

Shifting Transhumances: migration patterns in Mediterranean pastoralism

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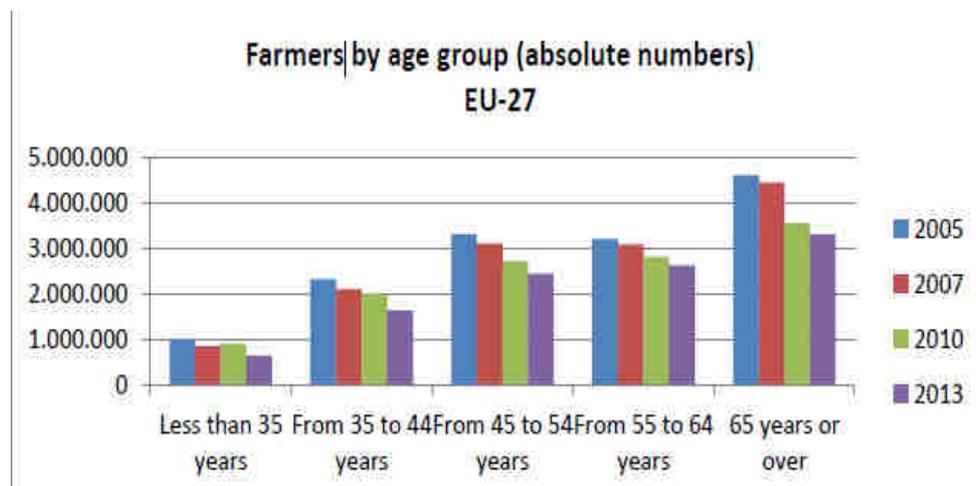
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Ageing countryside in the old continent

The EU's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) accounts for about 40% of the overall EU budget. After its initial mandate to recover agriculture and food production in Europe in the aftermath of the II World War, CAP has been reformed through time to better take into account different aspects of European rural livelihoods. Subsidies from such policy have come to contribute filling the gap between harsher living conditions for EU rural dwellers (ie. lower access to basic services) and to compensate the rural-urban income divide (ie. rural workers in EU gain as an average about 60% of their urban peers – EU, 2011). Since the 1990s reforms have reframed the CAP 'welfare system' within a more multifunctional perspective; 2013 reform indicates that agriculture aims not only at delivering high quality food but also helps to manage our environment and fight climate change (EU, 2013).

The economic success of the CAP is attested by the contribution of agriculture and agri-business to European output, but its outcomes in social and ecological terms remain in question, as rural populations continue to decline, many rural communities persist socially marginalised, and degradation of the natural resource base is affecting a number of regions. Main problems rural communities and agricultural enterprises in Europe face today relate to demographic ageing and generational renewal, as rural youth rather looks for an urban future thus contributing to a declining population in the countryside. Failure to reverse such trends represents a major criticism of the CAP and a main concern for policy makers at all levels.

Figure 1
A declining and ageing rural population in the EU-27



Source: EU, 2012

¹ TRA_MED patterns of pastoral migrations in the Mediterranean region, project funded by the European Union (contract EU Marie Curie ES706/2014).

A key factor that has helped buffering such trends is the significant inflow of foreigners to EU rural world. Today migrants – both legal and illegal – constitute a significant portion of the agricultural workforce and their labour has greatly contributed to the enduring of many EU farms through difficult and critical times. With newcomers undertaking a number of agricultural activities immigration contributes to tackling the social and economic mismatch of the rural labour markets by filling the gaps left by the national population (Kasimis, 2010).

Mediterranean flows and trends

While this phenomenon is visible throughout the European Union, it is specific to its Mediterranean flank (EUMed) – notably Spain, Greece, Portugal, Italy and France – for a number of reasons that make this sub-region peculiar.

- Agriculture is highly relevant in EUMed countries, as it underpins the agro-food and tourism sectors, which are the pillars of the national economy, and important elements of local identities. This was reflected, until recently, by the fact that half of the agriculturally employed population and two-thirds of the farm holdings of EU-15 were concentrated in these five countries.
- Demographic ageing is a particularly significant trend in these countries where only 10% of farm holders are younger than 35 years and the farming sector presents higher-than-average proportions of people aged over 65. EUMed rural areas show as well a relatively low ratio of children (0-15y) to pensioners (>65y), a low ratio of young adults (15-24y) to pensioners, and a high overall dependency ratio (Kasimis, 2010; EU, 2012).
- In-migration to these countries is quite recent and it is growing quickly. EUMed have in fact traditionally been a region of emigration, becoming only recently an area of transition for migrants heading North and eventually a destination in its own right². The shift has been particularly intense for Spain, Italy and Greece. Immigration to EUMed countrysides started in the 1980s and expanded since then inexorably; today migrants are over-represented in rural settings and in agriculture activities in most EUMed regions. Such dynamics are likely to increase due to the a) demographic patterns of migrants' communities (i.e. average age, fertility rates), and b) the recent inflows of refugees crossing the Mediterranean.
- The Mediterranean region represents the II world biodiversity hotspot, and one of the region most impacted by climate change dynamics (UNEP, 2012; IPCC, 2014). A healthy and vital countryside is a key asset for resilient capacities of Mediterranean rich but fragile territories threatened by desertification processes.

Migration plays an important role in the reshaping of Mediterranean agro-ecological as well as socio-cultural landscapes. A more in-depth analysis of ongoing dynamics and a qualification of patterns of rural immigration in timing and spatial change enable reckoning the relevance of this phenomenon as a strategic asset for the resilience and the sustainability of the EUMed agricultural sector. The presence of migrant labourers in the agricultural sector has increased dramatically throughout the recent financial crisis, coming to represent today about one-third of the agriculture workforce in Italy and Spain, according to official data (Caruso & Corrado, 2015).

Table 1
Percentage of migrants on the agricultural workforce in Italy & Spain (2008-2013)

	Italy	Spain
2008	19,4 %	19,1 %
2013	37 %	24%

Source: INEA, 2014; OMT, 2014; OPI, 2014

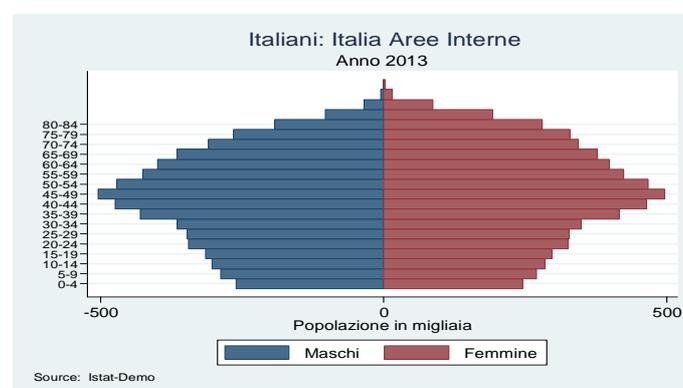
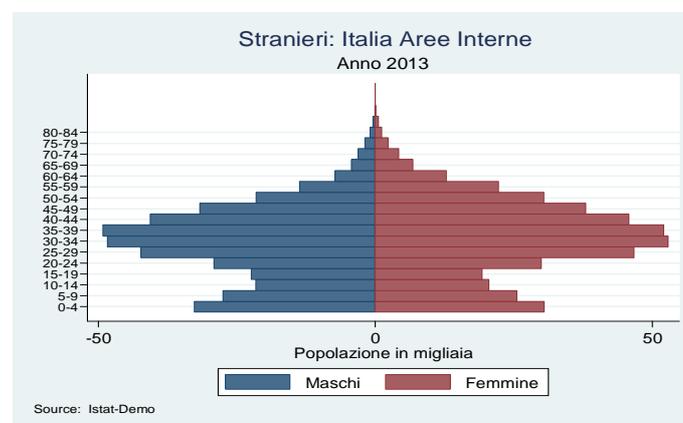
² The first Law concerning immigration in Spain is dated 1985 and in Italy 1986

These figures attest to the role of the agricultural sector as a safe-haven for the precarious, migrant workforce during times of adversity – but these prove as well the relevance of migrants' labour to maintain active and productive a number of farms that would have otherwise halted their activities. Through the critical crisis conditions migrant workforce has provided to the agricultural sector a highly flexible labour force, often quite skilled and motivated, despite the often poor levels of remuneration and the pitiable working conditions and rights.

The phenomenon though not only pertains to the difficult times of the economic crisis, but also to difficult environments in geo-ecological terms, as migrants represent today an important population component in remote, mountainous areas of EU countries. These areas are particularly dependent on agriculture and their sustainable development severely threatened by the decline of the active population. As an example in case immigrants represent about 10% of the active population in most internal communities in central Italy, and their children amount to about 20% of the school population.

In such realities migrants play a major role in the subsistence and the development of local communities. INEA (2014) attests the presence of migrants in the forestry sector in Italy to 40% of the national workforce. Apart from providing agriculture labour migrant communities undertake as well other important social and economic activities, from construction and maintenance works to the provision of basic care services. Paradoxically in these realities new-comers play also a primary role in terms of maintaining the local traditional/cultural life. The demographic structure of migrant communities compared to local ones suggests that their relevance for the social and economic development of these areas will be increasing through time.

Figure 2
Age pyramids for immigrants (a) and local (b) population in internal areas of Italy



Source: Programma Nazionale Aree Interne, Ministero Sviluppo Economico, Italia, 2013

Incoming shepherds

One sector where the presence of migrant labourers is particularly evident is that of pastoralism, an activity that plays a key role in maintaining difficult territories alive, bio-diverse and productive (Nori, 2010). Pastoralism is extensive animal rearing, and relies on livestock mobility and the access to pasture resources. In their own definition³ pastoralism is the main livelihood in many drylands and mountainous areas, where other forms of agricultural practices are impossible. In such challenging territories pastoralism presents the best livelihood strategy to provide food, income and employment. Pastoralists contribute also to the efficient management and governance of rangelands and to the protection of natural resources, thus also providing essential eco-system services such as carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. These benefit not only pastoral communities, but also those living in farming areas, urban centres and coastal regions, who all profit from nutritious animal proteins and related value chains as well as from environmental services (IFAD, 2016).

Apart from socio-economic and ecological aspects, Mediterranean pastoralism plays as well an important socio-cultural and political role, as it embeds a number of local traditions, supporting cultural heritage and territorial identity. It contributes as well to maintaining a human presence in harsh terrains, thus averting processes of agro-ecological and socio-economic desertification. Due to difficult living and working conditions, this activity undergoes cyclical problems in attracting young skilled and motivated people and in securing the generational renewal to shepherding (Nori, 2009; Meuret, 2010). In EU Med mountainous areas, and particularly in Italy and Greece as well as in certain regions of Spain, the presence of migrants as shepherds contributes significantly to keep pastoralism performing. Notwithstanding the important contributions received by the CAP subsidy schemes and whatever the entrepreneurial strategy pursued (extensification, intensification, diversification, etc...) most extensive livestock farms would face today great difficulties in maintaining their business profitable without the availability of foreign shepherds (Nori et de Marchi, 2015).

The typical profile of migrants that have come to work as shepherds in EU Med regions is that of a male, aged between 25 and 40, originating in another Mediterranean country, often with direct experience in extensive livestock breeding (though not necessarily within a pastoral setting). In many cases the culture and the religion of origin and destination countries might differ, though linguistic references tend to be similar. Migrant shepherds can be immigrants of Orthodox Christian religion (Romanians, Bulgarians) or Muslims (Moroccans, Albanians, Macedonians).

Though strange it might seem, the fact that a generational change is accompanied by an ethnic one is nothing new to Mediterranean pastoralism. This phenomenon has already been taking place in the 19th and 20th century all over the region, when young shepherds migrated from Piedmont to Provence⁴, from Sardinia to Tuscany⁵, from Andalusia to the Pyrenees, from the Extremadura to the Castillas. Similar, albeit peculiar, the case for the Valachs in Northern Greece and the Arvanites in its Central part, as well as for the Kurds in several areas of Turkey. Immigrated communities have contributed substantially to keep rangelands alive and productive in their countries of destination. It is not so unusual that shepherds migrate from one side to another of the same Mediterranean ecosystem, seizing opportunities and greener pastures while carrying their experience and knowhow. All in all mobility and migration represent different portions of the same continuum.

³ Statement of the special session with pastoralists and extensive livestock breeders held in Rome, 13th of February 2016 under IFAD Farmers' Forum auspices.

⁴ Refer to le projet Le Routo www.lerouto.eu

⁵ Reference is made to the works of Benedetto Meloni

Figure 3
Trajectories of past (in red) and present (in black) patterns of shepherds' migrations



Source: TRAMED data elaboration

Hereby a table that summarizes and quantifies the information collected so far in this regard by the TRAMED project, which specifically investigates on the presence and contribution of immigrants to EUMed pastoralism. This information is clearly indicative and does not aim to be exhaustive, it results from degrees of generalizations and simplifications needed to undertake this work.

Main elements of concern in this framework are the conditions of illegality, limited rights, scarce salary and poor working and living conditions for most of migrant shepherds. These factors eventually contribute detaching foreign workers from EUMed pastures and flocks. Another element of concern is the very limited degree of socio-economic scaling up within this sector. Migrants that have been working as shepherds in the EUMed for decades have barely improved their conditions as workers and as citizens. The cases where shepherds have graduated as livestock owners in EUMed are rare exceptions. A number of factors contribute to this phenomenon, including financial (ie. access to land and credit), legal (ie. work and residence permits), bureaucratic (ie. CAP administrative procedures) and technical (ie. animal health requirements). This setting provides for lose-lose conditions - as migrant shepherds do not evolve in their socio-economic role, livestock owners close to retirement do not find people capable of taking over their enterprises, and the whole society witnesses the disappearance of pastoralism in the EUMed and the increase of related hydro-geological risks and socio-cultural problems.

Table 2
The presence of immigrants in the euro-Mediterranean pastoralism

Area	Production focus	% migrants on overall shepherds	County of origin	Average monthly salary (€)	Note	Source
Italy						
Abruzzi	Milk/dairy	90%	Macedonia, Romania, Albania	800	Ethnic substitution	Coldiretti, 2014
Veneto	Meat	70%	Romania	800		TRAMed
Piedmont	Meat & milk/dairy	70%	Romania, Moldavia	800	Sikh workers in intensive dairy cattle farms	TRAMed; Lum, 2010
Val d'Aosta	Milk/dairy cattle	70%	Morocco, Romania	2000	Fontina value chain	INEA, 2009; Coldiretti, 2014
Sardinia	Milk/dairy	20%	Morocco, Romania	500-600	Pecorino value chain	TRAMed; Mannia, 2010
Calabria	Milk/dairy	35%	Kurds, Pakistan, India	500-600	Ethnic substitution	INEA, 2009
Greece						
Epirus, Thessaly	Milk/dairy	50%	Albania, Bulgaria, Valachs, Romania	400-600		Projects: Thales, Domestic, TRAMed
Peloponnesus	Milk/dairy	40%	Bulgaria, Albania, India, Pakistan	400-600	Difficult relationships	
Crete	Milk/dairy	35%	India, Pakistan Albania, Bulgaria	400-600		

France						
Provence	Meat	Limited	Morocco, Romania	Minimal salary rates (SMIC)	Winter period	TRAMed;
		65%	Other regions of France and NEurope	1500-2500	Benefits relative to experience and pasture zoning	TRAMed; Meuret, 2010
Maritime Alps	Meat	20%	Romania			Cerpam
Pyrenees	Milk/dairy	Limited			Higher presence of migrants in the past	Meuret, 2010
Corsica	Milk/dairy & meat		Morocco		Circular migration 6 months	Terrazoni, 2010
Spagna						
Comunidad Valenciana		70%	Morocco	600	Circular migration; difficult relationships	AVA, 2009
Catalan Pyrenees	Meat	55%	Romania, Sub-Saharan Africa	600-700	Yearly contracts	Nadal et al., 2010
Aragon Pyrenees	Meat	40%	Marocco, Romania, Bulgaria, Ucraina		Some scaled up to flock owners	TRAMed;
Andalucia			Romania, Sub-Saharan Africa		Mostly in Almeria areas	TRAMed;
Castilla León Castilla la Mancha	Meat Milk/dairy	30%	Marocco, Romania, Bulgaria		Technically appreciated	TRAMed; Plataforma GE

Source: Elaboration by TRAMED project

Multi-culture agricultures

Overall, migrant workers play today in the EU a determinant role in managing two basic societal functions such as the production of food and the management of the natural resource base, supporting the rural economy, managing public goods and maintaining ecosystem functioning in countries where agriculture represents a strategic social, economic and environmental asset.

Migrants' contribution to the rural world is projected to increase for reasons related to the demand for agricultural labour and to the growing availability of migrant's workforce. Figures from the recent crisis indicate that EU Med agriculture is highly and increasingly dependent on the presence and the endeavour of foreign farmers, foresters and shepherds. Figures also attest to the importance of immigrant communities in maintaining alive and productive difficult territories that suffer from progressive abandonment of local populations and patterns of desertification.

Pastoralism is a case study where the migrant workforce has enabled sectoral adaptations to the increasingly volatile economic, socio-political and climate settings. Migrant shepherds provide a relatively experienced and qualified workforce at relatively low cost, thus importantly contributing to overcome the human resource problem for this activity increasingly recognized as vital to the preservation of our natural and cultural heritage, but less and less practiced by Europeans. Constraints related to the working and living conditions of these workers and of their capacity to scale up in socio-economic terms threaten the sustainability of this phenomenon.

While immigration is increasingly perceived as a problem in many EU countries, indications are clear that it may represent a relevant opportunity to repopulate rural areas and to provide workforce to agricultural activities, which are of little attraction to local workers. Involving and integrating migrant workers into rural development policies and plans provide unmissable opportunities for those concerned with sustainable rural development. The forthcoming CAP midterm reform should consider these options - as a young and motivated workforce is a key asset for a healthy and vital agriculture and for a resilient rural world.

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