

XXIII European Society for Rural Sociology Congress

Thematic Symposium: Mobilities and Stabilities in Rural Space

“Socio-demographic imbalances and international mobility to rural areas”

C. Kasimis

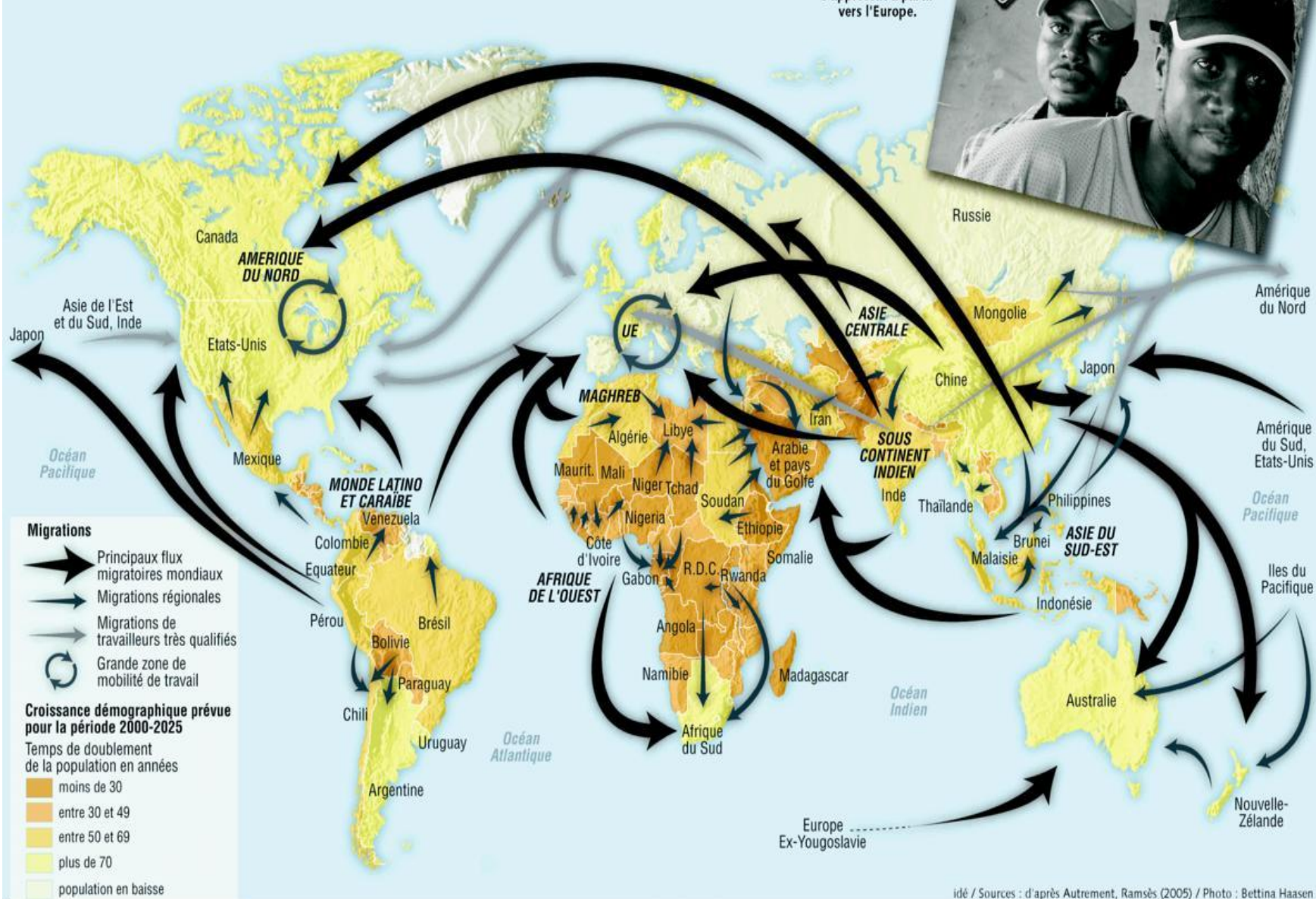
Professor of Rural Sociology
Agricultural University of Athens

kasimis@aua.gr

Vaasa, Finland
17-21 August 2009

200 million migrant workers in the world today

Les mouvements migratoires dans le monde



Introduction

- Human mobility is an increasingly central dimension of globalisation.
- Policy makers and citizens look with growing interest upon the connection between this emerging mobility and the economic and social outcomes of the migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries.

- As Europe undergoes a rapid demographic change, migrant workers are going to become more and more important.
- Structural rigidities in European labour markets imply that shortages of both skilled and unskilled labour in most countries are likely to coexist with unemployment, underemployment and continuous inflows of new migrants.

- EU Commission's Green Paper in 2005 stated: the EU will need 20 million migrants between 2010 and 2030 to cover the decline of its economically active population.
- Despite all this the EU has not resolved still the contradiction of the acknowledged labour needs and the adoption of restrictive migration policies.

- Yet, net migration into Europe is still increasing and is now the largest component of population change.
- However, the recent economic crisis has raised new concerns about migration.

Migrants in the rural regions of Europe

- The segmentation of EU labour markets, in conjunction with differences in economic, social, and institutional characteristics, has given rise to two distinct «migration regimes» and the construction of the «Northern» and the «Southern» models of migration.

The «Northern European» model:

- was shaped after World War II in the period of de-colonisation and economic reconstruction.
- migration was mostly legal and often organised on the basis of bi-lateral agreements for work in the 'fordist' industries of countries like Germany, UK, France, Sweden etc.

The «Southern European» model of migration:

- Expanded in the past 20 years
- Is characterized by wide 'illegality' and a multiplicity and heterogeneity of nationalities
- Shows an asymmetry of gender (overwhelmingly male) and differentiation of the geographic, social and cultural origin of migrants.
- And a coexistence of migration with high unemployment in the receiver countries.

- In the rural regions of Europe the ageing of the rural and farm population and the need to accommodate or reduce the flow of young people out of the countryside is a serious challenge to their sustainability.
- Statistics show that almost 17% of rural population in EU is over retirement age and only 10% of farm holders are younger than 35 years old.

- These developments reveal the complexity of the rural labour markets and the demographic and social mismatch of the demand and supply of labour.
- Some of these demographic imbalances have been halted by two independent developments: **“counter urbanisation” and “international migration”**.

- Strong migration flows to rural regions are a relatively new phenomenon in the European context and they have had a significant and growing impact on peripheral and rural areas.

A number of factors can explain international migration:

- First, the restructuring of agriculture has created significant demands for labour not satisfied because of the unfavourable demographic changes in rural areas.

- Second, the indigenous labour rarely has the necessary motivation and mobility for such work and is unwilling to work for low wages and under poor working conditions (social rejection of rural work).
- Third, the European countryside has become an arena for the development of other non-agricultural activities that increased demand for labour.
- Fourth, the employers can easily avoid the social security payments.

- In such an environment migrants come and fill the gaps left in the rural labour markets by the national population providing their labour for the marginal, least secure, highly exploitative, under-paid and non-insured jobs (3D jobs).

In rural Southern Europe

- Interdependent factors like globalisation, EU enlargement and the particular socio-economic developments in Southern European countries have transformed these countries from senders to receivers of migration flows.

- Evidence shows that migrant employment in agriculture and rural regions expanded rapidly in late 1980s and early 1990s.
- Migrants arriving from the Balkans, Africa and Asia have fuelled these often labour-intensive regional economies, to work in economically restructured rural areas and increasingly specialising seasonal agriculture.

In the rural South migrants:

- are extensively irregular and seasonal
- provide wage labour for both entrepreneurial and family farms
- are employed widely in agriculture, rural tourism, construction and domestic services
- often play a multifunctional role alternating seasonally between sectors
- constitute a 'new rural class' the presence of which has often caused social tensions connected directly with their way of life, work conditions and their regime of residence.

In rural Northern Europe

- In northern European countries, such as Ireland, Scotland, England, Germany and the Nordic countries (particularly Norway), rural areas have particularly benefited from the 2004 EU enlargement.
- The majority of migrant workers from the 2004 accession states have found employment in rural areas rather than in the traditional migration centres.

An initial analysis of migration patterns to Northern European rural regions shows that migrant workers:

- are geographically concentrated in specific areas.
- this geographical concentration is related to the greater concentration in specific sectors like agriculture and the food industry, hospitality, manufacturing and distribution.

- are more seasonal than in urban areas and organised legally.
- provide widely wage labour in a predominantly entrepreneurial agriculture.
- are a significant proportion of the overall workforce.

- However, migrants working in the rural areas of Northern Europe are not always regular and European.
- Irregular employment, deteriorating working conditions and low remunerations are reportedly expanding.

- Thus, the theoretical models of Northern and Southern migration cannot be treated as static.
- The changes in the socio-economics and the demographics of migration are expected to lead to a convergence of the characteristics of the Southern and the Northern models.

To sum up:

- Migrants have been employed in many tasks, with differing skills, and significant geographic mobility over the seasons.
- They have provided a highly flexible labour force.
- They have not supplanted native wage labourers.
- They have contributed to the improvement of the organisation and management of farm enterprises.

- In agricultural regions their contribution has ranged from farm preservation to farm expansion and modernisation.
- Large-scale farms and businesses that depend heavily on the availability of migrant labour have benefited most.
- For smaller and pluriactive farms, they have offered the opportunity to preserve the farm while the farm operator and/or family members hold off-farm jobs.

- Migrants have offered great services in other forms of rural economic activities such as construction, hospitality/tourism, and personal/domestic services providing the necessary labour at low cost.
- In marginal areas, they have provided rural households with the labour necessary for the maintenance of their traditional/cultural life.

Implications for policy

- Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of migration for the future of rural Europe, Europe remains largely closed to labour migration.
- Most Member States have few policies designed to attract, admit, and benefit systematically from the work of migrants.

- On the contrary today EU countries design unsuccessfully programmes for the repatriation of migrants when the persisting problems of Europe's agricultural sector and rural regions require policies that will regulate and monitor the employment and integration of migrants.

The plethora of more or less restrictive national policies and bilateral agreements highlight the need to:

- Improve the implementation of the regularisation programmes as a precondition for the integration of migrants in rural economies and societies.
- Design operational plans at a national level and adopt differentiated and flexible policies, on the basis of varying regional characteristics.

- Expand EU agricultural training programmes to include migrants in a way that improves their professional capabilities and understanding of new farming practices.
- Instigate and support local government initiatives for the reception and integration of migrants in rural regions.

The expected implications of the economic crisis

- The present economic crisis has highlighted even more the contradictions of Europe's migration policies and the dangers of losing the contributing factor to rural sustainability in the possibility of a gradual withdrawal of migrants from the rural labour markets.

Employment and return

- The impact of the crisis on migrants' employment will likely depend on how severely it affects sectors in which migrants work and how long the crisis lasts.
- Research has shown that low-skilled migrant workers are more vulnerable in recession.

- Despite all this many migrants decide to stay on. They are expected to show higher flexibility, mobility and willingness to adjust.
- National governments and policy makers showed concern about natives' jobs and employment opportunities and introduced a number of subsidised return programmes. The majority of them, however, failed.
- Spain introduced a programme of paid return with no success so far – only 1400 out of 100.000 joined it.

- Accession 8 countries migrants have been more recession responsive. These migrants have low cost of return and no barriers to re-entry when conditions allow it.

- The situation is rather different for the non-EU migrants originating from other European countries. Despite the close distance with receiving countries, no mass returns are identified.
- The family structure and long duration of their stay in parallel with the weak economic prospects in their home country make decisions to return less easy.

- In agriculture and the food sector the crisis, combined with international trade pressures and the CAP reform, has led to increasing pressures to either reduce the size of migrant employment and/or re-engage more family members.

- The crisis has brought changes to the attitudes of indigenous population towards agricultural work.
- It was reported that Britons were “now applying for some of the more seasonal, agricultural-type jobs” they might have rejected before.
- Similar re-considerations are identified in other countries (Greece, Germany).

Remittances

- There has been some discussion that the economic downturn will be a blow to migrant remittances, which have been identified as a key source of external capital for developing countries in the past decade.
- Migration has a positive contributory role for the sustainability of the rural regions not only of the receiving countries but of the sending too.

- In the case of Albania, for example, we know that remittances contribute more than 1/3 of the total monthly household income.
- The size of that is higher for the rural households, towards which goes more than 50% of total remittances.
- A possible reduction of remittances therefore is expected to affect sharply the living conditions in rural regions where poverty is higher than in the urban regions.

Integration and exclusion

- Economic and social integration will be affected by job losses and ineligibility of social benefits.
- Unemployment may also cause tensions between native and migrant population (recent reports from UK and Spain confirm that).
- Migrants who remain abroad will be in an increasingly precarious position with fewer opportunities for formal employment and the possibility of greater stigmatisation.

Conclusions and research questions

- The presence of migrants in the rural economies of Europe has, so far, solved long standing problems related to labour shortages.
- It has contributed to the survival and expansion of economic activities as well as to the maintenance of rural population in the countryside.

The discussion above raises certain research questions we have to think about:

- What is the contribution of international migration to rural stability and, on the other hand, to rural change and the formation of the 'new rurality' of rural regions (including changes in production, demography, social structures and rural culture)?
- Does the employment of migrants affect the modernisation of production structures and, if yes, in which direction?

- How does the crisis affect the size and conditions of migrant employment in rural regions?
- Does it lead to the expansion of the informal economy?
- Does it lead to new divides between old and new migrants, between different ethnic groups?

- What factors can contribute to their longer stay and the acknowledgement by locals of diversity as a contributing factor to rural sustainability
- It would be finally important for policy makers to know what factors facilitate or possibly undermine the integration of migrants in the rural regions.