



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

Covid-19 and the agricultural sector: Temporary migration in the EU



The policy brief presents the research results of AdMiGov project on the temporary migration in the EU with a special focus on the seasonal migrants in the agricultural sector during Covid-19. It analyses the existing policies on seasonal and circular migration in accordance with the working and living conditions of the migrants. This outlook illustrates the faults of temporary migration schemes in the EU while introducing possible changes regarding safe EU food production standards in line with both labour and human rights of migrants.

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INTRODUCTION

The Advancing Alternative Migration Governance project (AdMiGov) research on different types of migration in the EU and eventually aims to build recommendations and indicators for alternative migration governance measures, which are in accordance with the 2018 UN Global Compact for Migration and on Refugees. The project analyses the policies and practices related to the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 and evaluates, which are the existing practices, and which potential changes can create a safe space for migrants and host communities.

This policy brief addresses the research conducted during the second year of the AdMiGov project on the topic of temporary migration. More specifically, the focus of the WP3 was the seasonal migration in the sector of agriculture during the period of the Covid-19. The research team asked the following question: how responsive were the state institutions in supporting the agricultural sector in a time of emergency? The actors involved in the temporary migration are remarkably diverse and for that reason the researchers needed to contact trade unions, representatives of public state institutions, recruitment agencies, employers' organisations, NGOs, and immigrants' organisations.

As the entire AdMiGov project addresses the safe and orderly migration in the EU, the period of the pandemic, is an intriguing experiment of how Member States endeavoured to ensure the national food security and the EU Market in a period of limited migration inflows and closed borders in a sector, which is predominantly dominated by migrant workers.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

AdMiGov research on EU temporary migration underlines the ongoing issues and illustrates the findings that are of relevance in the policy discussion regarding seasonal and circular migrants. The focus of the research on Covid-19 supported the importance of these workers in the EU agricultural production but also featured as a wakeup call for effective recommendations for the future of the EU food security.

The abrupt announcement of an unprecedented phenomenon as of Covid-19 had a great impact on the sectors, which operate seasonal and need the inflow of migrants. The agricultural sector, hospitality and home-based care are dominated by foreign workers. The restrictions on movement due to the pandemic created a period of chaos as some migrants were reluctant to travel and others left the country of destination and returned to their countries of origin fearing that they will be stranded away from their families. This situation created some anxiety for the agricultural sector and obviously for the entire EU as food security concerns started to grow during the first months of the pandemic in 2020. Several issues seemed to come to the surface in the farms.

In Germany, for instance, where there is a significant production of white asparagus and strawberries, the use of other unskilled workers who happened to be available did not fill the gap of the previously employed trained workers. It became clear around the EU that seasonal workers carry with them years of experience and as the work in farms is very physically demanding workers of other sectors cannot easily withstand the working requirements. For that reason, when Germany tried to provide

occupation to unemployed refugees living in the country, that did not necessarily result in effective production. Spain, a country which predominantly bases its agriculture on third country nationals, could not manage to reach the usual numbers of newcomers for the season and ended up losing 20% of its annual production. In the case of Poland, workers who had contracts for seasonal work in hospitality could not change their job as the **declaration of intention to entrust work to a foreigner** limits the worker to one specific employer. Spain's bilateral agreements with countries outside of the EU for seasonal migration were ineffective in a period of restrictions of movement. At the same time due to the pandemic a lot of people lost their employment in the Netherlands in the agricultural sector making them very vulnerable.

All these made it apparent to the European citizens that several sectors cannot survive without the temporary migrants. And that the national and EU policies should be flexible and responsive to any emergency if they wish to secure the food production.

Having these in mind, it appears that the EU is going through a period of more mechanized farms, which again indicates the need of trained workers. Seasonal workers in the agriculture, from this research, seem to be difficult to replace with other groups like refugees or students and in some cases, it ended up being more costly or damaged the crops. Circular migration is preferred in most cases as it saves training time.

Overall, the EU showed resilience during the Covid-19. The pandemic was a challenge for agriculture but most importantly it underlined already existing structural issues, which have been present before it. With a better coordination between the diverse actors involved in the policies and practices, the EU can have orderly and safe temporary migration for the newcomers and the host communities. Better regulations and inspections of the farms can ensure the working and living conditions of temporary migrants.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief discusses the EU policies and practices regarding temporary migration under the scrutiny of the EU commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Research conducted in the *Advancing Alternative Migration Governance* project (AdMiGov) on the temporary and circular migrations shows that:

1. The living conditions of the migrants are not always of high standards and particularly during Covid-19, most farms did not fully follow the EU restrictions related to the pandemic. An example was that protective equipment like masks were not effectively distributed among the workers.
2. The working conditions is also a worrisome issue as most migrants worked from 10 to 12 hrs with low wages of 15 to 25 EUR of daily pay (ILO, 2021).
3. Recruitment processes mostly from temp agencies can possibly bend the national laws and not offer the best contracts for the migrants.
4. All in all, in relation to the contracts, living and working conditions of the temporary migrants in the EU, it was observed that there is a lack of national and EU inspectors, who can meticulously monitor these practices.

In the light of potential following Covid-19 waves, the EU needs to ensure safe working and living conditions for the temporary migrants; Masks, sanitizers and better accommodation should be considered. However, regardless of the pandemic, the living conditions of the migrants have been an ongoing issue and that should be taken care of. Unequal pay and excessive working hours should be addressed. Minimum wage legislation for temporary migrants can help solve the problem. More inspectors could be assigned either on the national or EU level to monitor the contracts and the work in the farms. This way contractors will find it harder to bend the national laws. Recognition of the migrants qualifications is important. Namely, temporary migrants have knowledge on crops and how to operate a farm and as 60-90% of the seasonal workers in the EU are migrants, it is apparent that there must be more gratification of the qualifications and their vital contribution to the EU food market.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

In order to structure the fieldwork and set common objectives, WP3 researchers collaborated on a common field guide, which helped setting common directions and the scope of the research. All researchers managed to adjust the fieldwork, during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the national regulations on movement, either face-to-face or digitally. The research was conducted by the different teams with a shared understanding of:

- **Research techniques:** Research would rely on qualitative methods to generate data through in-depth semi-structured interviews. In some cases, this has been complemented by a review

of press articles, considering the difficulties to reach the ground during the months of lockdown.

- **Target group:** representatives of public institutions (ministries of labour, governmental agencies, municipalities), employers' organizations (general or specific, working in the agricultural sector), employers (from agriculture), trade unions, recruitment agencies, migrant networks, NGO's, experts (researching on labour migration)
- **Definition of temporary migrants:** The team remains open to all the potential groups that may fit under the category of temporary workers. This will allow the researchers to better comprehend previous temporary migration schemes and compare them with the period of the Covid-19 and the possibly new agreements that emerged during that time.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Advancing Alternative Migration Governance (ADMIGOV)
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CONSORTIUM	Aalborg Universitet (AAU) Copenhagen Denmark; Addis Ababa University (AAU) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; American University of Beirut (AUB) Beirut, Lebanon; Centre for International Information and Documentation in Barcelona (CIDOB) Barcelona, Spain; Dansk Flygtningehjælp Forening (DRC) Copenhagen, Denmark; Koç University (KU) Istanbul, Turkey; Panepistimio Aigaiou (AEGEAN) Mytilini, Greece; Stichting Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen Clingendael (CLINGENDAEL) Den Haag, The Netherlands; Universitat de Barcelona (UB) Barcelona, Spain; Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) Brussels, Belgium; Universiteit Maastricht (MU) Maastricht, The Netherlands; Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA) Amsterdam, The Netherlands (coordinator); Uniwersytet Wrocławski (Uwr) Wrocław, Poland.
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FURTHER READING	Vincenzo Gomes and Jeroen Doornik (2020) <i>State-of -the-art on temporary labour migration schemes in Europe</i> . AdMiGov Deliverable 3.1, Amsterdam: UvA. Patrycja Matusz and Eirini Aivaliotou (2020) <i>Circular and temporary migration in Poland during COVID-19</i> . AdMiGov Deliverable 3.2, Wrocław: University of Wrocław.

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