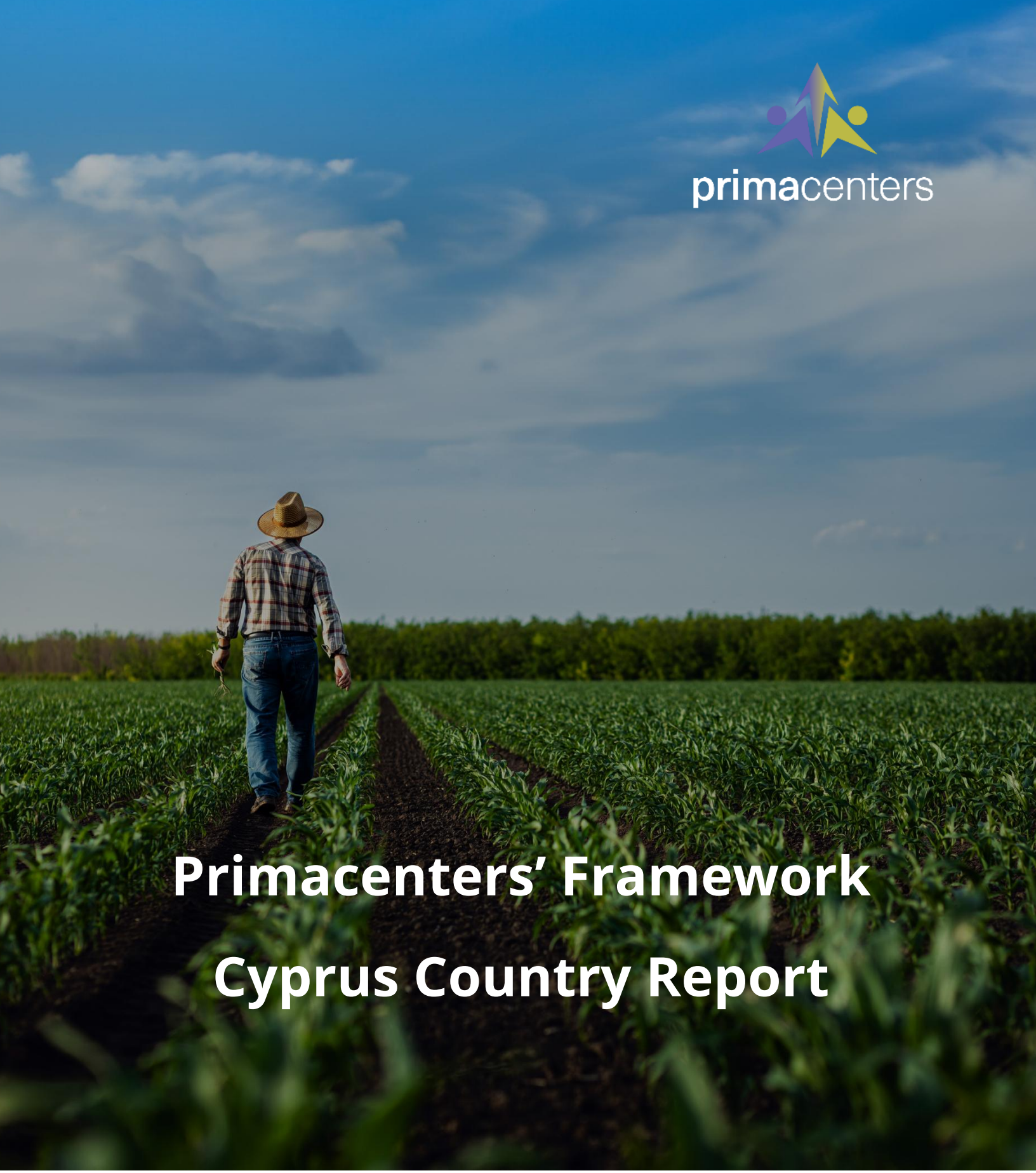


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Primacenters' Framework
Cyprus Country Report

Co-funded by the European Union

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Executive Summary

The PRIMACENTERS Cyprus Country Report examines the critical role of migrant workers in the primary sector, which, despite contributing only 1.3% to the national GDP, is vital for food production and exports. The sector relies heavily on non-EU migrant labor (accounting for nearly 27% of the workforce), in a predominantly male environment. Migrant workers face severe structural challenges, including labor exploitation, substandard living conditions, lack of regular labor inspections, and exclusion from protective employment frameworks. The report highlights the urgent need for comprehensive reforms, including regular workplace supervision, better integration practices, language courses, and the establishment of mechanisms to protect workers' rights and combat discrimination within rural communities.

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1.Introduction

According to the Census of Population and Housing (2021) of the Statistical Service of Cyprus the total population is 923.381, of which 719.252 (or 77.89%) Cypriots and 204.129 (or 22.11%) migrants. Out of the total population, 93.540 are European Union Citizens, representing 10.13% of the population, 107.168 are non-Europeans, representing 11.61% of the total population and 3.421 or 0.37% non-stated. Out of the total number of migrants, the 45.82% is made of European Union Citizens and the majority 54.17% of non-European Citizens.

In terms of gender, 48.70% of the total population are males and the rest 51.30% females. Similarly, out of the population of EU citizens in the country 49.25% are males and 51.75% females. The gender percentage for the male non-European citizens in the country is slightly higher representing the 50.51% and the female 49.49%.

The majority of European Union Citizens comes from Greece with 43.438, representing the 46.43% of EU citizens in the country, Romania 20.375 or 21.78% and Bulgaria 16.186 or 17.3% of EU citizens. Gender wise, 54.34% of the total number of Greeks in the country are males and 45.64% females, 47.65% of the Romanians are males and 52.25% females and 44.00% from the Bulgarian population are males and 54,00% females. EU citizens from all the other member states with smaller representation are also found in the country.

On the other hand, the higher number of non-European citizens comes from the United Kingdom with 18.918 (17.65%) of which 9.497 male and 9.421 females, following by Syria with 13.096 (12.22%) of which 8.470 males and 4.626 females and Russia with 12.250 (11.43%) of which 5.090 males and 7.160 females. Other non-EU countries with significant representation are: the Philippines (8.104, of which 92.28% are females), India (8.085), Nepal (6.949, of which 87.55% are females), Sri Lanka (6.654, of which 81.22% are females), Ukraine (3.977, of which 64.97% are females), Egypt (2.657, of which 88.36% are males), Vietnam (2.619, of which 86.22% are females), Georgia (2.223) and China (2.034). Non-EU citizens with smaller percentages of representation, from many other countries of the Middle East, Africa, America and Asia, are also found in the country.

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2. Primary Sector

According to the National Accounts of the Statistical Service of Cyprus 2025, the contribution of the primary sector in the economy and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Cyprus for 2024 is only 1.3%. Despite the low contribution in the total economy, primary sector remains vital for the production of a variety of crops and animal products for domestic consumption and exports. According to the Agricultural Statistics 2022 of the Statistical Service of Cyprus, the major agriculture crops include cereals (i.e., wheat, barley and oats), legumes (i.e, cowpeas, broad beans), industrial and fodder crops, vegetables and melons, fruits, carobs and olives. Livestock production includes the production and slaughtered of animals and poultry and the production of milk, eggs and honey. Fishing including the caught of different kinds of sea fishing and aquaculture including seabass, gilt-head seabream, trout and shrimps.

The Labour Force Survey (2022) of the Statistical Service of Cyprus provides that the total number of employment in Sector A: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing for the year 2024 is 10,666. It is noted that the numbers of this survey refer to the main employment of the participants as stated by them; total employment, including secondary employment and family workers is provided by the Agriculture Statistics and presented below. The gender distribution appears very unequal as the vast majority 8.577 or 80.41% is represented by males and only 2.089 or 19.59% of the total employment is represented by females.

Additionally, table 1 below presents the nationality distribution of the total employment in the sector for 2024:

Table 1: Employment, Sector A: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, year average 2024

	Total Number		**Male**		**Female**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Cypriots	7.549	70.78	6.020	79.75	1.529	20.25

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EU citizens	238	2.23	151	63.44	87	36.55
Non-EU citizens	2.879	26.99	2.405	83.54	474	16.46
Totals	*10.666*	*100*	*8.577*	*80.41*	*2.089*	*19.59*

As we observe the nationality distribution, Cypriots have the larger share with 70.78% of the total employment, followed by non-EU citizens with 26.99% and 2.23% of EU Citizens. The gender distribution among all ethnic groups corresponds to the overall gender division as above; it is a male dominant sector as the male present ranges from circa 64% - 84% of total employment whilst the female circa 17% - 20%.

The Agricultural Statistics 2022 of the Statistical Service of Cyprus provides the total employment in the sector subdivided by category, sub-sector and gender. At Table 2 below, we observe that total employment in the sector is nearly double in compare with the numbers provided by the Labour Force Survey. We also observe that the vast majority 92.73% is employed in the sub-sector 'Crop and Livestock Production', the sub-sector 'Fishing' employs 6.14% of the total employment and 'Forestry' only 1.13%. Another important observation in regards to the gender division of 'Holders and Family Members' in all three sub-sectors is the overrepresentation of male against female employment: for the sub-sector 'Fishing' the male presence is 100%, for 'Forestry' the presence of male is 70% over 30% of female and for the sub-sector 'Crop and Livestock Production' employment of males reaches 79.65% over 20.35% of females. The male employment domination in the sector is also verified by the gender distribution of employees. Similarly, male employees in the sub-sector 'Fishing' is 100%, in 'Forestry' the percent of male employees is 83.96% and the female 16.04% and in 'Crop and Livestock Production' the male presence reaches up to 89.94% of employment over 10.06% of female.

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Table 2: Employment in Agriculture by category, gender and sub-sector 2022

SUB-SECTOR	Numbers	% Sub-sector	% of holders and employees	% gender
CROP AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION	**18,642**	**92.73**		
Holders and family members	10,558		56.64	
Males	8,409			79.65
Females	2,149			20.35
Employees	8,084		43.36	
Males	7,271			89.94
Females	813			10.06
FORESTRY	**227**	**1.13**		
Holders and family members	40		17.62	
Males	28			70.00
Females	12			30.00
Employees	187		82.38	
Males	157			83.96
Females	30			16.04
FISHING	**1,234**	**6.14**		

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Holders and family members	780		63.21	
Males	780			100.00
Females	0			0
Employees	454		36.79	
Males	454			100.00
Females	0			0
TOTAL	**20,103**	**100**		
Holders and family members	11,379		56.60	
Males	9,218			81.01
Females	2,161			18.99
Employees	8,725		43.40	
Males	7,882			90.34
Females	843			9.66

The majority of interviewees in the study reported that the primary sector in Cyprus is historically one of the worst labour sectors for migrant workers. Currently, the majority of workers in the primary sector comes from Third Countries and are employed either as seasonal workers, temporary workers (i.e., Asylum seekers having the right to work) or 'permanent' workers, with a temporary migration status; a minor number of EU citizens coming from countries of the ex-Soviet bloc are also found in the sector. As it is mentioned, since the 80' and the first wave of migration, primary sector workers experience the worst terms of employment in comparison to other sector workers and humiliating living conditions; often, they are subjected to exploitation, human trafficking and intolerable behaviours. One of the key

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changes identified by the participants in regards to the employment of migrant workers in the sector is the fact that the recent Employment Framework of Migrant Workers (2025) of the government, which aims among others to the protection the equal treatment of workers and working rights, does not provide for migrant workers in the primary sector. Thus, migrant workers in the sector still remain subjected to the many and different forms of exploitation.

3. Migrants' Challenges

One of the key challenges of migrant workers in the sector reported is the lack of regular supervision and inspection. Given that the majority of migrant workers of the sector are scattered all over the rural and mountainous areas of the Island and usually in small farming establishments and in small groups, interventions such as trade union supervision and labour inspections are very rare. This gap of regular supervision and communication with trade unions, which is contrary to the common trade union practice found in other sectors and business establishments, is among the determining factors of the working and living conditions of migrant workers in the sector. Additionally, and despite the established mechanism, labour inspections are rarely performed and when they are carried out, they usually focus on the detection of undeclared workers rather than on employment and living conditions of workers.

The living conditions of workers in the primary sector have been assessed by the participants as a real challenge. They are often placed in completely inappropriate accommodation without the essential household equipment, running water, electricity and showers and/or in overcrowded accommodations and/or in remote from the communities' locations. Further than that, the accommodation of migrant workers in the sector is among the terms of their employment, which provides a deduction from their wages. The standards of the provided accommodation, as denounced by the participants, do not correspond to the wage deduction in most of the cases. The lack of a mechanism for supervising such aspects of the employment of migrant workers in the sector reinforces employers' exploitation contributing to the perpetuation of the phenomenon.

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Another key challenge is lack and/or inadequacy of integration practices. The participants have raised the need for more action by both the state and the communities for the successful integration of migrant workers in the society in general and their communities, in specific. It seems that migrant workers in the sector rarely participate in the social and cultural life of their communities; it is more likely to participate in events when they are invited by their employers and/or other members of the community. The key role of local communities and local leadership in the integration process of migrants has been well and repeatedly stated by the interviewees. It is said that local communities participating in related EU funds develop inclusive practices or joint events for migrant and local populations but rarely these practices occur in the absence of funds or due to inclusive convictions of the communities.

Another key challenge mentioned is acceptance; acceptance by the communities, by the inhabitants of rural areas, by the employers and by the society at large. Acceptance is key for social integration, as mentioned, and depends on factors including the composition and size of rural areas that migrants found themselves in, the ethnic background of migrants, beliefs and ideologies of inhabitants and the presence or absence of community practices. Often, the rhetoric of communities and community leaders is usually very negatively emanated by populistic attitudes, bias and stereotypes against migrants and despite the relations often developed and the support that local community members provide to migrant workers.

Other important challenges and problems that migrants in the sector confront, as perceived by the interviewees are: (1) lack of information on migrants' rights, (2) the language of their employment contracts, (3) lack of information on essential services (i.e., health services, police, independent authorities), (4) lack of information on supportive services for migrants (i.e., MKOs, migrant associations and communities, trade unions), (5) overexploitation by employers (i.e., long and extra unpaid working hours, performing tasks for others than the employer, performing tasks not related with the employment contract), (6) communication problems due to insufficient Greek language skills, (7) the fact that asylum seekers have different terms of employment from the standard employment contracts in the sector, (8) retention of the official documents of the workers by the employers, (9) restriction of movement outside of the workplace for many workers; a practice that violates the right of workers for autonomy, (10) discrimination, exploitation and inhumane treatment; many workers are often treated with depreciation due to their personal characteristics (i.e., colour, religion/believe, language) and/or vulnerable positions and conditions (11) verbal abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse and threats including the

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threat for deportation, (12) violation of the terms of employment as provided by their contracts including non-payment of wages and reduced wages.

Regarding the lack of information about migrant workers' rights, the participants underlined the importance of the issue and reported that the majority of migrant workers in the primary sector is not aware of their rights. The reported major reasons of this incomplete knowledge of workers' rights are: (a) the questionable process of employment of TCNs through the private employment agents in both their home countries and in Cyprus (as mentioned, they are often accused and engaged in exploitation of migrants, inhumane treatment and human trafficking), (b) the language of the employment contracts, (c) the lack of welcoming and information services before and upon their arrival in the country; in fact, migrant workers are completely uniformed about their prospective employers, their living conditions, rights and responsibilities (d) the lack of regular communication with their trade union representatives and (e) the lack of easy access to essential services due to the remote location of their working establishments. Furthermore, the participants reported that even the fundamental right for socialisation and communication in their local communities is violated due to the long hours of work outside of their provided working schedules.

4. Employer Challenges

The reported challenges that employers face are mostly related with the bureaucratic process for employing migrant workers and the fact that often migrant employees abandon their job positions without noticing their employers. The transferring of agricultural skills to new entrants in the sector, workplace training and guidance are additional challenges reported by the participants. This occurs mainly due to the language communication gap that exists between migrants and employers and the inexperience of migrants with the agricultural/farming processes. In combination with the other exogenous challenges that the sector confronts (i.e. extreme weather conditions, destruction of agricultural crops, animal diseases, pest infestations), these challenges become even harder particularly for small agriculture establishments.

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Employers, according to the participants, are generally aware about the rights of their employees and their own obligations towards them. The problem, however, is that many employers exhibit inhumane treatment against migrant workers, treat them unfairly, discriminate against them, retain their personal and travelling documents and rule their working and private lives. Other employers avoid informing their employees about their working rights because of the fear of the movement of workers in other sectors, which is an unfounded fear because migrants in the primary sector do not have the legal right to move in other sectors but only to establishments of the same sector.

The participants believe that the phenomenon of undeclared work in the primary sector is not as extensive as in other sectors (i.e., constructions) due to the established processes for the employment of workers from third countries. The information system 'Ergani', through which employers are required to notify the Ministry of Labour new recruitments from the first day of employment or termination of employment, the terms of employment of employees as well as the strict legislation for undeclared work are considered as good practice contributing to the elimination of the phenomenon.

Over-exploitation of migrants, however, is one of the most serious problems in the sector. Migrants in the sector usually work long after their working schedules, provided by their employment contracts, without extra pay, perform tasks unrelated with their job description and work for others (i.e., relatives of employers) and other places without pay. The primary responsibility for this over-exploitation is attributed to the employers but other factors are also identified by the participants such as the inadequate labour inspections and the lack of interventions by the state to address the issue. From the employers' perspective, the long hours of work of migrant workers are attributed to the fact that the nature of agricultural work cannot be fitted to standard working hour schedules. Coordination among the stakeholders – state agencies, trade unions, employers' organisations – undertaking common practices/policies is the suggestion provided by the participants in addressing the issue. The reactivation of the 'Triparty Inspection Committee' led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurances, aiming to perform regular workplace inspections, is a recommendation expressed by some participants as well. Other recommendations such as community and inclusive practices and regular communication with the migrants and their associations have been also expressed.

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5. Cultural and Social Factors

The cultural context including the feeling of superiority of locals, the rise of racism ideology in the country and the impact of the new political landscape on migrants and migration, the instrumentalization of the migration issue by certain political groups, the negative stereotypes against migrants or specific groups of migrants (i.e., unintelligent, lazy, dirty), the broadcasting of negative stereotypes and prejudice for migrants by the media and social media and the prevailing belief of the overpopulation of migrant workers in the country are factors contributing negatively, along with the lack of appropriate measures and policies, to the successful integration of migrants. The restrictive migration model in Cyprus, which prohibits TCNs workers to claim citizenship forcing them to abandon the country after 4-5 years of work, is also affecting the way that the local population and communities view and behave against migrants.

6. Focus group and interviews findings

Ten separate interviews were conducted with individuals involved in the primary sector and related to migrant labor. Their views offer a clear picture of the challenges and needs that exist on both the migrant and employer sides.

All ten interviews mentioned that migrants find it difficult to easily integrate into the primary sector due to various factors. The main problems are language barriers, lack of knowledge of local legislation, and lack of recognition of their qualifications. In some cases, there is also talk of the reluctance of certain nationalities to work in the agricultural sector. The cost of obtaining a work permit was also highlighted, which is often borne by the migrants themselves.

In summary, the ten interviews highlight the multifaceted challenges of integrating migrants into the primary sector and conclude that there is a need for more targeted support for both migrants and employers.

Furthermore, two focus groups were conducted. The **first group** gives insight into real migrant experiences on the ground, highlighting **discrimination, isolation, and labor exploitation**. The

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second group reveals **policy-level awareness, initiatives**, and **structural gaps**, with a focus on building systemic support and integration frameworks.

7.Policy, practices and recommendations

The recommendations that the participants provided in regards to the support migrant workers need are:

- *modification of the migration model in the country that seriously considers the rights of migrant male and female workers paying particular attention the UN and EU conventions,*
- *provision of integral information about the working rights of workers in the sector, the leaving conditions and the available essential services (i.e., police, migration services, embassy, trade unions, health system) before and after they arrive in the country,*
- *encouragement of migrant workers in the sector for trade union action and participation,*
- *regular workplace supervision by trade union representatives,*
- *regular labour inspections by the Department of Labour Inspections,*
- *design of community inclusive practices and integration activities after mapping the locations where migrant primary sector workers are found, considering the ethnic backgrounds of migrants,*
- *provision of adequate Greek language courses for migrant workers in the sector and all migrants,*
- *promotion of collective actions for the fight against the negative rhetoric against migrants,*
- *promotion of targeted public awareness campaigns for the rights of migrant workers and the phenomena of workplace discrimination, racism and intolerance,*
- *provision of state funds for research projects documenting the realities of migrant workers in the sector,*
- *support for the establishment and/or empowerment of the organisations of migrant communities,*
- *collaboration of social partners with local communities/municipalities and provision of incentives in order to take inclusive action supported by strong political will and against the instrumentalization of the migration issue,*

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- *establishment of a mechanism for the inspection of the living conditions of migrant workers and whether these provided living conditions correspond to the respective deduction from the primary workers' wages.*

8. Conclusion

The Cyprus country report under PRIMACENTERS WP2 examines the role of migrant workers in the primary sector, highlighting critical demographic, economic, and social issues. While the primary sector contributes only 1.3% to Cyprus's GDP, it remains essential for food production and exports. As of 2024, 10,666 individuals are employed in this sector—predominantly Cypriots (70.78%), with non-EU citizens comprising 26.99%. The workforce is overwhelmingly male (over 80%), and employment is concentrated in crop and livestock production. Migrant workers, mainly from third countries, face significant challenges including labour exploitation, substandard living conditions, lack of access to essential services, and limited community integration. Despite existing employment frameworks, these workers remain largely unprotected by national labour policies, leaving them vulnerable to abuses such as unpaid work, document confiscation, and discriminatory treatment. Employers face communication and bureaucratic hurdles, yet some perpetuate exploitative practices. Broader cultural and political issues—such as racism, stereotyping, and exclusionary migration policies—further isolate migrants. Interviews and focus groups confirm these realities and emphasize the urgent need for structural reforms. Key recommendations include enhancing legal protections, improving access to information and services, increasing inspections, promoting integration through community initiatives, and supporting migrant-led organizations and public awareness campaigns to combat discrimination and exploitation.

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9.Annex A: WP2 – Activities Numbers

County	**Cyprus**
Name of the event	**Number of participants**
Networking event 1	8
Networking event 2	7
Networking event 3	7
Focus group	8
Interviews	10
MoUs	9

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