

## **PODCAST on rural policy and integration of migrants**

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VOICE 1

You're listening to the European Parliamentary Research Service podcast on the EU's rural policy and the integration of migrants.

VOICE 2

Never before has the EU been confronted with such a massive influx of migrants as in the past 2 years... Most of them settle around cities, where they believe it is easier to find work and support structures, but what if a better life was awaiting them in Europe's rural areas?

VOICE 1

Stay with us! And we'll show you how the EU's rural development policy can support the integration of migrants and how, in turn, they can breathe new life into Europe's rural communities!

JINGLE TO START PODCAST

VOICE 2

Since 2015, nearly one million four-hundred thousand migrants have crossed into

Europe, sparking a major crisis as countries struggled to cope with the influx and settle those who were entitled to stay...

#### VOICE 1

Although the majority come from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, migrants are not a homogenous group so there is no one-size-fits-all solution to help them integrate into their new surroundings.

#### VOICE 2

This is why in 2016 the European Commission came up with an action plan to support the integration of third-country nationals and their economic and social contribution to the EU, highlighting the resources available from the European structural and investment funds to help ensure they can find a house, a job or a school for their children.

#### VOICE 1

But opportunities are also available within the framework of the EU's rural development policy to help local communities integrate migrants arriving in rural areas. So what are the challenges?

#### VOICE 2

Well, the first challenge is to attract them to rural areas in the first place! The perception that it will be easier to find a job and a place to live in the city -as well as support structures such as language courses and social networks- acts as a magnet for migrants... but with adequate support, migration could give Europe's declining rural regions a new boost!

#### VOICE 1

Creating new opportunities for growth and jobs in agriculture, services and other activities, reversing the depopulation trend, and ensuring the sustainability of public and private services... for instance, by ensuring there are enough kids to keep a village school open!

## VOICE 2

So, what tools does the EU have to support the integration of migrants in rural communities? Let's take a closer look...

## MUSIC JINGLE

## VOICE 1

Although there are no specific provisions for migrants, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development contains measures which can be used to support rural communities receiving migrants to fund activities promoting social inclusion and job creation. For example, equipping villages with the necessary infrastructure to host them, such as leisure and culture centres or access to broadband.

## VOICE 2

The LEADER approach, a community-led participatory initiative included in the EU's rural development programmes, has already allowed local action groups to propose tailored solutions to solve their specific problems, be it related to the social inclusion of migrants, the development of specific skills, employment opportunities or access to care.

## VOICE 1

And although challenges may differ from one community to another, a great deal of learning can be done through sharing experiences and ideas... which is exactly what the European Network for Rural Development and the National Rural Networks aim to do, providing communication channels and platforms for discussion between local, regional and national actors.

## VOICE 2

All in the spirit of finding win-win solutions! To the benefit of the newly arrived migrants and the locals... and many communities are proving that this is possible!

## VOICE 1

In Punkalaidun, for instance, in South-West Finland, migrants have given the town new life! With the support of a locally appointed integration coordinator, they have

taken on jobs on decaying farms, in small businesses and in the services sector, they have provided local shops with new costumers and rejuvenated an ageing population...

#### VOICE 2

The project was co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development –under the LEADER approach- but other European funds, such as the Social Fund, can also be used in the case of projects with a larger social dimension.

#### VOICE 1

In Italy, for example, the Terre & communi project drew funds from both social and the rural envelopes to integrate migrants in a rural area at risk of abandonment... And besides the various EU funds, Member States and private-sector foundations are also footing the bill for integration projects.

#### VOICE 2

But whatever the source of funding, all successful projects have one thing in common: they build on a COMPREHENSIVE strategy for the integration of migrants into rural communities. What does this mean?

#### MUSIC JINGLE

#### VOICE 1

Well, it means they think about the needs of migrants and the needs of the community, and try to match them in a way that benefits both, through the engagement of the whole community, the development of training and job opportunities in the sectors which most need it, promoting the interaction of migrants with each other and with local authorities, community leaders, civil organisations...

#### VOICE 2

This comprehensive approach to the integration of migrants in rural communities is also favoured by the European Parliament, which has emphasized the positive role of migration in boosting economic growth and fostering social cohesion in rural areas.

#### VOICE 1

Because local communities are in the frontline of migration, MEPs have also called on Member States to strengthen the role of the social partners and NGOs working together with the authorities to promote the social and economic integration of migrant workers, including female seasonal workers, migrants and refugees.

#### VOICE 2

The role of local actors has also been recognized by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

#### VOICE 1

On the situation of women refugees, the Parliament encourages Member States to make greater use of the European Structural and Investment Funds, in addition to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, to foster their integration into the labour market.

#### VOICE 2

The truth is that for as long as Europe remains a better place to live... migrants will keep on knocking on the EU's doors, and EU leaders and institutions will need to find durable solutions to integrate the newcomers. And for this, we'll need money...

#### VOICE 1

Indeed... In the framework of the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework -which lays down spending ceilings in different areas until 2020- the Commission proposed last year to increase EU funds to support the integration of migrants, and to simplify rules to access these funds, including the modification of the rural development programmes to address the migration crisis.

#### VOICE 2

A degree of flexibility that, according to the Parliament, is very much needed to face up to the budgetary implications of the migration crisis...

#### VOICE 1

2017 will also provide an opportunity to review the Commission's European Agenda on Migration and see what's been achieved, including in the framework of the new migration partnerships with third countries, which aim at better managing migration flows.

VOICE 2

So, are we on the right path?

VOICE 1

Well, what's sure is that migration will feature high on the EU agenda for many years to come. And rural communities, with the support of the EU's Regional Development Policy and other funds, can play a big role in finding win-win solutions to help migrants settle into their new homes while addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing Europe's regions.

VOICE 1

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