

The Agricultural Labour Markets in Slovenia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic

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Abstract.

Motivation, Purpose, and Objectives

This study investigates agricultural labour markets in Slovenia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, three post-socialist countries facing similar demographic, economic, and structural transformations in agriculture. Motivated by declining rural populations, ageing workforces, and labour shortages amidst evolving European Union (EU) policies, the research aims to understand factors influencing agricultural employment dynamics. Key objective includes comparison of labour market structures and dynamics identifying determinants of agricultural labour participation, and evaluating how national and EU-level interventions shape labour market outcomes (Bojnec and Fertő, 2022).

Methodology

The study applies a comparative approach. Quantitative analysis involves secondary data from Eurostat (2022), OECD (2024), European Commission (2025), national statistical offices, and agricultural censuses, examining employment trends, and demographic shifts, enabling cross-country comparisons and policy-relevant insights.

Findings

The agricultural labour markets in Slovenia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic share common features shaped by their geographic proximity, socialist legacies, and European Union (EU) membership, while each country faces distinct economic, demographic, and policy conditions.

In Slovenia about 6–8% of workforce is in agriculture — a sharp decline from the socialist era. Most agricultural production comes from small, family-owned farms that rely heavily on family labour. Seasonal labour is important, particularly in fruit and vegetable farming, viticulture, and livestock. Key challenges include an aging farming population, rural depopulation, low wages, relatively high land costs, and competition from EU producers. Slovenia aims to encourage organic and sustainable farming, but productivity remains relatively low.

Slovakia’s agricultural employment is around 4–6% of the workforce. Agriculture remains important in rural areas and is characterized by a mix of large-scale enterprises — remnants of the socialist era — and smaller family farms. Slovakia relies on migrant workers to fill seasonal and permanent roles in fruit and vegetable picking, dairy, and meat processing. The sector struggles with an aging workforce, land fragmentation, and underdeveloped rural infrastructure. Slovakia is modernizing its agriculture, emphasizing productivity improvements, sustainability, and organic farming.

In the Czech Republic around 3–5% of the workforce is engaged in the agricultural sector. Agriculture remains vital in rural regions and is highly diversified, including crop production, livestock, dairy, and forestry. The sector is more industrialized, with large agribusinesses dominating production, though family farms persist, often consolidated into larger operations. There is strong demand for skilled workers in machinery operation, plant protection, and animal husbandry, but labour shortages persist due to migration to urban areas and other sectors.

Across all three countries, agricultural employment has steadily declined due to urbanization and shifts to non-agricultural sectors. The workforce is aging, and attracting young people is challenging due to relatively low wages, difficult working conditions, and limited access to capital. Reliance on migrant labour for seasonal work presents vulnerabilities, especially under evolving EU labour mobility rules and geopolitical uncertainties.

A trend toward larger agricultural farms and enterprises has emerged, though small family farms remain important, particularly in Slovenia and Slovakia. To ensure the long-term viability of their agricultural sectors, there is need to focus on attracting youth through education, training, and financial support for new farmers. In addition, there is a need for technological innovation adopting modern technologies to boost productivity and reduce labour intensity improving labour mobility management and developing a skilled, adaptable workforce.

Keywords: agricultural labour markets, family labour, hired labour, Central and Eastern Europe

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