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'Leaving something behind' - Migration governance and agricultural & rural change in 'home' communities: comparative experience from Europe, Asia and Africa

Results in Brief

Linked-up policy is key to migration and rural development

Researchers in the EU-funded AGRUMIG project say strategies which support migrants as well as the communities they leave behind can benefit those in both origin and destination countries, as well as migrants themselves.



SOCIETY




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The reasons people leave rural areas are complex. Lack of available work, a desire to escape poverty, youth aspirations and the impact of climate change are just some key motivating factors.


For agricultural communities experiencing outmigration, the impacts can be diverse and vary widely. Many of these communities are under-represented in policymaking and research, which is something that the project [AGRUMIG](#) (‘Leaving something behind’ –

Migration governance and agricultural & rural change in 'home' communities: comparative experience from Europe, Asia and Africa), coordinated by the [School of Oriental and African Studies](#) in the United Kingdom, sought to address.

“We wanted to assess the consequences for those rural areas being left behind; to see if current programmes in place are a success, and to look at how – and if – migration can be a catalyst for rural transformation,” explains AGRUMIG project member Alan Nicol, from the [International Water Management Institute](#)  in the United Kingdom.

Understanding global demographic movement

The project set out to capture this broad picture of global demographic movement, with the aim of coming up with ideas and recommendations for how to better orient migration and rural development policies.

To achieve this, socio-economic contexts and policies across seven very different [countries](#)  were examined – those in China, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco, Nepal and Thailand – with a focus on economic migration.

“This is not just a question of people migrating to Europe,” adds Nicol. “The Gulf countries are also destinations. When you have such enormous inequalities of wealth so close to each other, people are going to move.”

The AGRUMIG project team used survey and participatory tools to examine the drivers of migration in these countries, and to analyse impacts on the rural sector. Policy dialogues were held, along with in-depth interviews with policymakers and practitioners.

Examining policy impacts on rural areas

The findings reflected the variety of situations. In China for example, government policy has resulted in agriculture being mechanised, and labour-saving technologies being introduced in response to rural-urban migration. One immediate impact of this could be to further reduce the availability of rural jobs, and encourage more farmers to move to the cities.

In Ethiopia, high population growth, low agricultural productivity and inadequate employment generation have resulted in substantial internal and international migration. Notable policy interventions have sought to better govern outmigration, including predeparture training programmes and rural job creation programmes.

Morocco, meanwhile, has seen many waves of outmigration over several decades. Recently there has been a growing interconnection between the EU and Morocco on migration matters – and Morocco has also found itself to be a transit country. The project found that stronger linkages could be made between rural development and

outmigration, and encourage returnees' reintegration into the economy. However, the drivers of outmigration would continue.

How rational migration strategies benefit all

Nonetheless, parallels existed between the case studies. AGRUMIG found that in many countries, people often migrate simply to support their families in response to low income and rising prices.

An examination of all seven countries also enabled the project team to identify the kind of strategies that promote safer and more regulated migration. These more effective strategies focus less on controlling the movement of people, and more on harnessing the flows of knowledge and finance that come as a result of migration. The team notes that migration can and should be a net contributor to a nation's development.

Outmigration can also be leveraged to encourage agrarian development by countries of origin, and help tackle endemic social issues such as gender inequality and youth exclusion.

"Migration is often seen in a negative way, as something to control, organise and prevent," says Nicol. "The truth is that migration is a key part of development. The assumption that all people coming to Europe want to stay is not true. Many want to work, and then go home. Policies that allow this natural fluidity would be beneficial to everyone."

This is supported by the World Bank's latest [World Development Report](#) , which notes that, given Europe's ageing population and need for people of working age, many countries may start competing to attract more migrants.

"A more rational migration policy – in sending and receiving countries – is a win-win," remarks Nicol. "One thing that the COVID pandemic did was to underline the relentless logic of migration; even COVID didn't stand in the way of people's need to move. It just reinforced how structurally significant migration is globally."

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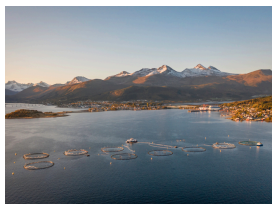
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