

Labour Market Flexibility and Informality in Greece: An empirical study

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Abstract

The paper explores the flexibility and informality in the Greek labour market during the pre-crisis period and proposes a newly developed research methodology for addressing currently the issue under the research project Thales. This issue is still very controversial in Greece when the high unemployment in the years of prosperity (the period of 2006-2007) is taken into consideration. The main query is whether the Greek labour market was flexible enough, according to international standards, in the prosperous years and reforms were not necessary. In order to describe the pre-crisis labour relations results from a survey (the period of 2006-07) with nearly 200 workplaces in a provincial Greek labour market are presented. Further, a new methodology is proposed in order to diachronically compare the results. The final aim of this working paper is to set the ground for comparing the results of two questionnaire surveys, the first performed in the pre-crisis period, and the second is currently in progress in the second semester 2015.

Keywords: Industrial relations, labour flexibility, informal employment, Greece

JEL Codes: J2, E26 and D0

Introduction

This paper explores flexible contracts in the Greek labour market during the pre-crisis period. This issue is still very controversial in Greece if the high unemployment during recession was taken into consideration. The main query is whether the Greek labour market was flexible enough, according to international standards, in the prosperous years and reforms were not necessary.

A survey in the provincial labour market of Thessaly (TERS) was conducted based on the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) by the UK and a questionnaire, was constructed to explore numerical flexibility in the workplace. Quantitative research methods were used to analyze data from employees in part-time, temporary time, fixed-term, seasonal and agency contracts. In addition, subcontractors, family members, home workers, and subsidized employees provide exceptional information for regression analysis with the above data.

Empirical data were collected in 2007 and personal interviews were conducted at 206 businesses in central Greece.

Findings can be used for recommendation policies of employment strategies in Greece and other European countries but also for comparative analysis with other countries having used the WERS or similar questionnaires. Results presented indicate the current situation of flexible forms of employment in central Greece and hence throughout Greece. Subcontracting and temporary time contracts seem considerably stronger than part-time and short-time contracts respectively.

Also, the high participation of family members in Greek businesses (especially in micro-enterprises) inflates informal employment. Strong points of the paper are that: (1) it considers all categories of enterprises; micro, small and medium (2) new factors in flexible contracts (family members, subcontracting and trainees) are studied.

The final aim of this working paper is to set the ground for comparing diachronically the results of two questionnaire surveys; the first one performed in the pre-crisis period and is currently analyzed; further, the methodology of the second survey under the Project Thales which is currently in progress and will be completed in the second semester 2015 is presented.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section, prior empirical studies related to the subject are presented; in the third section, issues focusing on the design and conduct of the pre-crisis survey are addressed, followed in the fourth section with an analysis of the findings. In the fifth section reforms undertaken by the Greek government are discussed. In the sixth section, our new research methodology under the Thales research project is described, related to our questionnaire survey currently performed during the second semester o 2015; the last section discusses the conclusions.

Prior Empirical Studies on Greek Employment Relations

In this section we are going to investigate the methodology used in earlier studies on employment relations and human resource practices in Greece will be examined before describing the survey process. It is known that studies on Greek employment relations based on empirical data are very limited (Mihail, 2003). However, an attempt to examine previous surveys or studies on the above subjects has been made in the last decade.

Table 1: List of Surveys dealing with Human Resources Practices in Greek workplaces during the last fifteen years (1999-2014)

Organisation	Author	Year	Sample Size	Comments
University of Macedonia- Dept of Business	Kufidu & Mihail	1999	22	Manufacturing firms (more than 200 employees)
Athens University of Economics & Business (Cranet Survey)	Papalexandris et al,	1993 1996 1999	156 (overall)	Private & semi-state firms (more than 150 employees)
Institute of Employment GSEE, Metron Analysis	Institute of Employment /GSEE	2002	2016	All main sectors employing at least 1 person

University of Macedonia-Dept of Business	Mihail	2003	30	Organisations from main sectors (more than 200 employees)
University of Macedonia-Dept of Business	Mihail	2004	16	Manufacturing & service SME's (fewer than 100 employees)
Athens University of Economics & Business	Voudouris	2004-2007	75	4 Manufacturing sectors (no restriction on workforce size)
TEI of Thessaly	Anagnostopoulos and Siebert	2014	186	Firms from all sectors in Central Greece with more than 1 employees

Source: The Authors

Table 1 provides a list of earlier significant research studies on employment relations such as Kufidu and Mihail (1999) investigating twenty two manufacturing firms employing 200 or more persons. In addition, the Cranfield project (Cranfield Network on Comparative Human Resource Management (Cranet)) organised a study by Papalexandris et al. (2000) which derived data studying flexible working practices from 156 large scale establishments which employed more than 150 workers. The Cranet project is one of the most representative independent surveys of HRM policies and practices in the world and Greece participated in 1993, 1996 and 1999. Furthermore, Mihail (2003) also surveyed - based on ICAP business database - thirty large-scale firms with more than 200 employees regarding atypical forms of employment through telephone interviews. Moreover, Mihail (2004) studied labour flexibility in sixteen SME's companies (manufacturing and services sector) that employ fewer than 100 employees. Finally, one of the recent studies, Voudouris (2004) was based on a random sampling from four manufacturing sectors drawn from the ICAP business database. She examined the use of temporary employees, independent contractors and subcontractors as forms of flexible employment and analysed data from 75 companies. She also studied the same firms in 2007 in specific business sectors and focused on the flexibility in different employee classes. Anagnostopoulos & Siebert (2014) based on a representative sample of nearly 200 workplaces. They have included very small workplaces, down to those employing only one worker and their fieldwork is modelled on the UK Workplace Employment Relations Survey.

Apart from academics, research bodies have also examined labour regulation and flexibility in the last decades. More specifically, the "labour market yearbooks" including both national and provincial surveys in Greece were created by the Research Employment Observatory - Public Employment Services. However, these yearbooks have a different orientation, trying to better understand the needs of the workforce as well as the lack of workforce skills in businesses. Finally, one of the most noteworthy studies on employment and industrial relations in Greece was the nationwide survey conducted in 2002 by the Institute of Employment/ Greek General Confederation of Labour, along with the private market research company Metron Analysis. The sampling of this survey consisted of over than 2000 companies from private sector which employ at least one person (EIRO, 2002).

However, some weak points are evident on the methodologies of the studies in Table 1: (a) the number of workplaces interviewed is generally small, (b) the samples deal mainly with medium and large-scale enterprises, and (c) the range of economic sectors is limited

(mostly manufacturing and service sectors). It seems as though scholars have preferred to investigate large scale enterprises in order to obtain a high volume of employees for their research instead of interviewing a large number of (more representative) micro-enterprises. Thus, in this case, the business samples were mainly derived by the largest Greek private financial directory (ICAP) which according to their web page "contains more than 20,000 companies (SAs, LTDs and others) which encompass the entire Greek state and all activity fields". It is obvious that this number is not representative since this database includes mainly large scale companies.

Finally, the Cranet longitudinal survey uses standardised questionnaires across different countries and over different years. Consequently, comparative outcomes between years in the same country as well as between different countries are very obtainable. But while this comparative aspect is to be welcomed, it clearly limits the depth possible for the questionnaire.

Methodology and Dataset of the pre-crisis Survey

This survey, called the Thessaly Employment Relations Survey (TERS) based on the U.K. Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) and it was conducted in four prefectures of Thessaly, central Greece. In this section issues focusing on the design of the survey are addressed. These include: (a) the specification of the body/organisation, considered as the provider of our dataset (b) the reconciliation of the population to the official statistical classification system, (c) the selection of the sample as well as the weighting and sampling procedures (d) the questionnaire and (e) the fieldwork.

The Sample

A very important issue arising in this study was the selection of businesses for our sample. The sampling frame was to be drawn from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the four prefectures of the region. Then, we harmonised the Chamber of Commerce and Industry's system to the Greek official statistical classification, called STAKOD-2003, which is similar to the NACE classification.

Table 1: Number of Enterprises per Prefecture & Group Economic Activity

NACE	Economic Activity	Karditsa	Trikala	Larisa	Magnesia	Thessaly
D	Manufacturing	983	1,186	4,839	2,445	9,453
F	Construction	90	84	1,350	1,262	2,786
G	Wholesale & Retail Trade	3,291	3,371	5,400	6,345	18,407
H	Hotels & Restaurants	1,102	1,341	2,250	2,956	7,649
I	Transportations & Carriers	398	423	458	596	1,875
J	Financial Intermediation	30	37	82	49	198
K	Real estate & Business Activities	978	870	967	1,133	3,948
M	Education	371	294	1,125	307	2,097

N	Health & Social Work	9	25	43	49	126
O	Other Community, Social & Personal Services	398	489	375	459	1,721
	Total	7,650	8,120	16,889	15,601	48,260

Source: Thessalian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Databases & ICAP business database

The Thessaly enterprise sample was based on the STAKOD 10 categories of economic activities (one digit), as shown in Table 1. Agriculture, public organisations and utilities were excluded from this study. Procedures for determining the appropriate industrial stratification are quite similar to the UK experience.

The Questionnaire

Our questionnaire for the TERS survey was based on the WERS Cross-Section questionnaire (the Survey of Managers) used for the fifth WERS survey. In fact, it could be characterised as a mini-WERS. Then, a team of the academic and research staff of Higher Education Institutes: the TEI of Larissa, Greece and the University of Birmingham, Britain made some amendments. Modifications were made on questions to the WERS questionnaire to make it more suitable or adaptable to Greek standards. Finally, the questionnaire consists of fourteen parts, mainly focusing on labour market flexibility issues.

The Interviews

Fieldwork was conducted between August 2006 and February 2007 in Central Greece as mentioned, through in-depth and face to face interviews with the owner/manager/accountant of the workplace. All firms in the survey belong to the private sector. Two hundred and six workplaces out of thirty hundred and thirty seven ones provided complete answers to the questionnaire, giving an effective response rate of sixty one per cent.

Each interviewee asked a standard "core" range of questions with follow-up questions where appropriate. Questions with the five point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" were included. Both "hard" (figures) and "soft" (opinions, attitudes) data were collected with 246 variables. A structured protocol was used to collect quantitative information along the following interrelated dimensions of employment in micro-enterprises: (a) full-time males & females, (b) flexible contracts (especially temporary time as well as part-time, short time, etc) (c) family member employees & subsidized employees (d) labour legislation and new hiring (e) gender labour issues.

Findings of the pre-crisis Survey

The main aim of the research was to investigate the current situation of flexible employment in Thessaly, Greece. Two hundred and six (206) Greek workplaces replied to the questionnaire studying what labour flexibility is for employers. Findings are presented below.

Usually surveys with number of employees are categorized in small-medium-large scales firms. However, in our case, almost all firms belong to the small medium enterprises, and the majority are micro-enterprises (according to EU standards).

Table 2: Industry & SME Composition, Percent of Workplaces

Industry Category	Thessaly Employment Relations Survey		SME Composition*	
	Weighted percentages (*)	Sample Number (**)	Micro-Enterprises (less than 11 employees)	Small & Medium (11 or more employees)
Manufacturing	9 %	21 (975)	96.5	3.5
Construction	6	17 (411)	90	10
Wholesale & retail	50	81 (203)	95	5
Hotels & restaurants	20	42 (461)	94	6
Transport & communication	2	4 (35)	98	2
Financial & other business services	3	7 (183)	98	2
Education & health	1	15 (401)	93	7
Other services	10	16 (250)	95	5
Total	100	203 (3519)	95.4	4.6

Notes: * Survey weights have been used to calculate all percentages,
 ** The number of employees is given in parentheses.

Table 2 contains information about the identity of the composition of the industries in Thessaly as well as the number of employees per economic activity as implied by the survey. As can be seen, only about 9% of Thessaly's workplaces are categorised as manufacturing. However, they represent a significant percentage of the total workforce (28%). It is also obvious that the main characteristics are (a) the great representation of retail sector and hotels in Thessaly (70% of workplaces) with almost 23 percent of the total employees, and (b) the smaller representation of financial and other business services (3% of workplaces).

Findings on Flexible Employment

Starting with overtime and shift work, we see that employers in small Greek firms tend to work some overtime and shift-work, but less than in the more flexible UK. (Official figures for overtime and shift-work would be lower since both need Labour Inspectorate approval). The final rows give a view of changes, firstly to temporary from permanent contracts. Here we see similar trends to the UK, with larger workplaces more interested in this move. Secondly, we see some move towards part-time work in but this move is much smaller than has occurred in the UK, as might be expected given the greater importance of part-time work in the UK.

The general impression we would carry away is that Greece has flexibility in temporary and family work. Due to obstacles put in place by Greek law on most aspects of flexibility - even temporary worker categories such as agency work - the temporary and family worker avenue seems the only one open. It is true that, enterprises with more than 10 employees have a low percentage of family members (5%). However, this figure is twice as high in percentages in part-time and temporary contracts. It seems that micro-enterprises use labour flexibility through the "hiring" of family members. On the other hand, large workplaces do not have the luxury of having many

family members and introduce flexibility through part/temporary employment.

Table 3: Subcontracting of employees via subcontracting of services

		Small, less than 11	11 or more
Percentage of workplaces with subcontracting	Legal subcontracting (accountant + lawyer)	75	74
	Basic subcontracting (cleaning, security, catering, maintenance)	29	55
	Non-routine subcontracting (printing, payroll, training, recruitment etc.)	37	70
	Total subcontracting	47	76
Reasons for contracted out these services	Cost savings	26	28
	Improved service	56	58
	Greater flexibility	15	32
Needs that subcontracting covers in the enterprise	Permanent	52	38
	Temporary	6	8
	Both permanent and Temporary	20	33

Sources: TERS 2007 - Notes: See Table 3

Table 3 indicates on the extent of subcontracting which is relevant to investigation of flexibility, since buying in services is an alternative to hiring workers. "Legal" subcontracting is of significant importance to the majority of businesses (75% even of small companies hire an accountant or lawyer). As expected, basic and non-routine forms of subcontracting in rows 2 and 3 have less importance for small businesses since these businesses have a simple structure. At the same time, non-routine subcontracting is extensive (37% of small companies and 70% of large). As can be seen, the most popular reason (56-58%) for contracting out was because the subcontractors offered a better service. However, a substantial minority (15-32%) explicitly used subcontractors for greater flexibility. Moreover, high proportions of employers (between 38 and 52%) believe that permanent workers would be hired if subcontracting was not used in their workplaces. In our regressions for temp/family worker hiring below, we make allowance for such subcontracting.

Reforms on Flexible Employment during the post-Crisis

Since the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis in 2009, Greece undertook to reform its labour market relations based on the Memorandums of Economic and Financial Policies by IFM-EC-ECB. The governmental policies during the last six years have intended to (a) promote an institutional and legal framework with more labour flexibility allowing employers to face the recession (b) tighten the rules and introduce a system of penalties for labour law infringements. In this context the state includes strategies to tackle undeclared work and shift atypical labour transactions into the formal labour market.

One of the main reforms that Greek government has introduced, it is the reduction of gross national minimum wages by 22% (from 751€ to 586€ monthly rate). Moreover, has lowered the minimum wages for young people (below 25 years) by 32% (510€ monthly rate). According to OECD (2013) this "should foster gains in competitiveness, and boost employment especially among young people". In addition, there is a move to decentralize Greece's system of industrial relations: a new law makes enterprise agreements more powerful than sectoral ones and consequently this type of agreement can be signed by a firm even with a few employees.

Another measure defined by the Greek government is on labour flexibility. More specifically, in the dismissal procedure, it reduces the length of dismissal notice period (especially to those employees with long tenure) and lowers severance payments for white collar workers. It also redefines collective dismissals increasing the threshold for firms with more than 20 employees.

With regard to temporary employment and fix-term contracts, it has introduced a longer probationary period (from 2 months to 1 year). It has also extended the maximum cumulated duration of fix-term contracts to 36 months (previously 24 months). Furthermore, employers have the permission to extend to three renewals of such contracts during 36 months, but additional contracts automatically give the contract at the open-ended status. Finally, the state has also launched reforms on flexible working arrangements. The employer has the right - in case of a slowdown in activity to - introduce short-time working arrangements on a daily, weekly or other basis, for a period up to 9 months.

Focusing on inspection mechanisms in order to avoid informality in the labour market, the state has reformed the structure of the Labour Inspectorate and allows inspections-visits to firms controlled jointly by the Labour Inspectorate (SEPE), the Social Security Organisation (IKA) and the Financial and Economic Crime Unit (SDOE). Such actions maximize performance through the mutual exchange of information, the better targeting of inspections, an increase in the number of inspections by reducing the agencies' budgets involved.

The Ministry of Labour in March 2013 launched a joint information system called Ergani. All employers - after a trial period - are obliged by law to submit online forms required by labour market management organisations (SEPE, IKA, OAED). Following that, the state has succeeded in reducing bureaucratic procedures and administrative burdens for employers, issues which as discussed above push firms to the informal labour market. In parallel, the Ministry of Labour has an overall picture of the salaried employment flows in the private sector since the information system provides all detailed information for employees (notifications of hiring, dismissals and any change that may occur, notifications regarding the type of employment: full-time, part-time, fixed-term etc).

Our new proposed research aim and methodology under the Thales research Project

The purpose of our research project is to research and measure all the various aspects of shadow economy in Greece, including corruption, tax evasion, tax avoidance, social contribution avoidance, undeclared and illegal work, self-consumption, tax morale level, tax compliance level, illegal and criminal acts (black or underground economy, money-laundering, human and drug trafficking, bribes). It covers all economic agents in Greece, such as citizens and corporations (e.g. public servants and private individuals, companies and all

professional categories, etc.) The research is also performed at sector levels. It does not aim to the precise percentage regarding the measurement of Greek shadow economy but aims to the qualitative analysis of questionnaire results and the comprehension of the problem. The implementation of our interviews, scientific games and economic experiments (tax compliance games) involves at least 2,000 individuals and business owners (in majority small businesses). The project aims to achieve numerous objectives, among which the development of a relevant theoretical background, and perform cross-country comparisons at regional level, but also with country groups with advanced taxation systems.

Emphasis is given to the qualitative analysis of questionnaire results which it aspires to reveal the opinions of households, enterprises and institutional entities and public services. It does not aim to the precise percentage regarding the measurement of Greek shadow economy but aims to the qualitative analysis and the comprehension of the problem so that we can reach essential and thorough proposals to the government in order to contain the problem.

Particularly, the implementation of our scientific games / economic experiments (tax compliance games) will involve at least 2,000 individuals and business owners (in majority small businesses, as explained in the next section), which will be identified via random or other statistically sound sampling methodologies. At least 20 different occupational categories and income groups will participate in the execution of the experiment, in order to determine their behavioral aspects related to tax compliance and attitude arising from the impact of the economic crisis, high unemployment, undeclared work, informal economy, corruption, tax implications, etc. The experiment is performed within an environment where the decisions or actions of participants are based on monetary incentives (and not vouchers) in which participants are exposed to frameworks resembling real-life taxpaying situations. The real cash earnings / incomes cannot be observed by other participants or the experiment coordinator or other researchers (no impacts from the breach of rules will apply). Also, the participants in the experiment will not be occupied by a sense of injustice in taxation of their income during the game, whereas various levels of tax rates will be involved during the game in order to identify there respective levels of tax evasion incentives.

The innovativeness and the originality of our research area and of the wider Project are associated with the facts that has never before in Greece been performed a research to such an extent, and also that this study is situated at the peak of the current public and academic debate. Until now, the estimated size of shadow economy in Greece results only through indirect approaches, methods that are easily applicable but include a great possibility of fault in the accurate measurement of the shadow economy, and are also unable to determine the factors that cause people to shift toward shadow economy. These indirect approaches to measure shadow economy are the widespread calculations of black economy that are based on secondary macroeconomic data. The research methodology and the Project by considering the weaknesses of a direct approach of measuring the Greek shadow economy (there is a cost in resources and time of managing a large number of questionnaires), however, aspire to be the first that will calculate the shadow economy in Greece by using and analyzing primary data.

Finally, various proposals and structural policies to the Greek Government are expected to be addressed at the finalization of the

research, for the effective confrontation of black / shadow economy and tax evasion in Greece.

Conclusions

We have mentioned that the Greek labour market is performing badly, more specifically, being third last in the OECD both for its high proportion of long-term unemployment (over 50%), and for its high youth unemployment (over 40%) just before the recession "arrived". We have seen that the Greek labour market is also highly regulated as reported by international organisations.

The purpose of this paper was to go to the micro level, using a mini-WERS (by the UK) constructed for Greek conditions (the TERS), and to show with greater precision how the framework of labour market flexibility affect firm decisions. Topics related to the survey area as well as features which deal with the Greek business context are analysed. The Thessaly region is the third region in Greece - based on its population - with a high rate of its agricultural workforce transferring to the services sector in the last decade. A detailed description of the design and the conduct of the survey in this region are reported here. The TERS survey is based on the WERS methodology of the UK, and comparisons between them have been reported in detail.

A number of descriptive tables were also produced in this paper in order to provide the backdrop to the current overall situation of employment in Thessaly. Topics related to the business context, such as formal status, ownership, management and the economic activity of a business are of substantial importance in Greek employment relations. The family ownership of business and its operation dominate the structure of a typical Greek business. Demographics on the age, gender and ethnicity of the Thessaly labour force indicate low participation rates of females and poor performance of young people who constitute the outsiders in the Greek labour market.

It is immediately apparent that workplace size plays a significant role in labour market regulation and flexibility issues. Different views between small and large businesses are observed in a number of contexts: (a) recruitment and dismissal procedures, (b) obligations related to employment (working hours, collective agreements and minimum wages) and (c) atypical employment.

Based on our survey outcomes, we realised that in a regional economy in Thessaly, Greece, strict legislation and employment protection push employers to other directions in terms of employment. In other words, the Thessaly survey results indeed imply that Greece's system of labour regulation shifts firms' personnel decisions in the direction of externalising work. Based on this evidence, we argue that firms find it difficult to implement the above restrictions and thus resort to solutions between flexibility and informal employment.

In general, we find substitutability between temporary-time workers, family workers and part-time workers, which is reasonable, since these groups represent alternative pathways to flexibility or informality. More specifically, small businesses achieve "grey" flexibility through their family members, who are unregistered employees on the employment agencies. On the other hand, large businesses use temporary employment as the only source of flexibility.

It is apparent that the state during the years of prosperity (2006-2007) needed to introduce flexibility and reform the Greek labour market. All the measures mentioned above (2009 till nowadays) create a better business environment, trying to "unlock the economy from its low level of development" (OECD, 2004) and "allow" businesses becomes more flexible to businesses in order to survive the recession.

The final aim of this working paper is to set the ground for comparing diachronically the results of two questionnaire surveys. The first one performed in the pre-crisis period and was herein analyzed; further, the methodology of the second survey under the Project Thales which is currently in progress and will be completed in the second semester 2015 is presented. This will facilitate also the evaluation of the efficiency of reforms which have taken place during the years of the crisis.

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