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## Article

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## Exploring the contribution of migrant labour in Greek agriculture

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**Abstract.** A distinctive feature of Greek agriculture is its important position in the economy and society. Depending on the state of the national economy, and especially in times of economic recession, different population groups may consider agriculture as either a “sector of departure” or a “sector of arrival”. In Greece, migrant labour has become a major component of agricultural production and rural development, especially in areas where intensive agricultural systems prevail. The aim of this paper is to critically discuss the contribution of migrant employment to Greek agriculture in recent decades. First, the paper provides an overview of the academic discussion concerning migrants in rural Greece, offering a framework for interpreting migrant employment in Greek agriculture. This is followed by an analytical account of the structural characteristics of the Greek agricultural sector. Next, the focus turns to the changing features of migrant labour in Greek agriculture since the early 1990s. Methodologically, the paper synthesizes secondary data from various sources. The paper concludes with reflections on the prospects for migrant labour in Greek agriculture, particularly in an era of changing migration flows and restricted mobility due to COVID-19.

**Keywords:** farming, migrant labour, farm structure, agricultural employment, Greece.

**JEL codes:** J61, F22, Q10, J21, J43.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The impact of migrant labour on rural areas is a relatively recent field of research (Kasimis *et al.*, 2003; 2010), since it is generally considered that migrants contribute in the main to economic development and multiculturalism in urban settings. The rural milieu is seen as residual compared to the vast transformations and globalization trends which primarily affect urban areas.

Since the late 1980s, observations have been made which illustrate that the new international migration is connected to changes in the European labour market, while it was also evident that migrant labour contributed to the informal economy, and thus to the fragmentation, of southern European societies (Pugliese, 1992; Mingione, 1995). These developments were linked to features of the Southern European countries, many of which had recently joined the EU and had similar sectoral and labour market needs. Moreover,

it became evident that the countries of southern Europe—Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain—had transformed into countries of immigration (i.e. that they were new immigration countries). Economic, demographic and social structure characteristics and their inter-connections—have determined aspects of the demand for labour which explain the composition of migrant flows.

A “Southern European model of migration” was suggested, which combines the main aspects of the new developments linked to migrant labour inflows into southern European countries. This model was introduced and elaborated by King and various co-authors (King *et al.*, 1997; King, 2000) and discussed further by other authors (Ribas-Mateos, 2004; Peixoto *et al.*, 2012), some of whom called its heuristic value into question (Baldwin-Edwards, 2012). While the model applies mainly to Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, attempts have been made to include Cyprus and other EU countries including Malta, Slovenia and Croatia (King, Thomson, 2008). This model was reiterated more recently in an attempt to integrate the changes arising from the financial recession (King, De Bono, 2013).

In this context, the discussion on migrant labour in rural areas of southern Europe was triggered by a paper by Hoggart and Mendoza (1999) which tried to adapt Piore’s (1979) approach for application to rural southern Europe. Hoggart and Mendoza (1999) argued that migrant labour plugged “holes” in the rural/local labour markets of southern European countries, seeking to utilize Piore’s discussion in the case of southern European, and more particularly Spanish, agriculture. This argument also seemed relevant to Greece, where migrant labour responded to the demand for both unskilled and skilled migrant labour (Kasimis *et al.*, 2003; Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2005). What is more, systematic empirical studies illustrated the various aspects of migrant labour’s inclusion in the local/rural labour market. Due to a number of demographic, social and economic challenges, migrant contributions were considered important not just for the survival of farming households, but more significantly for the competitiveness of family-owned enterprises. Various facets of this research revealed that migrant labour also had an immense impact on women’s involvement in farm employment (Papadopoulos, 2006), while different migrant labour groups followed different social mobility trajectories (Papadopoulos, 2009; Papadopoulos, Fratsea 2013; Fratsea, Papadopoulos 2020) and/or transnational strategies (Papadopoulos, 2012). In any case, the term “migrant labour” may be conceived as a blanket term that covers various migrant groups (i.e. permanent/seasonal/circular labour, documented/undocumented labour, regular/semi-regular/precarious labour,

etc.) (Kasimis *et al.*, 2010), concealing the divisions, hierarchies and dependencies among them.

The discussion on migrant labour in rural Greece has had a significant impact on the emergence of a related literature in other European countries. Although this impact cannot be easily measured, we can mention a number of studies that explicitly refer to the role of migrant labour in the transformation of non-metropolitan areas in Portugal and Spain (Fonseca, 2008; Moren-Alegret, 2008; Camarero *et al.*, 2012), and the role played by migrant labourers in retaining Italy’s informal labour relations and intensive food systems (Kilkey, Urzi, 2017). It is also worth mentioning the impact of the Greek discussion in other European countries, such as Norway (Rye, Andrejewska, 2010; Rye, 2014), Sweden (Hedberg *et al.*, 2012) and the UK (McAreavy, 2012; McAreavy, 2017).

One of the main arguments to emerge from the Greek discussion is that migrant labour has become a major component in agricultural production and rural development in southern Europe, and Greece in particular. The different ways in which migrant labour has fit into the existing socioeconomic and productive systems in rural southern Europe have been discussed in a rapidly expanding literature (Hoggart, Mendoza, 1999; Kasimis *et al.*, 2003; Jentch, 2007; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018). Migrants have been received as a “multi-functional” labour force that responds to various labour needs in rural areas (e.g. in farming, construction, tourism, personal services); however, the different jobs/tasks undertaken has led to significant differentiation among migrants. In fact, southern European countries have received a number of migrant/ethnic groups who have followed differing spatial and social mobility trajectories (Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2005; Papadopoulos, Fratsea, 2017).

Especially in areas where intensive agricultural systems prevail, the presence of large numbers of migrant labourers has been instrumental in bolstering production dynamics by keeping labour costs low and securing adequate quantities of skilled/less skilled labour (Gertel, Sippel, 2014; Corrado *et al.*, 2017), both of which are needed if farmers/agricultural producers want to be competitive in international markets. This intensive agricultural production regime is supported by formal networks of labour recruitment, but informal brokers who organize and secure the continuation of new migrant flows into those areas also play an important role (De Genova, 2002; Krissman, 2005).

Migrant practices and strategies are continuously reconstructed on the basis of existing migration policy measures, which are directly or indirectly-pivotal in

creating regular, semi-regular and irregular tiers within the migrant labour force (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018). The capacity of migration policies to allow for regularized migrant labour and/or to cater for various seasonal, temporary or ad hoc requirements, therefore creates a complex canvas of migrant labourers (Castles, 2006). Policy schemes allowing for seasonal, flexible and temporary migrant labour are particularly relevant in the case of southern European agriculture, which requires a sizeable labour force to fulfil its role within an increasingly globalized economy.

The aim of this paper is to critically discuss the contribution of migrant employment to Greek agriculture over the past several decades. The paper is structured thus: the next section provides an overview of the academic discussion of migrants in rural Greece and offers a framework for the interpretation of migrant employment in Greek agriculture. This is followed by an analytical account of the structural characteristics of the Greek agricultural sector. Compared to other EU countries, a distinctive feature of Greek agriculture is its important position in the economy and in society in different time periods and for different population groups, either as a “sector of departure” or a “sector of arrival”. Next, we focus on the changing characteristics of migrant labour in Greek agriculture since the early 1990s. Methodologically, the analysis is based on elaborating data from various sources including National Accounts, Farm Structures, and Population Censuses from the last thirty years. This analysis is supported by policy reports and grey literature describing the evolution of migrant labour in Greece, and in rural areas in particular. Based on this analysis, the paper concludes with reflections on the prospects for migrant labour in Greek agriculture, particularly in an era of changing migration flows and restricted mobility due to COVID-19.

## 2. FRAMING MIGRATION IN RURAL GREECE

Southern Europe has attracted many migrants since the start of the 1990s, due to its geopolitical position, improved socioeconomic situation, and the fact that it is now part of the European Union. The number of migrants entering Europe increased tremendously, and the southern European countries hosted a significant proportion of these migrant flows. This migration into Greece demarcated a new era of economic development and societal evolution in the country, which brought new challenges and opportunities with it, especially in rural areas. Both the older migration flows originating from the Balkans and more recent flows originating

from Asia and Africa have posed various challenges for society, the economy, and political elites in Greece.

Despite harsh economic conditions stemming from the recent economic crisis, Greece continues to serve as migrants’ main point of entry into Europe. In the context of the economic crisis, the pressure exerted by migrant flows has been felt particularly keenly by Greek society and the Greek economy, raising issues of social and spatial justice. Migrant labour has played an immensely important role in increasing agricultural productivity in intensive agricultural systems, while the nature of its impact on local societies and economies has been disputed. Still, in some areas, host societies have perceived migrant groups as a problem due to the lower wages, loss of local identity, and reduced personal security their presence can entail.

The Great Recession of 2008/9 created a depressed socioeconomic environment which severely impacted on peoples’ lives for a long period (2009-2016). In addition, the “migration and refugee crisis” (2015) added to an already profound economic recession, creating a “perfect storm” of political and socioeconomic turmoil in the country. In relation to the “migration/refugee crisis”, Greek public opinion has consistently addressed migration and asylum as a “problem” that needs to be “resolved”, while the management of migration and asylum has been affected by the EU securitization agenda.

In this context, the presence of international migrants in rural areas since the early 1990s is linked to a combination of demographic, social, economic and structural factors that have resulted in labour shortages in local receiving societies (Hoggart, Mendoza, 1999; Kasimis *et al.*, 2003; Labrianidis, Sykas, 2009a; Labrianidis, Sykas, 2009b; Papadopoulos, 2009). In the case of rural Greece, the employment of migrants has contributed to the following key developments: first, migrant labour in agriculture has been important in maintaining and/or expanding agricultural activity; second, the availability of a migrant labour force has played a significant role in releasing farmers from heavy agricultural work, enabling them to better organize the production and marketing of their products, or even to seek additional non-agricultural income; third, in regions where agriculture continues to play an important role in the local economy, the impact of the migrant labour force extends from certain farms being maintained to others being modernized and expanded; fourth, migrant employment has also been important in other sectors in rural areas, such as construction and tourism; finally, migrants have contributed to a demographic renewal in certain remote parts of Greece (Kasimis *et al.*, 2003; Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2005).

Revisiting the debate on migrant labour in rural Greece, which began before the onset of the financial crisis, has led to a more elaborate discussion of the dynamics of migrant labour in rural Greece. The story of migrant labour unfolds in a wider context of interactions between migrants and non-migrants and of local/global relations. Therefore, issues like migrant bonding and/or competition, as well as networking between migrants and locals, are important for understanding migrants' (re)positioning in the local economy and local society. Two major aspects are considered important: a) migrants' permanent/seasonal employment in agriculture, which references divisions and hierarchies among migrant labourers; and b) the social mobility trajectories of migrants across economic sectors and urban/rural areas (Kasimis *et al.*, 2010; Fratsea, Papadopoulos, 2020).

However, the economic recession has drastically altered the socioeconomic conditions in Greece (Papadopoulos, 2019). Dramatically intensifying the challenges for migrants in both urban and rural areas, the crisis has in many cases transformed the social mobility strategies which migrants had applied over several years (Kasimis *et al.*, 2015). The crisis also led to increasing tension between integrationist and autonomous perceptions of the socioeconomic situation, to new types of protest, and to altered migrant strategies of (in)visibility. It became evident that migrants had developed a repertoire of practices which included resilience, acts of reworking, and resistance against the requirements of the locally dominant agricultural production system. Since, in intensive agricultural production systems in particular, labour control remained the main instrument for governing migrant labour, life precariousness and labour precarity were prevalent (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018).

The discussion over the last decade has been severely affected by the economic crisis, which disrupted the existing socioeconomic trajectories of migrants and non-migrants with detrimental effects on both populations. Many farmers/employers attempted to control and "immobilize" migrant labour using various practices designed to increase their profitability and competitiveness in harsh times. The research agenda shifted to the study of the over-exploitation and precarity of migrant labour, while migrants exhibited significant resilience and agency when they needed to respond to existing challenges. They seemed to be able to react to/resist/mobilize against pressures from both their employers and the broader receiving economy and society. More to the point, migrant labour, along with other types of movers, add to the cosmopolitanism of rural areas and thus enable the re-territorialization of people's lives in rural areas (Papadopoulos, Fratsea, 2021).

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Greek literature on counter-urbanization, and more particularly the "return to the countryside", is rather limited. Publications either focus on the characteristics of specific coastal rural areas that have attracted significant numbers of newcomers (Chalkias *et al.*, 2011; Papadopoulos, Ouilis, 2014), or on more targeted research into the "return" to rural areas in the wake of the economic crisis, which has had an immense impact on the country (Gkartzios, 2013; Anthopoulou *et al.*, 2017; Gkartzios *et al.*, 2017; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, some writers have traced the trajectories of those people who seemed to have turned to agriculture as a response to the economic recession (Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2013; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2019), while others have emphasized young people's engagement with agriculture in the era of austerity (Koutsou *et al.*, 2014). However, there is still a significant research gap when it comes to researching "lifestyle" or "amenity migration" and "rural gentrification" in Greece, which may stem from the seasonality of such movements, the heterogeneity of the phenomena, and/or the small size of the relevant populations.

### 3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GREEK AGRICULTURE

In Greece, agriculture still holds an important position in the economy. Traditionally, Greek agriculture has followed a less intensive development path, with relatively low environmental pressures, in comparison to other EU countries. Despite the wider trend towards industrialization, modernization and, later on, the tertiarization of the economy, Greece's economy and society remained tied to agriculture and rural development. In various ways, agriculture is the country's "reference point", alternating between being a "sector of departure" – in times of rapid economic modernization and economic expansion – and, occasionally, becoming a "sector of arrival", i.e. for those who seek a better quality of life and consider agriculture as a gateway to it, or in times of economic crisis when agriculture is linked to an alternative development pathway (Papadopoulos, Fratsea, 2021). This double-edged role of agriculture is acknowledged here to shed light on the two obviously conflicting components of agricultural development in the country: first, and foremost, the purely economic dynamics of agricultural modernization connected to increased competition and technological advancements, and second the sustainability aspects of agricultural activity related to food provision, environmental concerns, and rural development.

In the early post-war period, agriculture was described as a sector in need of modernization albeit in a restrictive environment. Greece was depicted as an “underdeveloped, foreign-trade-oriented country” (Pepe-lasis, Thomson, 1960: 145) with the following discom-forting features: a) a marked inability to broaden the productive structure of the economy; b) a heavy depend-ence on foreign markets for a few “luxury” exports (i.e. unprocessed agricultural products accounted for 85 per-cent of total exports); c) an industrial sector developing slowly and mostly behind tariffs and other protection; d) an agriculture sector which, as the country’s princi-pal economic activity, employed about 57 percent of the total labour force in primary activities and was the ori-gin of 40 percent of GDP.

Public investment in agriculture increased over the 1950s and 1960s, while policies of income support would later seek to assist the farming population in rural areas (Petmezas, 2013). At the same time, out-migration from rural areas and agriculture led to the abandonment of hilly and mountainous areas, which actually favoured the tendency towards agricultural modernization, pro-ductivity growth, farm capitalization and social differen-tiation. Between 1955 and 1975, around one fifth of the rural population abandoned the countryside and moved either to the two major cities (Athens, Thessaloniki) or emigrated abroad; 60 percent of those emigrating from Greece were of rural origin (Petmezas, 2013: 124).

Greece’s accession to the EU has accelerated the pre-existing tendencies towards agricultural modernization and the shrinkage of the agricultural labour force. How-ever, both the size of agricultural employment as a share of the total labour force and agriculture’s contribution to the GDP remained high compared to other EU coun-tries. This apparent contradiction is due to the farm-ing population in Greece being highly differentiated. In addition, significant segments of farming population have adopted both farming and non-farming activities, so their family holdings are seen as components within a flexible and multifunctional agricultural activity that supports the family’s economic survival (Kasimis, Papa-dopoulos, 2001) or, under specific conditions, operates as an economic asset in times of crisis (Kasimis, Papa-dopoulos, 2013). Thus, we need to interpret the charac-teristics of agriculture through the lens of the social trans-formation that has been occurring in rural Greece, while avoiding a linear approach to agricultural modernization that underestimates the structural limitations of Greek farming and the socio-economic dynamics that are con-tinuously remodelling rural areas (Papadopoulos, 2015).

In the early 1990s, almost ten years after Greece’s entry to the European Community (EU), the Greek

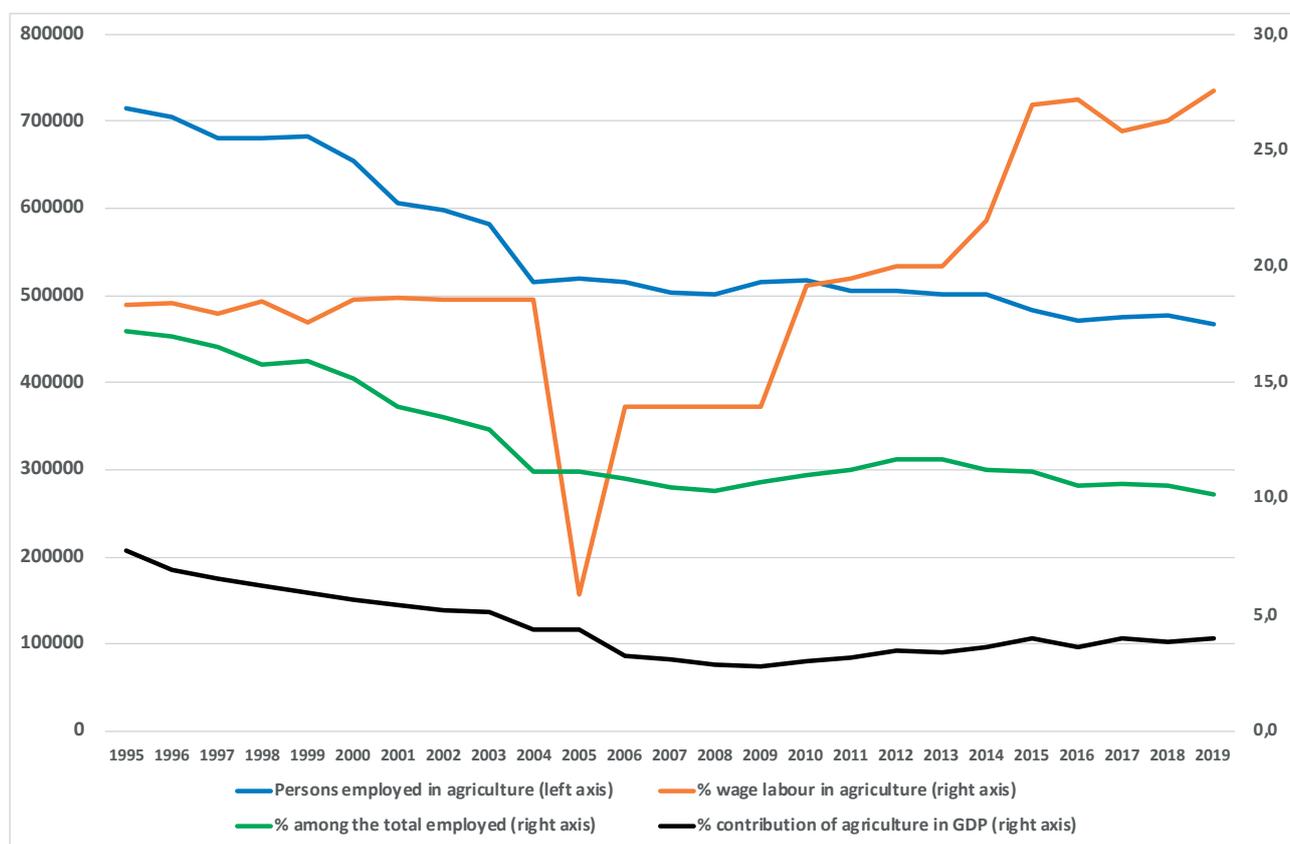
economy was in an almost-economic stagnation and would continue to diverge from the developed econo-mies through until 1995. By 1990, agricultural employ-ment was still high, at 24.5 percent, with industry accounting for 27.4 percent and services 48.2 percent (OECD 1993: 118). In the 1974-2000 period, the average GDP growth was 1.9 percent per year, much lower even than in the post-war period (Costis, 2018: 438). Unem-ployment, and particularly female and youth unemploy-ment were on the rise, the international competitive-ness of Greek products has significantly decreased, and attempts to reconstruct the agricultural sector, the sec-ondary sector and the economy at large failed to cure the sector’s chronic and structural problems, such as the small size of both farm holdings and enterprises (OECD, 1993; Costis, 2018).

Since the mid-1990s, agricultural employment has declined significantly, while the contribution of farm employment to total employment has followed a simi-lar path; similarly, agriculture’s contribution to GDP decreased until 2009, before rising and stabilizing between 2014 and 2019 (Fig. 1). Agricultural employ-ment has followed a downward trend, due to farming’s low attractiveness for young people and the older gener-ation of farmers retiring. It seems that there was a slight increase in the number of people employed in the agri-cultural sector during the first phase of the economic crisis (2009-2010), which led some writers to argue that farming had become part of an alternative strategy for mitigating the economic downturn (Kasimis, Papado-poulos, 2013; Gkartzios, 2013). Given the overall decline in salaried employment in Greece caused by the eco-nomic crisis, the stability of agricultural employment entailed a relative increase in the contribution of agricul-tural employment to total employment and, consequen-tly, of agriculture’s contribution to GDP.

By 2008, before the start of the economic crisis, agricultural employment represented 10.3 percent of total employment. By 2013, it had increased to 11.7 per-cent, but this figure had fallen to 10.3 percent by 2019. It is estimated that over 466,000 people are currently employed in agriculture, with agriculture contributing around 4 percent to GDP, a figure that has remained stable for the last five years (Fig. 1).

What has changed, however, is the number of peo-ple in salaried agricultural employment, which increased very significantly in the period 1995–2019. More specifi-cally, salaried employment remained between 17.2 and 18.5 percent of total agricultural employment in the period 1995-2004, before declining for a few years due to the rise of the construction sector. By 2010, salaried agricultural employment had climbed back up to its

Fig. 1. Evolution of agricultural employment and agriculture's contribution to GDP, 1995-2019.



Source: ELSTAT, National Accounts, 1995-2019.

previous level, and since there has increased rapidly. In 2019, salaried employment accounted for 27.5 percent of agricultural employment, which is the highest it has ever been. Evidently, this rise is related to the increased contribution of migrant labour in agriculture, which will be discussed in more detail below.

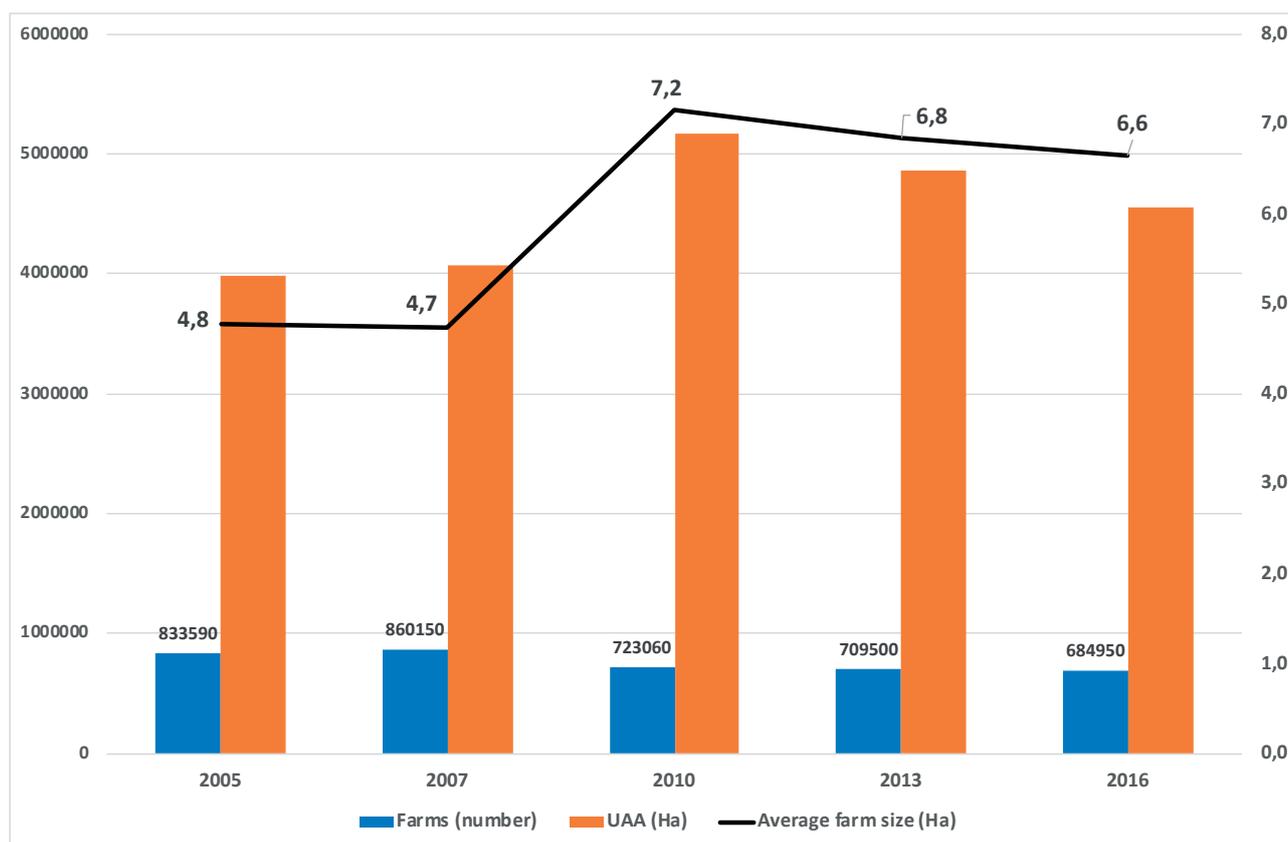
The structural characteristics of Greek agriculture are not favourable to agricultural modernization, with several structural drawbacks underscored in reference to the Greek farming sector (MEPPP, 2008; Hellenic Republic, 2018: 105-107; FEIR, 2020). The structural weaknesses of Greek agriculture include the: small size and high fragmentation of its agricultural holdings; unfavourable age structure and educational attainment of the farming population; ineffective organization of farm holdings; low integration of new technologies and equipment; significant dependence on farm subsidies; and a lack of strategic orientation for promoting farm products (FEIR, 2020: 111).

Greek agriculture is characterized by fragmentation with a large proportion of small-scale farms and an ageing agricultural workforce. In particular, although

the average size of agricultural holdings has increased from 4.8 hectares in 2005 to 6.6 hectares in 2016, Greece is still among the countries with the lowest farm size in the EU (Fig. 2). This change is due to the significant decrease in the number of farm holdings – the majority of which are family farms/enterprises – and an expansion in utilized agricultural land. Since 2005, the number of farm holdings has declined by around 18 percent (which equates to 148,640 holdings), while the most recent survey (2016) records 684,950 holdings. It is also important that a significant number of farms – estimated at 109,600 holdings – are owned by households who consume more than 50 percent of their final production, implying they are subsistence farms.

Despite the increased average farm size, three quarters (77 percent) of farm holdings are still less than 5 hectares, while 50 percent of farms have an economic size of less than EUR 4,000. What is more, only 3.7 percent of farm holders are under 35 years old, while 33.5 percent are over 65. Two thirds of farm holders are male, and only one third are female. In terms of agricultural output, Greek agriculture specializes in crops such as

Fig. 2. Changes in farm holdings, utilized agricultural land and farm size, 2005-2016.



Source: Eurostat, Farm structures, 2005–2016.

fruits (21.9 percent), vegetables and horticultural products (18.1 percent), olive oil (9.2 percent), industrial crops (8.6 percent), forage plants (7.2 percent), cereals (6.6 percent), etc. Animal yields represent a small share: milk (9.6 percent), sheep and goats (5.8 percent), cattle (2.5 percent), etc. (European Commission, 2020).

To sum up, agriculture has been a reference point for the country's economy and society in different eras, including the recent economic recession. Socioeconomically, as illustrated above, agriculture has been a reference point both as a "sector of departure" and a "sector of arrival" for various social groups and populations. The conventional discussion on the so-called obstacles to agricultural modernization in Greece regurgitates the well-known arguments regarding the significance of scale and competition for agricultural growth. However, such characteristics also need to be understood as framing components of the Greek socio-economic context and thus in how they interact with the social practices of the population groups involved.

#### 4. TAKING STOCK OF MIGRANT LABOUR IN GREEK AGRICULTURE

In the 1990s, Greece was transformed from an emigration to an immigration country. Migration flows intensified after the fall of the socialist regimes in 1989, with Greece receiving the highest percentage of immigrants from third countries (1.2 percent) relative to its total population (Lazaridis, 1996: 340). Greece's geographical position, its economic growth, previous historical and ethnic ties, EU membership, and more recently the economic recession and the political instability, war and conflicts in other countries, are among the fundamental factors which impact on the size, composition and spatial distribution of the country's migrant population. Migration flows towards Greece can be divided into four periods, each characterized by a different ethnic composition, migration policy responses, and initiatives for migration management. Up until 1996, migration towards Greece was basically linked to the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and Greece's geographical proximity to the Balkans. Between 1996 and 2002, Albanian

migration to Greece was still growing, but migrants and asylum seekers from other Balkan countries, the former Soviet Union, Pakistan and India were arriving in greater numbers. Between 2002 and 2014, there were increasing numbers of migrants from Asian and African countries. In addition, the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU led to increased inflows of migrant workers who were employed irregularly and seasonally in agriculture and construction. The next period of migration was marked by the so-called “refugee and migration crisis”, which had an impact on Greece and Italy as the first receiving countries. Syrians in the main, but also Iranians, Afghans and other Asians and Africans, continue to cross land and sea borders on their journey to Greece and onwards to the rest of Europe (Papadopoulos, Fratsea, 2019).

In each period, agriculture was a key employment sector for immigrants in Greece. In the early 1990s, 12.2 percent of migrants were employed in the primary sector (agriculture and fisheries) compared to 19.6 percent of Greeks. The lack of a legal framework for the employment and residence of migrants in Greece meant that the majority were employed in the informal labour market. The precarious legal status of most migrant population also contributed to their precarious employment status. It has been estimated that migrants, both irregular and regular in their status, provided 45 percent of all hired labour in agriculture (Lianos *et al.*, 1996). By the mid-1990s, the number of irregular migrants was estimated to have been 470,000, accounting for 4 percent of the country’s population and 13 percent of its workforce (Lianos *et al.*, 1996: 458), while by 1997, only 78,000 foreigners had valid residence permits (Fakiolas, 1999: 212) and fewer than 2,000 migrants were working legally in agriculture (Fakiolas, 2000: 62).

Various institutions and professional organizations acknowledged the necessity of migrant labour for the Greek economy. In fact, at the end of 1996, the Ministry of Agriculture acknowledged the increased need for labour in agriculture due to

the continuous reduction of the Greek farm labour force, as a result of urbanization and the changing job preferences of young people causes wage increases and higher production costs which make agricultural output uncompetitive. The employment of immigrants has offered an economic relief to farms by stabilizing in the last three years daily wages at 4,000-5,000 Drachma (EUR 11-15) plus some fringe benefits and it has also contributed to match the increased seasonal demand with adequate labour supply (Fakiolas, 2000: 62-63).

By 2001, the number of migrants working in the primary sector had increased from 7,792 to 74,922 people,

who constituted 12 percent of the labour force in the sector. More than one fifth (21.7 percent) were women (mainly from Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria), while the respective percentage of women in the Greek agricultural labour force was 42 percent.

The overwhelming majority of agricultural workers are salaried (86.3 percent), whereas the number of self-employed and employers ranges from limited (6.7 percent) to negligible (0.9 percent). Their education is low to average, yet migrant agricultural workers have a better educational profile than their Greek peers. Thus, while 22.7 percent of migrant agricultural workers have secondary education, and 2.7 percent a tertiary education, the corresponding figures for Greek workers are 16.2 and 1.8 percent respectively (ELSTAT, 2001).

The majority are employed in low-status occupations in the primary sector, such as unskilled workers, while one third are specialized agricultural workers. As expected, in terms of their geographical distribution their numbers are high in regions with intensive agricultural systems, or areas that are heavily dependent on agriculture such as the Peloponnese, Central Greece, Central Macedonia, and Thessaly. Their spatial mobility is low within the country due to their irregular status, a situation that changed considerably in the late 1990s.

In the years that followed, the size and characteristics of migrant employment in agriculture changed considerably. Five interconnected reasons have been identified, which will be discussed throughout the remainder of the paper. First, the Greek legalization programmes of 2001 and 2005/2007 allowed a significant proportion of the migrants living and working in Greece to legalize their residence/status. Following these regularization programmes, the social and spatial mobility of migrants increased. Their legalization has allowed a significant proportion of migrants to seek more stable and better-paying jobs within the agricultural sector, or to move to other areas – cities and islands – and seek employment in construction or tourism. For some, employment in the primary sector remained a source of secondary income during periods of low labour intensity in other sectors. Third, by the beginning of 2000, migratory flows towards Greece had become highly differentiated as geographic accessibility steadily replace geographical proximity to Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania as the key factor in shaping these flows (Papadopoulos, 2011; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2013). In fact, the number of African and Asian migrants living in the country started to rise. By 2011, Greece’s immigrant population numbered 912,000 people, or 8.4 percent of the total population (ELSTAT, 2011). Albanians remained the predominant nationality, while the numbers of A2 migrants (Bulgarians and

Romanians) and Asians increased considerably. A fair number of the newly-arrived migrants found employment in agriculture, where, due to their precarious legal status, they usually performed the more dangerous, unskilled and low-paid jobs. The flow of migrant workers into the primary sector was mirrored by the continued abandonment of agricultural employment by young people and women, especially in rural areas where the local economy had begun to offer more employment opportunities outside agriculture. By 2008/2009, these trends were impacted by the implications of the economic crisis.

By 2011, changes in the legal status of agricultural workers also affected the Greek farm labour force. In more detail, total employment in agriculture decreased by 35.4 percent compared to 2001, a trend which can be largely attributed to the falling number of unpaid farm family members (mostly women). Moreover, migrant employment in the primary sector had fallen to 16.6 percent of migrant employment (compared to 18.6 percent in 2001), although the share of migrant labour in the primary sector increased to 19.7 percent. The number of migrant labourers employed in agriculture increased to 79,271 individuals (from 74,922 in 2001), while the share of female migrant agricultural employment remained at the same level, which is to say one fifth of total migrant employment in the agricultural sector. The ethnic composition of female migrant labour had changed, however, since the percentage of female migrants from A2 countries had increased to 44 percent (from 29.6 percent in 2001), while the proportion of female Albanians had fallen to 43.3 percent (from 53.5 percent in 2001). Moreover, 88 percent of migrants employed in agriculture were now salaried labour and 9 percent self-employed; in terms of the occupational structure of agriculture, 56.5 percent of migrants were classified as low-skilled labour in 2011 and 42.8 percent as specialized labour.

Equally important, the demographic composition of the agricultural labour force had improved substantially thanks to the insertion of migrant labourers (Fig. 3). In particular, the age pyramid of everyone employed in agriculture revealed a labour force which was rather aged, due to the large proportion of males over 40, while females were significantly reduced in numbers and concentrated in middle age groups. However, while the pyramid of the Greek agricultural labour force revealed a significantly aged male and female labour force – results from the lower representation of people under 30 (in the population), the age pyramids of the agricultural labour force for Albanians and other nationalities depict relatively younger labour forces, which improve the demographic picture of the total agricultural labour force. The

bulk of Albanian agricultural labour is concentrated in the age groups between 30 and 45 years of age, while other nationalities' agricultural labour is concentrated in the categories between 20 and 40 years of age. Female agricultural migrant labour (both Albanians and other nationalities) remains much smaller than male agricultural migrant labour, while female workers are more dispersed across different age groups, (re)confirming the predominance of males in agriculture. In summary, migrant labour benefits the population structure in Greek agriculture significantly, although total agricultural labour remains relatively aged compared to other economic sectors.

#### 5. THE EVOLUTION AND DYNAMICS OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY LABOUR IN GREEK AGRICULTURE

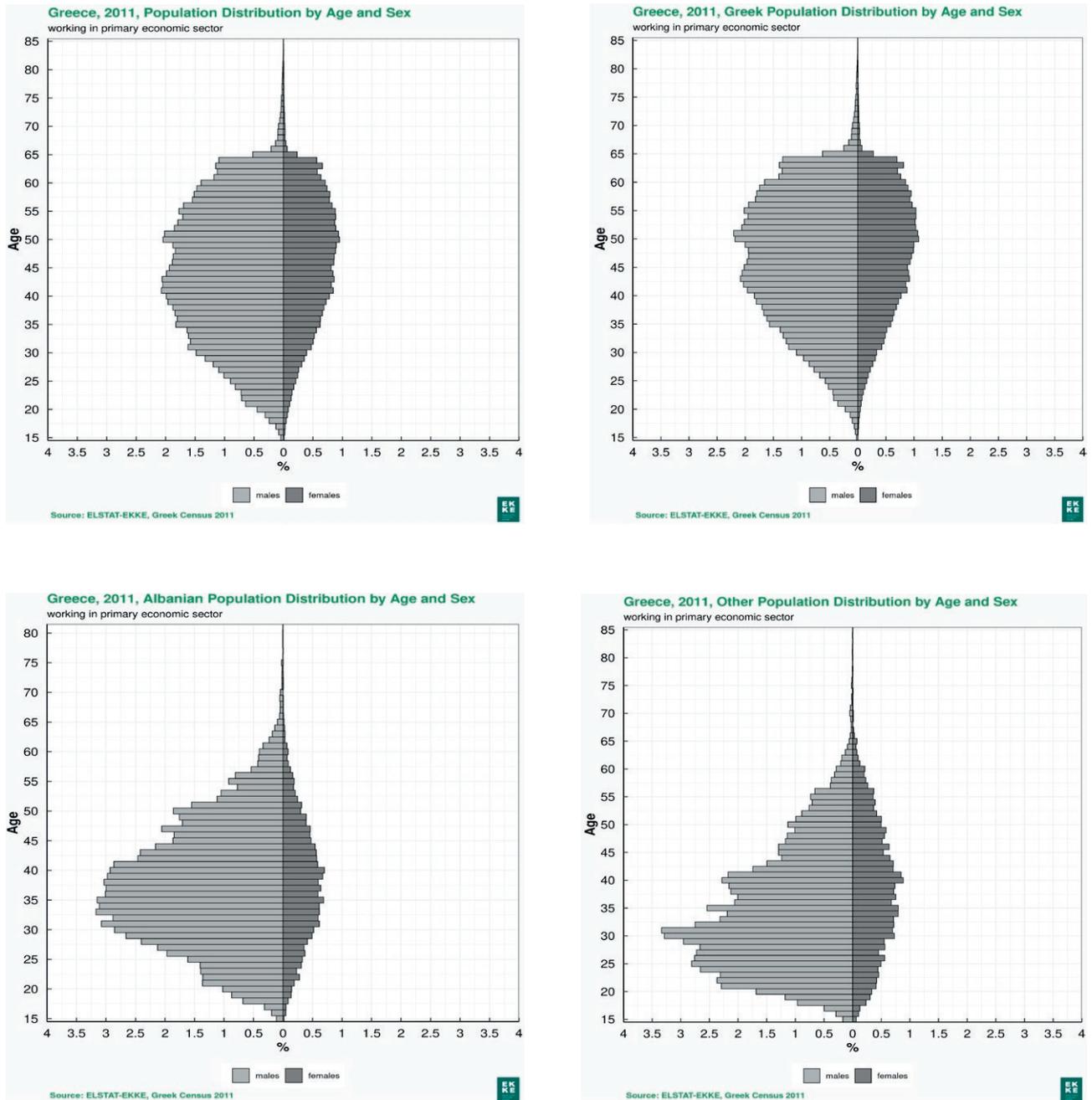
Based on the previous discussion, Greek agriculture has undergone significant changes due to the impact of wider transformations related to increased competition in agricultural and non-agricultural markets, European integration, economic globalization and migration flows towards Europe and developed countries. The restructuring of Greek agriculture is reflected in the falling number of farm holdings and the declining size of the agricultural labour force, both of which have already been noted.

To study the evolution and dynamics of the agricultural labour force, we should make it clear that, due to the small size of Greek farms, the majority of the agriculturally employed cannot secure full-time employment on their own farm. It is important to consider that only a limited number of farm holdings justify full-time employment for their managers. Thus, a decreasing number of people are employed in agriculture (Fig. 4), with many who were employed either part-time or full-time in farming leaving the sector. Between 1991 and 2016, the number of persons employed in agriculture declined by 23.7 percent (372,143 people), while the number of full-time employed declined over the same period by 32.8 percent (223,170 AWUs).<sup>1</sup>

In 2016, the equivalent of the full-time employed in agriculture reached 457,000 and the recorded number of people employed in the sector was 1,198,390; this implies that agricultural workers work on average 0.38 of a full-time job. This calculation, which ostensibly shows the extensive underemployment in Greek agricul-

<sup>1</sup> AWUs stands for Annual Work Units and is the full-time equivalent employment; 1,800 hours is to be taken as the minimum figure (225 working days of eight hours each).

Fig. 3. Pyramids of Greek and migrant populations employed in agriculture, 2011.

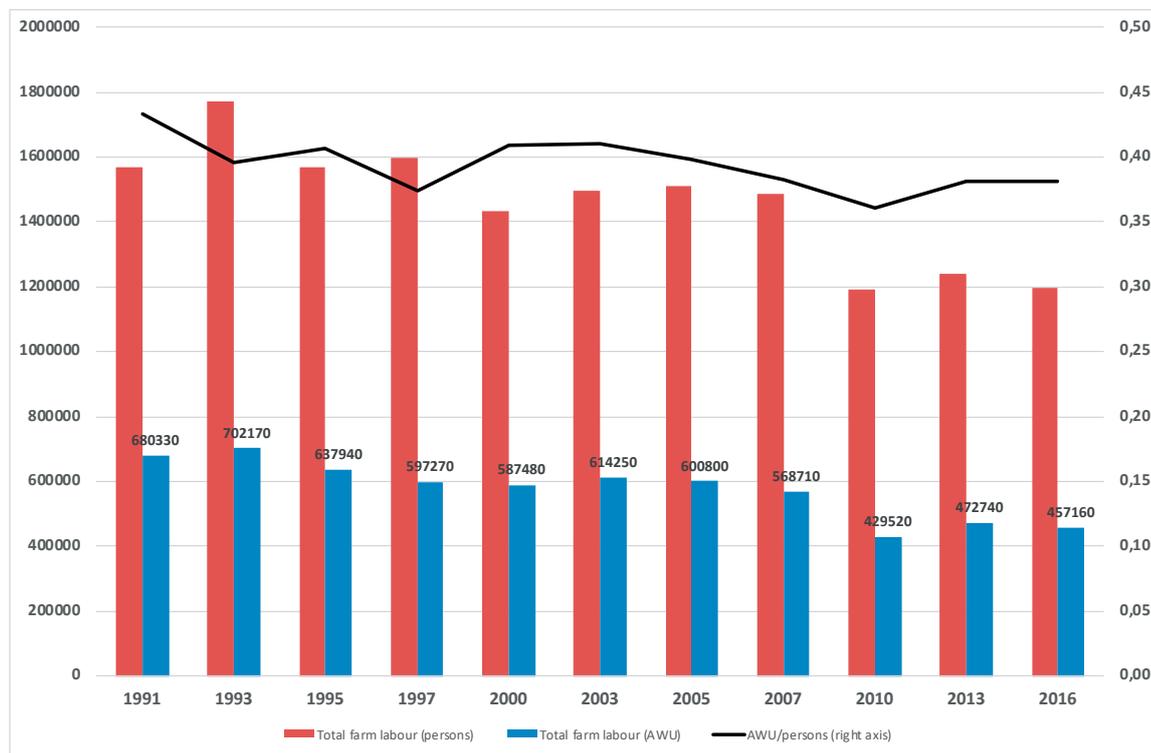


Source: ELSTAT, 2011.

ture, reveals two interconnected facts: first, the extent of pluriactivity – multiple job holding – among a large segment of the Greek farming population; and second, the prevalence of part-time engagement in agricultural activities by many people who retain their farm holding, in the face of the economic imperative of economic scale and competitiveness.

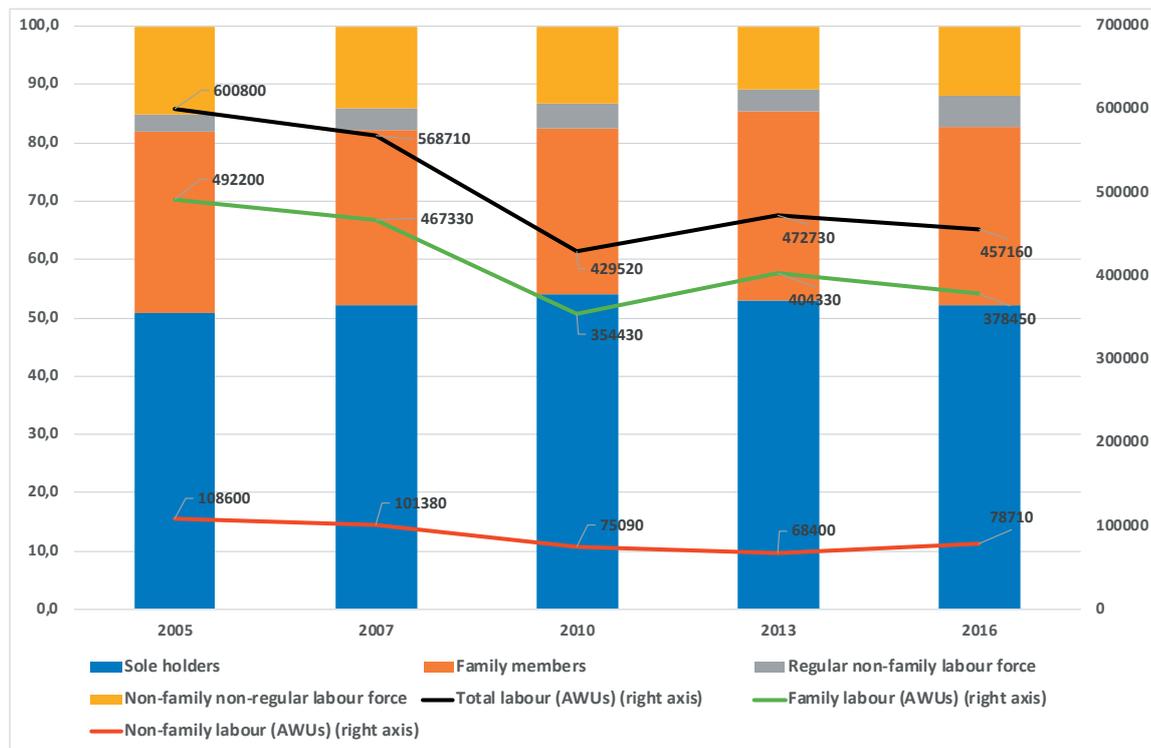
Given that agricultural employment has been in decline, both family and non-family labour has changed over the last decade (Fig. 5). The proportion of family labour remains very significant and varies between 82-83 per cent of total farm labour; the rest (17-18 per cent) is non-family labour. In particular, regular non-family labour has increased from 3 per cent in 2005

Fig. 4. Evolution of agricultural employment in Greek agriculture, 1991-2016.



Source: ELSTAT, Farm Structure Surveys/Agricultural Censuses.

Fig. 5. Family and non-family labour in agriculture, 2005-2016.



Source: ELSTAT, Farm Structure Surveys/Agricultural Censuses.

(18,310 AWUs) to 5.3 percent in 2016 (24,390 AWUs). However, seasonal non-family labour has declined significantly, from 15 percent to 11.9 percent (i.e. from 90,290 AWUs to 54,320 AWUs) over the same period. This illustrates that larger, labour intensive farm holdings have increased their dependence on non-family labour, while smaller, less intensive farm holdings have opted to reduce non-family labour in order to lower their production costs. In the period 2005-2016, total farm labour declined by 24 percent (or 143,640 AWUs), with the vast majority (79 percent) of those leaving the sector being family labour and the rest (21 percent) non-family labour.

The investigation into the dynamics of family and non-family (migrant) labour shows that the latter plays an increasingly vital role in Greek agriculture. The spatial distribution of family and non-family labour, both regular and seasonal, in Greek agriculture for 2016, as depicted in Maps 1-4, shows that family labour is more prevalent in mountainous and island areas, where farm holdings are relatively small and cultivate less intensive crops. However, non-family migrant labour prevails in areas which include intensive agricultural zones around Athens and Thessaloniki, the Peloponnese and Thessaly. Regular migrant labour seems to have become a permanent characteristic in coastal and mainland areas, where production “hot-spots” are located, while seasonal migrant labour is more relevant to emerging agricultural areas and represents a horizontal feature in plains and coastal areas.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The agricultural sector in Greece retains its important position in the economy and society of the country, although its role and structural characteristics have changed over the years. Socioeconomically, agriculture has been a reference point both as a “sector of departure” and a “sector of arrival” for various social groups and populations. The traditional discourse on the so-called obstacles to agricultural modernization in Greece echoes the familiar debates on the significance of scale and competition for increasing agricultural output. Greek agriculture is characterized by fragmentation, with a large portion of small-scale farms, and by an agricultural workforce skewed towards older workers. However, to understand the characteristics of the agricultural sector, these need to be situated within the wider socio-economic setting and the social dynamics of the population groups involved.

Based on an analysis of secondary data from various sources (i.e. National Accounts, Farm Structures

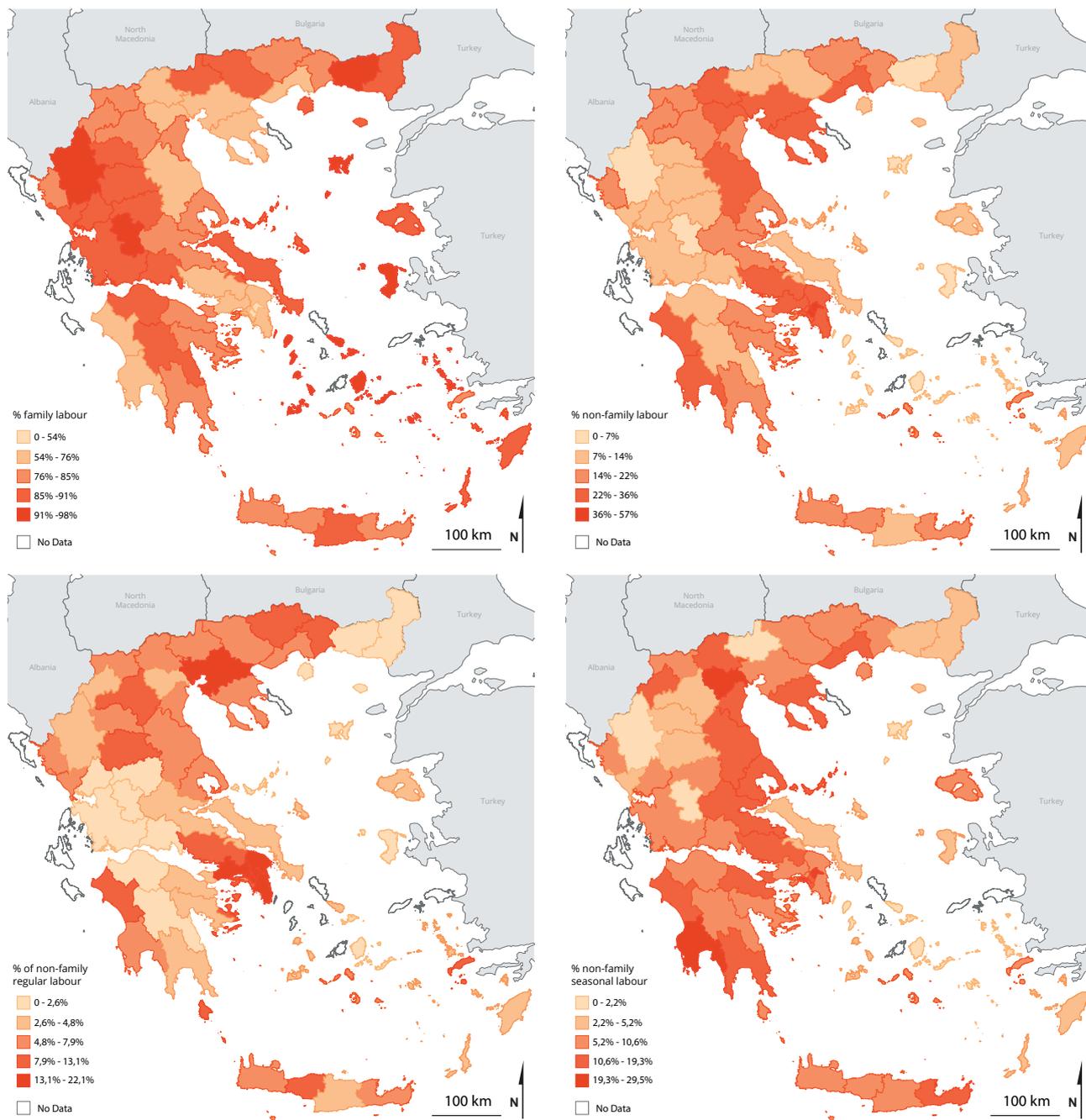
and Population Censuses) we explored the changing characteristics of migrant labour in Greek agriculture. In recent decades, international migration has been an important factor in rural restructuring in Greece. The impact of migrant labour in rural areas is a relatively recent field of research, since migrants are generally viewed as contributing mainly to economic development in urban contexts. For Greece, the relevant literature has shown that migrant labour has participated as a “multifunctional” labour force responding to various labour needs in rural areas, particularly in areas where intensive agricultural systems prevail. The presence of large numbers of migrant labourers has been instrumental in strengthening production dynamics by keeping labour costs low and securing adequate quantities of skilled/ less skilled labour in peak seasons. Migrants’ low social and political status connected to a deficient legal framework has had significant benefits for the employers who grabbed the opportunity to expand their activities.

Our analysis has shown that the number of migrants working in agriculture has increased in recent decades, while the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the migrant labour force have changed considerably. In fact, the general tendency since the mid-1990s has been for the size of salaried agricultural employment to increase significantly. This trend can be attributed almost exclusively to the increased participation of migrant labour in agriculture.

Several interconnected factors have contributed to this shift: the changing legal status of many migrants has expanded their social and spatial mobility opportunities, either within or outside the agricultural sector. Agriculture has become the primary employer for some migrant nationalities, while for others it has offered temporary employment opportunities during periods with limited labour demand in other sectors. Differentiating migration flows reveals new ethnic hierarchies within the agricultural sector and significant changes in the occupational structure. A fair number of the newly-arrived migrants found employment in agriculture, where, due to their precarious legal status, they usually perform the more dangerous, unskilled, and low-paid jobs. The flow of migrant workers into the primary sector was mirrored by the continuing abandonment of agricultural employment by young people and women, especially in rural areas where the local economy now offered more opportunities beyond agricultural employment. In 2008/2009, these trends were impacted by the implications of the economic crisis.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has imposed various restrictions on internal and international mobility. In EU countries, agricultural migrant labour has

**Maps 1-4.** Spatial illustrations of family and non-family labour (regular& seasonal) in Greek agriculture, 2016.



Source: ELSTAT, Farm Structures 2016.

been identified as among the hardest hit during the pandemic (Fasani, Mazza, 2020). Migrants with irregular status may have limited access to health care and social provisions. What is more, lockdowns and restrictions temporarily have changed the labour participation of migrants in agriculture. Mobility restrictions across

borders and regions have contributed to labour shortages, particularly in areas that rely on seasonal workers during harvesting. Labour shortages, exacerbated by the pandemic measures, now jeopardize the production chain. It remains to be seen what the wider implications of the pandemic will be for the agricultural labour force.

However, policy measures are certainly to avoid the precaritarization effect of the pandemic on the agricultural migrant labour force.

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