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BRIEF

Mediterranean Interfaces: Agriculture, Rural Development and Migration

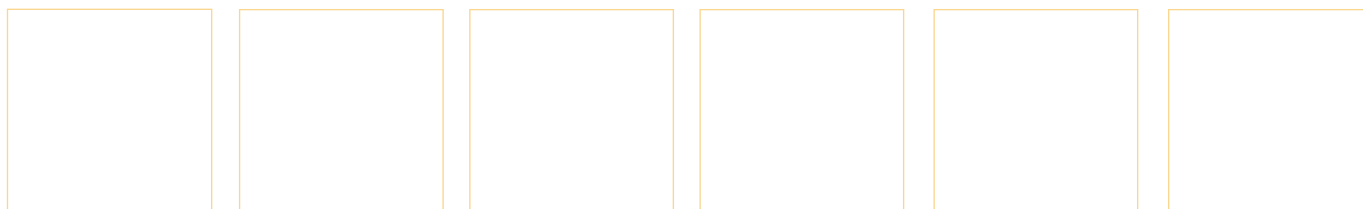
*Forward-looking policies and
programmes for an integrated
approach*

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Highlights

Migration is a growing global phenomenon and its impacts on both origin and destination countries have become major concerns in national, regional and international political agendas. As migrations connect and relate territories experiencing different dynamics, the Mediterranean provides quite a unique setting to address migrations, as the region is characterised by important agro-ecological as well as socio-economic asymmetries.

The relationships between development and migration are complex, and so are the drivers, the impacts and the implications of migratory processes. Particularly for rural areas as agriculture and the rural world provide for push as much as pull factors for migrations throughout the different rims of the Mediterranean.



Background

People have always been on the move, especially in the Mediterranean, whose history is deeply characterised by and embedded in mobility and migrations. At the crossroads of three continents, the Mediterranean represents probably one of the most remarkable regions with several co-existing migratory patterns; all Mediterranean countries are, in fact, simultaneously areas of origin, destination and transit of migratory flows coming from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and central Asia.

The agrarian world deserves a specific attention in this respect, as the decreasing viability of smallholder farming and the growing vulnerability of rural livelihoods represent major triggers for ongoing migratory flows. Throughout the region local youth seem increasingly interested in undertaking agricultural livelihoods in their communities of origin. Emigrating out of rural areas is not a new phenomenon; all over the globe rural populations have moved towards areas with higher economic potential, with relevant implications for the local economy, society and agroecology.

That said, in recent decades the intensity and extensions of rural migratory flows have dramatically increased due to interconnected factors – including population growth, socioeconomic inequalities, climate change, conflicts and political instability, inadequate access to income opportunities, to decent jobs, as well as to financial services and social protection in rural areas. Despite agriculture and rural livelihoods constitute priorities in policy agendas for all countries across the region, growing rates of rural poverty and youth outmigration and the limited degree of local integration of rural migrants indicate that appropriate strategies have yet to be forged on all sides.

This paper provides a synthesis of the works undertaken at the [Forum on Agriculture, Rural Development and Migration in the Mediterranean](#) on 29 May 2018 jointly organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Centre international de hautes études agronomiques méditerranéennes (CIHEAM), the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfMS) and the Global Governance Programme of the European University Institute (EUI).

The event brought together experts from different rims, levels and disciplines with a view to provide recommendations and to support agendas on rural migrations in the Mediterranean from the perspective of rural and agricultural development.

Development and Migration

The relationship between development and migration is complex and controversial; even more so when it comes to the rural world. Development is about enabling people to improve standards of living, which may not coincide always with keeping them in their areas of origin. As reported in the State of Agriculture (FAO, 2018) the emigration of some household members represents today an integrated livelihood component of most rural households everywhere in the world.

As to table 1 in the Maghreb and Mashreq poverty is importantly concentrated in rural areas.

A main reason that spurs emigration out of rural areas is the negative bias agriculture suffers from decades. The policy frame favouring urban consumers on rural producers - including food strategies, subsidy schemes, pricing mechanisms - has carried relevant implications on the viability of agriculture and rural livelihoods. This

Table 1: Poverty as a feature characterising rural communities

<i>country</i>	<i>% urban that are poor</i>	<i>% rural that are poor</i>	<i>% of poor in rural areas</i>
Jordan	12	19	29
Syria	8	15	62
West Bank and Gaza	21	55	67
Egypt	10	27	78
Algeria	10	15	52
Morocco	5	15	68
Tunisia	2	8	75

Sources: World Bank, IFAD and FAO, 2010 data



adds to a situation where risks are higher, and incomes lower compared to other economic sectors. The social and cultural aspects of such process should not be underestimated, as the negative image agriculture holds affects the engagement of younger generations.

Redressing such bias would involve tackling structural constraints, including access to productive assets, unfair marketing and overall low returns. As well, investing in agriculture goes hand in hand with enhancing off-farm diversification of the rural economy, including service provision, tourism, environmental management. This process also involves emigration, especially where labour force exceeds land resources available and/or accessible.

Changing Landscapes

People mobility plays a growing role in restructuring the Mediterranean rural landscape. Indeed, evidence from most literature shows that all over the region **migratory dynamics have represented an important component for the resilience and capacities of the Mediterranean agricultural sector and of the rural world to cope with the recent economic crises**. The implications of this phenomenon are significant in terms of food production, natural resource and skills management, territorial integration, social protection and inclusive development – with impacts on the overall resilience and sustainability of our society. These matters represent today major concerns in national and international political agendas, with a view to formulate possible long-term solutions.

Take the example of Europe where a limited portion of populations engages in agriculture, the average farmer is 55 years old, and lands suitable to agriculture are being abandoned every year. As shown in the Table 2 more than a third of the agricultural labour force in EU Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece is currently represented by immigrants, whose contributions play a critical role in tackling the social and economic

mismatch of labour markets by filling the gaps left by the local population.

On the contrary, for the agrarian worlds in Mediterranean eastern and southern rims (Maghreb and Mashreq countries) emigration represents a key strategy to expand, diversify or protect local livelihoods, especially for households that are constrained in accessing productive assets - specifically land, water and credit – as well as institutional and market opportunities. It should though be noted that increasingly migrants' presence is reported as well in MENA agricultural areas, often also resulting from the political and civil crises that have characterised inner African and Asian territories - such as the recent conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Libya and beyond.

A Double Perspective

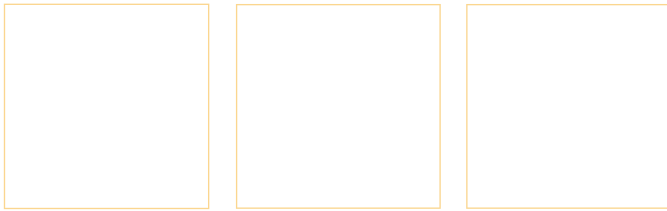
Migrations are driven by a wide range of factors, from individual decisions, to social dynamics and structural forces. It is rarely an informed, voluntary choice but rather undertaken out of extreme necessity due to poverty and livelihoods' deterioration, or due to a conflict or protracted crises. The implications and consequences of migratory flows are relevant in countries of origin and destination alike.

The **impacts of rural mobility in areas of origin** are highly context-dependent, and often contradictory. These might include reducing pressures on local natural resources, increasing local communities' exposure to technical innovations and financial investments through the transfer of know-how and remittances. Evidence attests that for households in areas of origin these bear mostly positive outcomes associated to poverty reduction and food security. These could though contribute as well to widening existing territorial disparities and social inequalities, by fostering individualisation of resources, polarization of production systems and abandonment of marginal territories, loss of traditional know-how, eco-

Table 2: Demographic and immigration rates in the Mediterranean EU rural world

<i>Spain</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Greece</i>	
9.8	7.9	20.8	% active on rural population in 2008
42.1	56.4	58,5	% young/old rural population ratio in 2016
19.1	19.4	17	% immigrants on wage labourforce in 2008
24	37	> 50	% immigrants on wage labourforce in 2013

Sources: Eurostat, 2015; Caruso et Corrado, 2015



conomic differentiation and a dramatic decrease in social protection measures.

Emigration can also be problematic in terms of labour shortage as the draining of workforce could provide significant challenges to local productivity and generational renewal, and ultimately for the sustainable future of local agrarian systems. In many cases rural outmigration leads to feminization of agricultural labour; in some cases this might contribute to enhancing women's economic empowerment, while in other this has provided room for increasing or perpetuating gender imbalances.

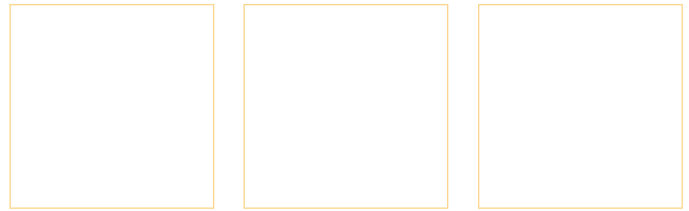
Impacts in destination rural communities are also significant. In the EU, the agricultural sector and rural communities are characterised by a declining and ageing population, with related problems of workforce availability and generational renewal. Immigrants' increasing presence in rural areas has definitely represented a key resilience factor, enabling many farms, rural villages, and agriculture enterprises to remain alive and productive throughout the recent crisis.

The conditions of agricultural migrant workers remain often a matter of concern, especially for those living in illegal conditions. Workers vulnerabilities relate to the irregular nature of their job and the related social costs, such as curtailed wages, limited rights and lack of access to primary services and to social security provisions. These features are moreover often accompanied by segregated and unhealthy housing and living conditions, which represent main determinants of marginalisation and social exclusion.

The Way Forward/ Recommendations

Ecological, economic and socio-demographic asymmetries characterising the Mediterranean provide today relevant push and pull factor for rural migrations in the region, and beyond. On the eastern and southern shores limitations in water sources, fertile soils, reliable climate or peace conditions seriously affect agricultural livelihoods for a growing population. Conversely on the northern, European shores it is mostly the decreasing rural population and problems related to workforce availability and generational renewal that lead to abandoning rural villages and agricultural lands.

Societal efforts to disentangle and redress these dynamics are needed at the different levels - including researchers,



development practitioners, local authorities, policy makers and the civil society alike.

Redressing agricultural policies and investing in rural development are crucial in ensuring that migrating out of rural areas is a matter of choice rather than a necessity. Support to entrepreneurship and skills development related to agriculture, food systems and employment creation in rural areas plays a key role in this regard.

At the same time, it is necessary to **enhance the positive contribution and opportunities migration can generate** in countries of origin and of destination, by supporting investments in farm and non-farm activities, and facilitating the transfer of knowledge, skills and technologies. **Supporting the integration of migrant workers in destination rural communities** holds the potential to contribute addressing critical matters including agricultural labour and generational renewal.

Considering the multiple and intertwined drivers and impacts of migration, there is a **need for an integrated approach**, which combines different perspectives and effective coordination among researchers, policy makers, development and humanitarian actors. Coherence and consistency of the policy and investment frameworks in closer synergy with a strengthened policy-research nexus are critical in supporting agricultural development and rural livelihoods throughout the Mediterranean region.

Specific to the Mediterranean, the increased complexity calls more than ever for **policy dialogue** and exchanges among countries of origin, transit and destination to further strengthen protection along the journey, and to foster integration and development with a view to seize the opportunities that migration brings to all societies. Better stocking of existing initiatives, experiences and practices are necessary, both for learning and dissemination purposes.

While most research has addressed the main push and pull factors triggering rural migrations in the Mediterranean, more research should be carried out to discern the different patterns and to link them to the wider policy framework. Overall, **scientific research and policy making would definitely benefit from strengthened interfaces and synergies**, and if accompanied by enhanced coordination amongst stakeholders at the different levels.

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Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

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