

Seasonal Migration in Agriculture Amidst Intra-European Romanians' Mobility

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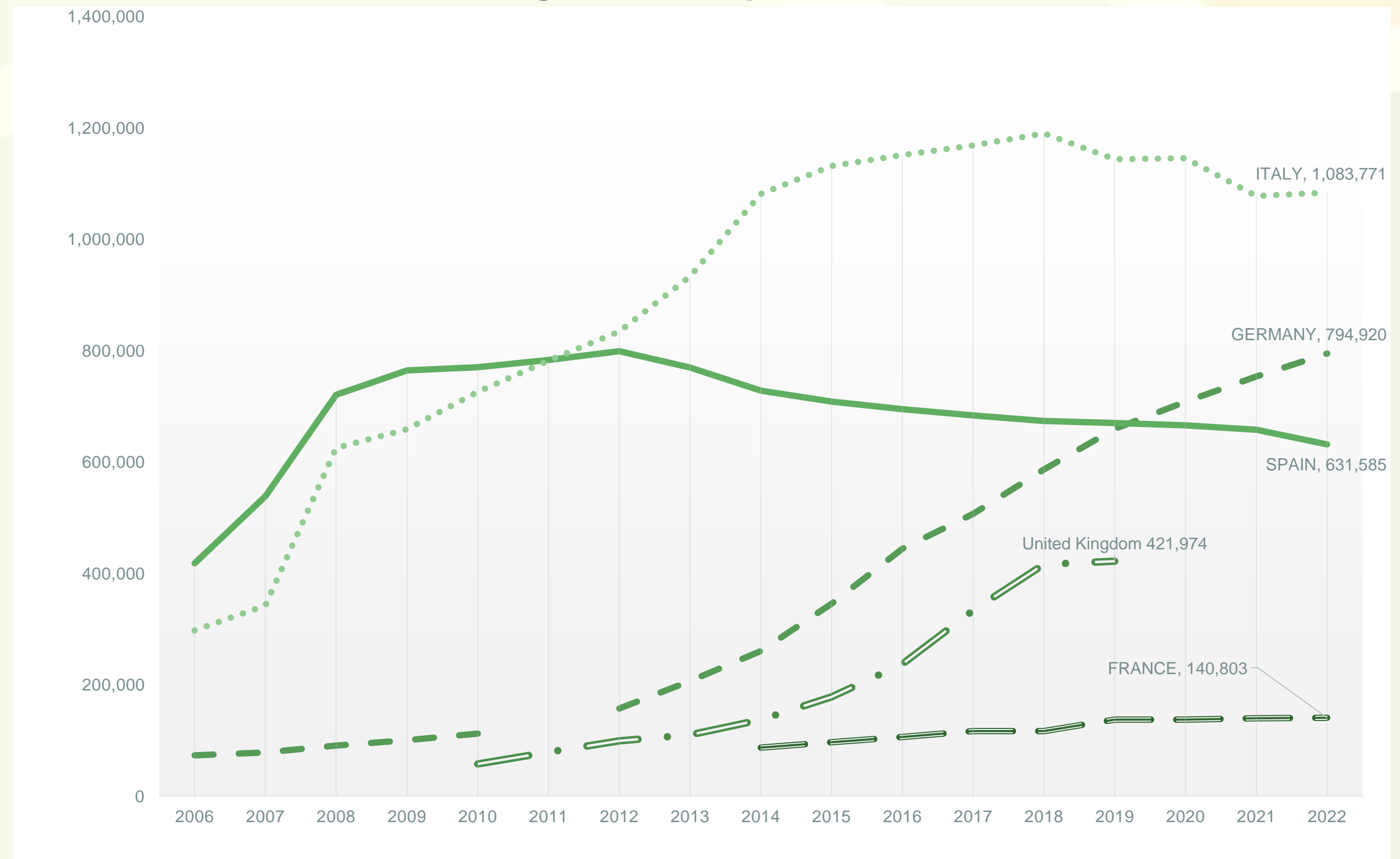
Overview on Romanian migration



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- "Diverse sources estimate that between **3-5 million Romanians currently live and work abroad**. Taking into consideration the most optimistic figure of 3.58 million from the UN (2017), migrants constitute approximately 18.2% of the population" (Dospinescu and Russo, 2018: 7) – the main destinations are **Italy, Germany, Spain, UK and France**.
- **Romania ranks among the top 20 countries globally** in terms of the total number of emigrants in the year 2020 (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou (eds.), 2021: 202).
- On the one hand, the magnitude of the phenomenon represents **a significant challenge for the country** (e.g., brain drain, the loss of the working-age population, children left behind). On the other hand, there are studies that have shown **some benefits** related to economic and social remittances, and in the case of return migration, new entrepreneurial initiatives and the development of new skills.

Number of Romanian citizens registered in top five EU destinations



Source: Eurostat (2023)

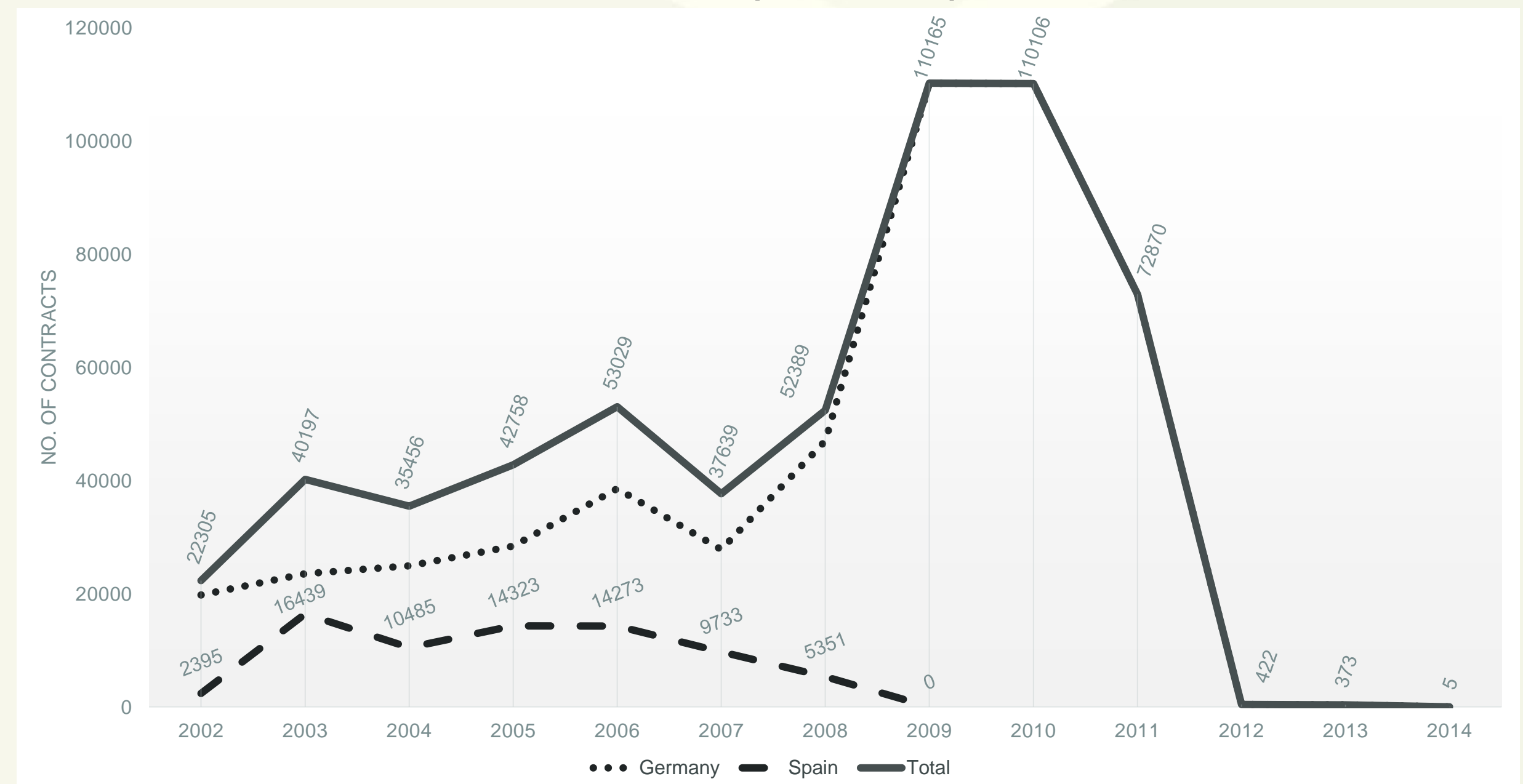
Overview on Romanian seasonal migration



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- It started in 1991 and (the first bilateral agreement was signed with Germany). During 1990-2014: Romania has signed agreements with 9 countries, but **Germany and Spain** were by far the most prevalent destinations for public mediated contracts. In the period of bilateral treaties, there is evidence of a **feminization** of the flow of Romanian migrants in agriculture (Şerban and Croitoru, 2015).
- However, the number of those who migrated as part of bilateral agreements represents only a fraction of the total migration in agriculture during that period, as **there were also contracts mediated by private companies or individuals who negotiated directly with employers.**
- Since Romania joined the EU and the gradual lifting of restrictions on labor market, a recent report (Fries-Tersch et al., 2021) estimates that **Romania, Poland and Bulgaria are the most prolific origin countries in terms of intra-EU seasonal migration** (e.g., approximately 60-65 % of agricultural seasonal workers in Germany come from Romania).

Number of individual work contracts signed through bilateral agreements between Romania and other countries (2002-2014)



Source: Şerban and Croitoru, 2015.

Romanian migration for agriculture in Romanian media



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- Generally, **migration in agriculture has not been a major point of interest within the Romanian society**, except for the widespread use of the label 'căpșunari' (strawberry pickers), which has become a lasting, pejorative appellation for Romanian unskilled or semi-skilled migrants.
- Recently, **during the Covid-19 pandemic**, migration in agriculture has emerged as a significant topic in the Romanian media, with hundreds of articles published after **several thousand workers crowded at an airport while strict travel restrictions were in place** in the country.
- A systematic analysis of the media articles (Șerban and Croitoru, 2022) published after this event pointed out:
 - ✓ Event-oriented approach and a rapid loss of interest;
 - ✓ Schematised representation of agricultural workers – only few stories of individuals with real lives where the reader could recognise himself in the subject, helping him to understand more about migrants in agriculture;
 - ✓ Overrepresentation of powerful institutional voices that drowned out rapidly the voices of migrants.

Seasonal migrants in agriculture waiting at the airport in Romania to depart for work abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Source: <https://www.cotidianul.ro/spalatul-pesto-miini-si-zborul-pesto-tara/>

Romanian migration for agriculture in social research



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- This represents the primary focus of research only occasionally, with seasonal migrants in agriculture being discussed alongside other types of migration.
- First papers making reference to Romanians' migration as agricultural workers are based on **community case studies**, most of them in rural communities, including this category of migrant in analyses related to other topics, but bringing also information about migration to agriculture in terms of: connectivity to migration networks, access to work contracts, changes of social hierarchies within the origin communities etc.
- An overview of papers approaching Romanians' migration to agriculture from the origin country perspective allow us to distinguish between:

1. Migrants' agency and some specific features of those who migrate for working seasonally in agriculture.

- ✓ Voivozeanu (2020), analyzing the migration to agriculture in a particular area in Romania, shows that migrants are actively seeking arrangements that fits better to their current life in origin.
- ✓ Şerban et al. (2020) also advocate for incorporating the sequences of work abroad into a larger perspective that consider the live of individuals at origin.
- ✓ Croitoru and Vlase (2023) utilize pre-pandemic empirical data collected from a social survey which included individuals who, during their migration abroad, worked in domains such as agriculture, construction, and elderly care. They found that those who worked in agriculture abroad had a lower average age and less paid work experience in Romania compared to those who worked in construction or elderly care.



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2. Migration in agriculture from the perspective of its impact on the origin (on the lives of seasonal migrants, on their families, and on the communities of origin).

- ✓ Şerban et al. (2020) discuss this in the case of migration to Spanish agriculture in Huelva (contract-migration with recruitment in origin). They stress **the limited economic impact** of this migration on the households of departure and its purpose-oriented nature. Similar evidences found by Voivozeanu (2020) and Deliu (2015).
- ✓ Croitoru and Vlase (2023) show that individuals who worked in agriculture abroad believe they have accumulated **less human capital during their migratory experiences** (new formal qualifications or learning foreign languages) and have **a significantly higher probability of being both unemployed** and not enrolled in an educational program after their return.
- ✓ Anghel et al. (2023) discuss about **consequences for the way of practicing agriculture in Romania** (from diversity to monoculture), stressing also detrimental effects of migration on the availability of labour force to get involved in agricultural work in origin.
- ✓ Corman and Croitoru (2023) employ empirical evidence from four **Roma communities in Romania** where seasonal migration in agriculture is practiced, highlighting certain negative aspects at the individual, familial, and community levels.



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