non documented immigrant population,  $x^2 =$ 15.8, s=0.02) and with the time spent in the country (overrepresentation of long-stayers in the documented immigrant population,  $x^2 = 48.1$ , s=0.000).

Finally, and as regards future plans, immigrant responses are quite diverse. A relatively high percentage of immigrants (mostly Albanians) plan to move back to their country of origin when social and economic conditions in Albania improve. Most of them connect their final decision to move back, to the preferences of their children. Seven per cent of the sample plan to move in other countries such as Germany, France, the UK, Canada and the USA. An absolute majority of the respondents (51%) plan to stay permanently in Greece but not necessarily in the Region. It is worth mentioning, however, that about 17% of the immigrants stress that 'future plans' are a 'luxury' to think about because of their constant efforts to survive the hardship and uncertainty of working and living conditions in Greece. Future preferences are not connected with place of residence in the Region, but are linked with area of origin (Albanians are overrepresented to those preferring to move back at some point of time in the future,  $x^2 = 64.9$ , s=0.000), with employment sector (the preferences of those working in the primary sector are mainly to move back,  $x^2 = 43.5$ , s=0.009), with job satisfaction (higher job satisfaction leads to greater willingness to stay in Greece permanently,  $x^2 = 58.6$ , s=0.000) and with marital status (immigrants who are married and have chil-

dren in Greece prefer to stay permanently in the country,  $x^2 = 22.6$ , s=0.031).

# **Concluding Remarks**

Table 5 summarises our main research findings by connecting basic socio-economic characteristics of immigrants in Western Greece Region with place of residence and other crucial factors.

Socio- economic characteristic	Significance of place of resi- dence (rural or urban)	Significance of other factors
Competence in Greek language	No	Nationality; Years of stay in the coun- try
Employment sector	Yes	Nationality
Job satisfaction	No	Employment sector; Years of stay in the coun- try; Working conditions; Job security and stability; Good relation with em- ployers
Income level	No	Gender; Employment sector
Hours of work	Yes	Gender
Social and la- bour security	No	Nationality; Job satisfac- tion; Gender; Income level
Job finding practices	No	Social capital; Gender; Job satisfaction
Unemployment experience	No	Nationality
Legal status	No	Employment sector; Nationality; Years of stay in the country
Future plans	No	Employment sector; Na- tionality; Job satisfaction; Marital status

Table 5. Summary of main findings

As shown in Table 5, only the employment sector and the hours of work of immigrants are differentiated according to place of residence (and simultaneously according other factors) but this differentiation is only due to the predominance of primary sector in rural areas. All other major characteristics of immigrants, such as competence in Greek language, job satisfaction, income level, social and labour security, job finding practices, unemployment experience, legal status and future plans, are differentiated according other crucial factors which proved to be far more important than place of residence. Thus, for socio-economic characteristics of immigrants in the Region the thesis of 'urban-rural continuum' is confirmed. That is because the character of the position of immigrants in Greek labour market and the processes of ethnic labour market specialisation and segmentation surpasses the effects of urban-rural differentiation.

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