

European Telework Status Report 1998: Greece

This is an extract from the country summaries section of the European Commission's 1998 Status Report. The complete report is online at <http://www.eto.org.uk/twork/tw98> in a variety of formats, including Word, HTML pages and Acrobat .pdf files. Links to further information about telework in Greece are in the Greece national page at European Telework Online - <http://www.eto.org.uk> .

Summary

For Greece, with Europe's highest level of employment in agriculture, lowest per capita GDP and lowest proportion of information workers, the Information Society clearly has different aspects and implications than it does in (for example) Denmark or Germany. With Information workers making up only 22% of the workforce, telework in the most commonly accepted sense (working at or near home instead of commuting to an office) is not a high priority. On the other hand, cross-border teleworking and closely related applications such as teletrade and telecooperation present excellent opportunities for Greece to widen its basis of trade with the rest of Europe and internationally.

Greece also has Europe's lowest levels of investment in IT (both in absolute terms and relative to GDP) and lowest Internet usage. IT and Internet use are heavily concentrated in Government services and higher education. For young, IT- and Internet-aware Greeks, telework and related applications present opportunities to participate in the new work opportunities without needing to migrate and thereby lose the undoubted merits of the Greek life style.

Telework background and take-up of ICTs

General background:

- The Greek economy is characterised by an exceptionally low level of investment in IT, both as a proportion of GDP and (because per capita GDP is the lowest in Europe) in absolute terms. Internet use is proportionately low:

	IT spend as % of GDP	IT investment		Internet users per 1000 population
		per capita (ECU)	Scaled (highest 100)	
Greece	0.86	76	10	11
Portugal	1.36	117	16	19
EU mean	2.18	414	55	54
EU highest country	3.36	751	100	152

- Agriculture remains a significant source of employment. Employment in services is the lowest in Europe and includes a high public sector and a large element of tourism. Greece has Europe's highest proportion of employment in small firms and self-employment, and lowest proportion of information workers. This reflects the prominent roles of tourism and agriculture. Other than in small firms the public sector, directly and indirectly, is a major employer and a dominant influence in employment practices.

	% of employment		Enterprises per 1000 population	% of total employment		
	Agriculture	Services		SMEs	Self employed	Information workers*
Greece	21	55	101	86	34	22
Portugal	12	56	64	78	26	33
EU lowest/highest	2	73	23	56	8	54

* Jala International, quoted in EITO 1998

- With low per capita incomes and spending power, the cost of a PC or an Internet connection appears high to the Greek citizen or small business owner - more than twice as much as for an equivalent person in USA, nearly twice as much as in Denmark (see table over)

Driving factors:

- Although there is low PC and Internet penetration, local phone call costs are low and there are now Internet Services Providers active across most of Greece, including local suppliers on some islands.
- Relative to the low overall level of Internet penetration, there is a high level of World Wide Web activity, with a particularly strong emphasis on using the Internet for telecooperation activities, especially in linking the large and widely distributed Greek diaspora.

	Per capita spending power, PPP*	Perceived relative cost of PC
Greece	43	233
Portugal	47	213
Spain	54	185
Ireland	58	172
Finland	66	152
Sweden	69	145
UK	71	141
Netherlands	74	135
Germany	74	135
Italy	74	135
France	78	128
Denmark	79	127
Austria	79	127
Belgium/Luxembourg	80	125
USA	100	100
Japan	82	122

* PPP = Purchasing Power Parity, a measure of per capita GDP adjusted to allow for different basic costs of living in different countries.

- There is growing use of the Internet by Government, including online (WWW) presence of Greek overseas embassies, demonstrating an early awareness of the promotional and trade opportunities. Interest and online presence is also visible among city and regional administrations.
- There are examples of imaginative use of Internet in connection with tourism, an important element of trade and employment.

Constraints:

- Telecommunications liberalisation has been postponed in Greece, which has a derogation from the European directives for voice telephony until January 2001.
- The very low proportion of information work leads to a low level of interest in telework in its most commonly understood sense of working at home instead of commuting.
- Relatively low income levels mean that PC is unlikely to become a common household purchase in the near future. The Greek citizen's experience of Internet may be mainly conditioned by applications delivered through low cost devices such as enhanced TV; even this is likely to be considerably delayed compared with Northern European countries.
- Other than in Greece itself and in the Greek diaspora, the Greek language is little understood. Greek individuals and enterprises that seek to trade internationally have no choice but to sustain their online presence and deal with their customers and suppliers in at least English and preferably other languages. Since in most cases they also trade in Greece, this is a significant overhead.

Telework activities and results

- There are several websites that either have a focus on telework or provide some telework links, including a substantial set of pages in Greek at the European Telework Online website.

The Technological Educational Institute of Piraeus is planning a trial for the year 2000, with the detailed planning phase in 1999. The introduction of telework aims for the stimulation of distance learning and will be managed by the automation department. The main goals regarding organisational change are an expansion of services, to increase creativity at work, decentralise services to the public, and to retain experienced staff members by offering them more individual flexibility. The pilot project has been initiated by the person who is in charge for computer technologies. Training will be offered to the participants, and guidelines for the pilot will be elaborated. Equipment will be provided by the employer.

- The EURO-MED programme is providing Greek companies that have Information Society interests with opportunities to link with and relate to people and firms in other countries that are more similar in their current environment than the mainstream of EU member states.

Conclusions

A strong focus on telework as a primary Information Society application would seem to be inappropriate as a national priority in Greece at this time. More important is the need to accelerate general awareness, use and experience of information technology and online activities. Especially important is the availability of PCs and Internet access in schools, since the low general use of ICTs cannot be dramatically increased overnight, so it is the expectations, knowledge and decisions of future decision makers, workers and managers that will be most decisive in shaping Greek's longer term participation in the Information Society.