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Rural Migration: Agriculture and Inclusive Development for a Resilient Mediterranean

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As the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and current Secretary General of the United Nations António Guterres once said, “The 21st century will be the century of people on the move.”¹ While humankind has been moving for millennia, the phenomenon has intensified over time due to population growth, increased inequality, globalization, frequent conflicts and national disasters.

A Migrating Planet: The Mediterranean at the Heart of the Phenomenon

The Mediterranean has long been a major migratory region, but the factors responsible for this mobility have gradually become more diverse. It is simultaneously a region of origin, destination and transit for Mediterranean populations and the populations of peripheral regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa. Mostly internal to each country, migration generally takes place from inland rural areas to cities. Although the migratory dynamics of the Mediterranean are historical and polymorphic, they have taken on an increasingly complex geopolitical configuration in the region’s current context.

Notwithstanding the many southern Europeans who have left their countries in recent years as a result of the economic crisis, it is important to underscore the extent to which this international migration primarily

concerns the countries on the eastern and western shores of the Mediterranean. These countries have become areas of transit and even settlement, with massive arrivals in the Near East and North Africa of people fleeing war or seeking better living conditions. Several million people have been displaced or have migrated to the region in recent years, driving large populations into Mediterranean countries that are themselves experiencing economic difficulties, rendering the allocation of budgetary and logistical resources to assist the influx of new arrivals and facilitate their integration into society even more complex.

The Root Causes of Migration

The globalization of trade, increased social and economic disparities within and between countries, demographic growth, the anarchic development of certain areas, the inherent tensions caused by the scarcity of vital resources such as water, land and food, and even the growing constraints due to climate change have all contributed to intensify the migratory phenomenon. In rural areas, issues related to the status and condition of farmers and fishermen (labour conditions, informal employment, low income, precariousness and lack of long-term visibility, low expertise of the actors, insufficient social protection, etc.) are particularly likely to lead to migratory flows. Within the Mediterranean region, salinization, soil erosion, water scarcity and increasingly frequent droughts are all risks that are expected to increase over the course of this century. The agricultural sector is also the most affected by shocks associated with climate change. When extreme climate events

¹ Interview with António Guterres (former UN High Commissioner for Refugees) in *Le Monde* on 28-29 September 2008. http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2008/09/27/ce-siecle-sera-celui-des-peuples-en-mouvement_1100313_3244.html

occur, agriculture bears most of the costs. The side effects of climate change, including increasingly frequent health crises and the resurgence of certain pests, likewise place considerable burdens on the agricultural sector. When rural populations depend mainly on agriculture for their livelihood and are no longer able to carry it out following these types of disasters, they have no choice but to migrate to cities or other countries. Water, financial, climate and food insecurity are all catalysts for this distress migration from rural areas to urban ones or abroad. In recent years, the classic Mediterranean model of migration to Europe has undergone profound changes: the socio-political crises that have plagued the region since 2011 have given rise to the development of new forms of migration, such as environmental and climatic migration, as well as exponential growth in the number of asylum seekers and refugees. The phenomenon of environmental migration affects the poorest countries in the Mediterranean and the most marginalized rural populations, which are both the most vulnerable to climate change and the least equipped to cope with it.

Enhancing the Value of Rural World Solutions: Agriculture as a Tool for Resilience

In the face of these multiple and interdependent challenges, agriculture seems to offer keys for understanding, but also for action. It is important to consider the role of agriculture and rural development in preventing the exodus to cities, but also to address some of the challenges that migration poses. More generally, these reflections are part of an approach aimed at strategically reclassifying rural regions and agriculture as major determinants for the stability of the region's countries.

A profound change in agricultural practices is needed to improve agricultural productivity, enable more sustainable food production, and prevent migration to cities. To this end, it is important not to neglect the fundamentals underpinning better agricultural and rural development: improved living conditions and logistics in rural regions, good natural resource management, adaptation to climate change, food and nutritional security for the people, and promoting the resilience of agricultural and fishing communities to crises (whether related to the market, prices or

health or due to natural disasters, conflicts, etc.). In this regard, in the Mediterranean, agriculture and rural regions clearly remain a source of resilience for many families in the face of economic shocks. The development of triple-performing agriculture – at the economic, environmental and social levels – is, in this sense, a mobilizing project for Mediterranean countries, bringing together the traditional knowledge, innovation, and highly diversified local specificities that make up the Mediterranean's richness. Agriculture can be a tool for preventing the risks and managing the tensions related to migration. The development of appropriate agricultural policies can be viewed as a means of fostering rural welfare. The FAO estimates that investment in the agricultural sector is eleven times more effective for reducing poverty than investment in any other sector. Agriculture should thus be viewed as a lever of social and economic development for rural areas and, consequently, a means of reducing the number of people seeking to leave the countryside or their countries due to the lack of attractive prospects. Although far from a miracle solution, agriculture has enormous potential as a tool for development, resilience and peace.

The Contribution of Diasporas: Shared Benefits

Migration can lead to shared benefits for both the host society and the society of origin. These benefits are not only economic: they can be political, social or cultural... Throughout history, the intermingling of populations has helped to consolidate state structures. Several nations have turned this diversity, this melting pot, into a major strength, leveraging it to maintain their capacity to stimulate innovation and openness. Diasporas the world over play a key role in the different levels of shared benefits, across both time and space. Lying at the crossroads of three continents, the Mediterranean is a region of permanent, multidirectional migration that exemplifies these shared benefits. Since the dawn of civilisation, Mediterranean populations have been on the move. Indeed, it is one of the hallmark traits of the region, which has been characterized for centuries by the flow of human, economic and cultural exchanges. This constant mixing has gradually formed a sort of social mosaic, in which

identities intertwine and cosmopolitanism grows ever stronger.

In the Mediterranean region, agriculture in particular has multiple ancient ties to population movements. It is worth noting that historically agriculture has been a geographical reference point for moving populations. It was through agriculture that mobile populations settled over time: when the first crops and animals were domesticated several millennia ago, as wheat was in the Fertile Crescent along the eastern shore of the basin, people gradually settled in the region, abandoning their nomadic way of life. Agriculture in the Mediterranean also highlights the shared benefits resulting from successive population flows. The existence of highly diverse cuisines (that nevertheless share many cultural and culinary traits), encouraging the emergence of the Mediterranean diet, a lifestyle and sustainable approach to consumption that cuts across eras and borders, is an example.

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Migrants from rural areas represent a segment of agricultural skills to be maintained, particularly in future integration processes in their host countries. In many countries of the EU and the Mediterranean Basin, it is migrants who ultimately revitalize rural and mountain areas, strengthen the agricultural labour force and meet the need for skilled agricultural workers. Thus, in addition to improving the working conditions of migrant agricultural workers, it is worth weighing the advantages to be gained from seasonal agricultural migration as long as it is well-organized. Likewise, efforts should be made to establish educational and training pathways, particularly agricultural ones, for migrants when they reach the host country. The issue of education and training for these populations is a major challenge, especially for forcibly displaced populations. Language training has to be supplemented with technical training tailored to the knowledge of these populations and to the job op-

portunities the host countries are likely to offer them, particularly in rural areas.

Furthermore, the influx of investment and knowledge transfer to the migrants' rural areas of origin plays a fundamental role in the rural development of their home countries. According to the FAO, 40% of international money transfers are sent to rural areas and international remittances are three times the size of official development assistance. This reinvestment is a real asset and an opportunity to reduce rural poverty and implement a more inclusive development model.

Inclusive Development to Address the Causes of Distress Migration

Mediterranean countries have strong human, economic and agricultural assets. Despite the existing inequalities, several economic, social and demographic indicators show an overall improvement in living standards, albeit in a context of sharp disparities between and within countries. As a result, Mediterranean countries share a common problem: youth migration. This translates to a true waste of human resources throughout the region. Inclusive development ensuring social and territorial cohesion is an absolute priority for Mediterranean countries. Agricultural and rural worlds must thus be assigned greater value as strategic sectors for economic growth and political stability. In addition to providing food, agriculture also creates jobs and stability in fragile rural areas where more inclusive social and economic policies need to be implemented.

The often untapped potential of young people, their employability and their active participation in rural life are a major via for reflection and action to prevent rural exodus, for they are a vital component that is unlikely to be replaced. The crux is therefore to offer them decent living conditions in rural areas. The aging populations of rural areas and the agricultural sector will pose challenges if current trends hold. It is thus necessary to work to create decent and viable, but also attractive and innovative jobs, for example, by stimulating entrepreneurship or the social economy in rural areas. Rural regions should be made more attractive from a cultural point of view for those young people seeking a more urban lifestyle. It is likewise necessary to think of inclusive develop-

ment models that involve all communities in local policy and the organization of social life in rural areas. Technical and economic responses alone are not enough. They must be complemented by meaning, an ideal to be attained, and by political responses and a social contract to which people adhere. Participatory initiatives based on dialogue and co-development can help lift young and rural populations out of their threefold marginalization: geographic, economic and social. They are ramparts of the most radical ideological currents, which feed on feelings of frustration, injustice and despair. The stakes are staunching the outflow of the life force of rural areas and cultivating a feeling of belonging to a community of interest. Countering the “rural brain drain” and “radical withdrawal” requires greater inclusion of inland and agricultural areas in countries’ development and economic growth dynamics and providing local youths with high-value and diverse employment opportunities with a high social impact.

The Indispensable Europe-Mediterranean-Africa Dialogue: Linked Fates

A constructive dialogue between Europe, the Mediterranean countries and Africa is today an indispensable tool to strengthen food security, foster more inclusive development and prevent distress migration.

It is to this end that CIHEAM has strengthened its partnership with the European authorities,² which have become aware of the importance of the stakes of food security and rural development to achieving greater stability in the region. Food and climate issues must be high on the Euro-Mediterranean agenda. In the wake of the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris climate agreement, Europe has an unprecedented opportunity to regain a certain geopolitical clout on food and agricultural issues, especially by maintaining the CAP at the heart of its mission. Co-development must be a priority, and Europe can take concrete action to reduce uncertainty and contribute to food balances and agricultural development in Northern Africa and the Middle East. In the context of this constructive exchange, the Mediter-

anean is a key player and a link between Europe and Africa to increase regional integration.

The Mediterranean region holds several world records in terms of conflict, unemployment, food dependency, natural resource depletion and the expected impacts of climate change. Migration has always played a fundamental role in its development dynamics. As a result of the stakes involved, political action and cooperation tend to target the effects and consequences of these dynamics, obscuring the policies that could be put into place to prevent or better manage them. There can be no peace without food security, no food security without agricultural production, and no agriculture without development dynamics in rural areas. Food security and agriculture are closely linked to peace and stability in these areas and should be considered priority issues to prevent forced displacements and migration.

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² Informal Meeting of Agriculture Ministers, Malta, 23 May 2017 www.ciheam.org/en/news_and_events/news/one?event=informal-meeting-of-agriculture-ministers&id=84 and EuroMed Meeting Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan, “Enhancing International Cooperation in Agriculture in the Mediterranean Region,” www.ciheam.org/en/news_and_events/news/one?event=euromed-meeting-speech-by-commissioner-phil-hogan&id=73