

Migrants in rural areas face particular challenges

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Migrants do essential jobs in rural areas, especially on farms that are in constant need of temporary work. Credit: nick barounis – Adobe Stock.com

Jobs on EU farms are increasingly being filled by migrants who help to cultivate some of our most common kitchen staples. But migrants who move to rural areas also face additional difficulties than people who choose to migrate to the EU and settle in towns and cities. These findings are the result of the first EU-wide statistical analysis of migrants living in rural areas.

The analysis includes both mobile EU citizens and migrants who have come from outside the EU. While on average migrants are more present in [urban areas](#) than in rural ones, their [share](#) in some rural villages and regions can be much higher than in a city. They do essential jobs in these rural areas, especially on farms that are in constant need of temporary work. Most of the strawberries and tomatoes reaching European tables, for example, have been cultivated thanks to the work of migrants.

At the same time, the situation is often challenging for the hosting society and for the migrants,

because of the temporary and often irregular nature of their work, the remoteness of the territory and the lack of equipment of rural local authorities to support migrants' integration.

Rural migrants coming from outside the EU tend to be more at risk of poverty –compared to migrants living in towns and cities, and to people born in the same country where they are living and working.

The study finds that 34 percent of migrants coming from outside the EU and living in rural areas are at risk of poverty. Seventeen percent are unemployed, compared to an 8 percent unemployment rate for those living in the country they were born in the EU.

The proportion of rural employment filled by [migrant](#) workers is gradually increasing over time. Between 2011 and 2017, there was an increase of 4.3 percent to 6.5 percent in the share of migrants in total employment in the EU agricultural sector.

This tendency is driven by Spain, Italy and Denmark where the share of migrants employed in agriculture is several percentage points higher than the share of migrants employed in all other sectors. Local data in Italy and Spain also shows a positive association between the increasing share of migrants in the population and a high share of temporary work in agriculture in specific municipalities.

Local data in Italy and Spain also shows that migration is expanding in areas where the population of natives is decreasing. The authors conclude that the presence of migrants in rural areas present challenges (such as remoteness, isolation, limited access to services) and opportunities (contrasting depopulation trends, providing labor force) for both migrants and hosting communities.

The precariousness and vulnerability—coupled with the important role played by migrants in sustaining

certain types of agriculture in specific regions—means migrants in [rural areas](#) require special attention when designing integration policies. By providing new evidence at EU level, the study also raises awareness at a critical moment of the ongoing negotiations and discussion on EU funds dedicated to the integration of migrants.

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