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**ANNALS OF THE POLISH ASSOCIATION  
OF AGRICULTURAL AND AGRIBUSINESS ECONOMISTS**

ROCZNIKI NAUKOWE  
STOWARZYSZENIA EKONOMISTÓW ROLNICTWA I AGROBIZNESU

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Received: 31.12.2023

Acceptance: 14.03.2024

Published: 20.03.2024

JEL codes: J21, J24, J43

Annals PAAAE • 2024 • Vol. XXVI • No. (1)

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DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0054.4245

**NINA DREJERSKA<sup>1</sup>**

Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW, Poland

**RURAL INHABITANTS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF LABOUR  
MARKET CHALLENGES**

**Key words:** labour supply, rural areas, megatrends, outflow from/inflow to agriculture, farms succession, education, skills

**ABSTRACT.** The study delves into the nuanced challenges rural inhabitants face within the contemporary labour market landscape. As rural areas experience dynamic socio-economic shifts, this research aims to comprehensively understand the intricate intersection between rural livelihoods and emerging labour market trends. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study investigates the constraints and opportunities in accessing and thriving within the labour market. The methodology includes pointing out the impact of megatrends described within the Horizon 2020 RURALIZATION project on the labour market and reviewing the research topics addressed during the XVII Congress of the European Association of Agricultural Economists 2024. The megatrends identified include an ageing population, the influence of globalisation, the ramifications of urbanisation, environmental stewardship, climate change concerns, efforts to counteract unequal development and rural decline, the surge in food demand, infrastructural considerations, regional accessibility, and connectedness, as well as the evolving patterns of migration. The review of contributions provided to the XVII EAAE Congress underscores the significance of addressing the inflow and outflow of the labour force in agriculture. Delving into specific aspects such as farm succession and the various factors influencing these processes, including the impact of agricultural policies, further solidifies the assertion that labour supply in rural areas holds paramount importance within agricultural economic research.

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: nina\_drejerska@sggw.edu.pl

## INTRODUCTION

The significance of work in the lives of individuals is a subject of considerable academic inquiry and societal relevance. Work, broadly construed as productive and purposeful activity, is pivotal in shaping the social, psychological, and economic dimensions of human existence. At the core of its importance lies its capacity to provide individuals with a sense of purpose and identity, contributing profoundly to their overall well-being. Tadeusz Kotarbiński [1973] indicated that work is a series of actions having the character of overcoming difficulties to satisfy someone's essential needs. At the same time, he wrote on the essential needs as serious tasks, assuming that a task is serious if and only if its non-performance threatens evil of such a measure as the loss of life, the health of loved beings, and the joy of living. As such, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role of work in individuals' lives reflects an interdisciplinary examination encompassing insights from sociology, psychology, economics, and philosophical discourses [e.g. Będkowski 2022]. This wide philosophical background cannot be forgotten when starting any studies on work and the labour market.

More detailed framing of the investigation of labour supply decisions of rural inhabitants also requires at least a short reference to which locations are understood as rural, knowing that rural areas are often defined through varying lenses [Drejerska et al. 2014, Rakowska 2014, Bański and Mazur 2016], such as population density or distance from central cities (measured not only in kilometres but also in travel time using various means of transportation). For the sake of brevity, specific definitions will not be provided here; however, it is important to note that the discussion encompasses rural areas within functional metropolitan zones, those in proximity to urban functional areas, and those in more remote locations.

Considering such differentiated areas, it must be noted that the sectoral structure of economic activity of rural residents [e.g. Wojewodzic et al. 2020] and, more generally – the labour market is subject to many challenges. It is essential to recognise the dynamic nature of employment for rural inhabitants. Limiting the focus solely to rural labour markets may oversimplify the reality, as many individuals in rural areas work within their local communities and in urban settings [Drejerska 2018]. The boundaries between rural and urban employment are increasingly porous, with individuals often navigating between these spaces based on opportunities and economic demands. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the employment landscape should consider the fluidity of rural inhabitants in participating in diverse work environments rather than isolating discussions to a rigid rural labour market framework. That is why it seems more relevant to discuss the situation of rural inhabitants in the labour market, referring not only to individuals but also to household labour supply decisions [e.g. Chiappori et al 2022]. For example, Oded Stark and David E. Bloom [1985], co-authors of the new economic theory of migration,

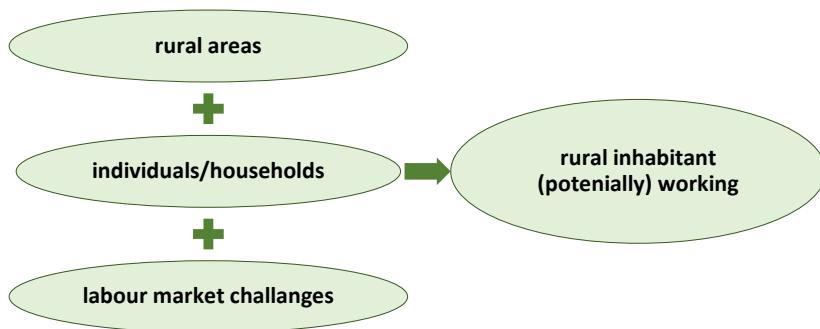


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Source: own study

point out that the decision to change the sector of employment may be driven by a tendency to avoid risk – if one member of the household changes employment sector to one in which wage is inversely correlated, statistically independent or slightly positively correlated with the salary in the previous sector (in which at least one other household member is still working). This relationship explains the change in one person's work sector and that the remaining household member has not made such a change. There is simply a kind of insurance by diversifying sources of income.

In the contemporary global landscape, labour markets face a myriad of complex challenges that demand careful examination in some specific sectors, usually investigated in the context of rural areas. The role of technological advancements [e.g. Kusz and Misiak 2017], demographic shifts [Pomianek and Kapaj 2018, Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska and Wagner 2023], and unforeseen global events [Franc-Dąbrowska and Drejerska 2022] has significantly reshaped employment dynamics. From the rise of automation and artificial intelligence [e.g. Weremczuk 2022] to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic [Czech et al. 2021, Gomółka et al. 2021], labour markets are navigating a transformative period that necessitates rigorous analysis.

This paper explores the multifaceted challenges confronting modern labour markets, exploring their implications for workforce dynamics. By dissecting the intricacies of the above-mentioned dimensions (Figure 1), it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of work and provide insights that can inform evidence-based approaches for fostering resilient, inclusive, and adaptive labour markets. By adopting a comprehensive approach, this paper sheds light on the intricate relationship between rural inhabitants and the labour market. This exploration also contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the functioning of rural areas, with particular emphasis on the role of agriculture and agribusiness in shaping the future of these regions.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study delves into rural inhabitants' challenges within the contemporary labour market landscape. The objectives include identifying the impact of megatrends described within the Horizon 2020 RURALIZATION project on the labour market and reviewing the research topics addressed during the XVII Congress of the European Association of Agricultural Economists 2024.

The paper refers to the current state of the art in labour economics. Additionally, it applies some data from public statistics concerning the demographical trends in rural areas of Poland.

The project RURALIZATION (The opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms) was founded as one out of four proposals under the call Rural Renaissance, assuming that the design of modern rural policies requires capturing and anticipating the long-term trends affecting European rural areas [EC 2017]. The project was finalised in April 2023 with a conference hosted by the European Committee of the Regions. This study refers to the author's selection of megatrends defined by the project consortium, which are crucial to the situation of rural inhabitants in the labour market. The detailed methodology of trend analysis is available in the deliverable resulting from the project [Kuhmonen et al. 2021].

The selection of the chosen project as a primary source for defining megatrends in rural areas stems from its relevance and timeliness in addressing the specific focus of this paper. This project holds paramount significance due to its recent completion, rendering it both contemporary and distinctly in sync with the evolving landscape of rural dynamics. Being a product of recent collaboration and discourse among researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders, it reinforces its relevance and positions itself as a valuable resource for shaping evidence-based policies. Its timely nature and the involvement of diverse perspectives make it a credible foundation for defining and understanding the megatrends influencing rural areas in the present socio-economic landscape. At the same time, it is essential to note that the project was leveraged as a wellspring of insightful definitions, while the author of the paper did not actively contribute to the project – the author's role is limited to analysis, ensuring an objective extraction of pertinent definitions while maintaining a clear distinction from direct project participation.

The author actively participated in the XVII EAAE Congress, and the inclusion of this aspect in the study stems from the unique significance of the event. The EAAE Congress, being a triennial gathering, is a pivotal platform for exchanging innovative ideas within research and teaching in agricultural economics and related fields. Incorporating insights from this event enriches the study by tapping into the latest advancements and perspectives shared during this influential and periodic assembly.

## RESULTS

In discussing any trends related to labour economics, it is necessary to refer to the issue of demographical changes as they determine the supply part of the labour market. According to forecasts from Statistics Poland and the Statistical Office in Olsztyn [2022], Poland's population will decline steadily and reach 34.0 mln by 2050. The upward trend will continue until 2030 (a 3.1% increase compared to 2010), after which the population is projected to decline – in 2050, the rural population will be only 0.2% larger than in 2010. The rural population will increase in 2050 compared to 2010 in 6 regions: Pomorskie (by 24.2%), Wielkopolskie (by 15.1%), Małopolskie (by 9.7%), Dolnośląskie (by 4.8%), Mazowieckie (by 3.4%) and Kujawsko-Pomorskie (by 2.7%). The remaining regions will experience a population decline, with the largest in Opolskie (by 20.6%). This demographic aspect is listed within the RURALIZATION project as a first megatrend influencing rural areas. It, as well as the others and their effects on the situation of rural inhabitants in the labour market, are briefly summarised in Table 1.

The labour market was addressed directly during the 2023 EAAE Congress during the session entitled Agricultural Labour, with some contributions referring to the labour market in developing countries and issues such as child labour [Van den Broeck and Akaribo 2013, Brandt et al. 2023]. Some researchers addressed one of the fundamental topics of labour economics as income. For example, Anna Fabry et al. [2023] found structural disparities in wages and job quality between men and women and between local and migrant workers, trade-offs between wage and non-wage dimensions of decent work, and sector and company differences in the Peruvian horticultural sector, while Georgios Miaris et al. [2023] concluded that an increase in farm diversification decreased the total farm and the family labour hours, and increased farm income variability in Swedish agriculture. One possible reason for the latter result may be that activities related to farm diversification are not, *per se*, a stable source of income and are contingent upon prevailing market conditions. Other researchers delved deeper into the financial dimensions of agricultural employment, examining the connection between health coverage and farmworker productivity within the California (USA) agriculture industry [Richards et al. 2023]. The findings indicated that farmworkers with employer-provided health coverage exhibited notably higher productivity levels. At the same time, employers who offered health coverage retained an additional economic surplus for each hour of work their employees performed due to a health productivity premium.

However, the relations to the labour market topics were not limited to this one session explicitly devoted to agricultural labour. For instance, Sebastian Neuenfeldt et al. [2023] addressed farm structure and spatial information on farm exits in Germany during the poster session Farm Structure. This contribution brought not only interesting insight into structural changes (e.g. older farmers were more likely to exit the business, and exit

Table 1. Megatrends and their impacts on farms and their resources, as well as on labour market and migration

Megatrends	Impact on farms and their resources	Impact on labour market and migration
Ageing population	– impact on structural changes of farms (e.g., succession)	– emigration from rural to urban areas, – „silver economy” (a) labour force participation of the elderly, (b) service sector – demand e.g. care services
Benefiting from globalisation	– increase in the number of large farms (hired labour)	– growing number of jobs and higher income
Benefiting from urbanisation	– differentiated impact on the structure of farms (geographical location and direction of production)	– growing number of jobs and higher incomes in urban functional areas (commuting), – influx of new residents
Caring for the environment	– new/modified modes of production, – opportunities for farms with diverse activities (e.g., education)	– new/green jobs
Climate change	– diverse influence on the structure and directions of production, – different business models (e.g., community-supported agriculture)	– inflow of people into rural areas
Counteracting unequal development and rural decline	– the risk of a decrease in the number of farms, – increasing importance of large farms	– inflow of new residents, – increase in jobs and income
Growing food demand	– stability of running a farm, – higher income	
Infrastructures, accessibility and connectedness of regions	– risk of decreasing the number of farms	– inflow of new residents, – different lifestyles – diversification of the economy
Migration patterns	– more significant opportunities to enter the sector, – opportunity to develop small farms (part-time)	– increased labour supply (opportunity but also risk)
Sustainability transition	– diversification of production, – diversified business models	– development of local economies (jobs, income)

Source: own compilation based on RURALIZATION project

probabilities varied most with age) but also proposed methodology using a logit model to examine the decision of farmers to exit the farming sector (data from the German Farm Structure Survey) but augmented by external data incorporating neighbouring and regional information (e.g. neighbouring information like age, size, distribution of land or farm growth; augmented data at farm level like standard gross margins and at county level like unemployment rate or population density). The authors also concluded that in the case of their model, farm-level variables showed more predictive power than neighbourhood variables.

Some scholars presented the results of investigations on labour inflow to agriculture. For example, Bazyli Czyżewski et al. [2023] investigated farm succession in three Eastern European countries: Romania, Moldova and Serbia, concluding that more-educated and more efficient small-scale farmers were less likely to pass on their farms because of a kind of “glass ceiling” (they might be aware that they have reached the “glass ceiling”, and they did not want such a future for their successors). The perspective of the young generations was investigated, for example, by Sari Forsman-Hugg et al. [2023], who identified issues and aspects indicated as essential to enter this sector (e.g. improving the image of agricultural and food production, a need for versatile incentives and exit models for those who give up farming, and a need for more information on alternative farm ownership models). This strand of research seemed to be even more detailly approached by Ilkay Unay-Gailhard and Mark A. Brennen [2023], pointing out that existing literature predominantly focused on sustaining farming careers while neglecting the potential of digital communication to engage young individuals in farming. Additionally, communication strategies for farming careers lacked adequate attention and could be better integrated into agricultural communications strategies by using the potential of digital communications. The topic of succession was also addressed in a case of a particular direction of production as cattle farming in France [Latruffe et al. 2023], who identified three types of successors: young farmers directly taking over from their parents and starting as business associates with them; late-coming farmers, of generally low level of education and usually not related to the transferors; as well as educated women seeking a change of career and taking over farms with family connections, although not their parents.

Understandably, the Congress of Agricultural Economists gathered contributions focused on agricultural jobs and inflow and outflow to/from this sector. However, Sophia Davidova and Katarzyna Zawalińska [2023] presented a broader perspective of rural jobs not predominantly in agriculture, indicating a need for more jobs outside this sector. Nevertheless, establishing non-agricultural jobs relies on the economic diversification of rural areas, which may be supported by the EU Common Agricultural Policy, even if it is not its explicit goal.

Some of the contributions mentioned above, but also traditionally state of the art (a more comprehensive review presented, for example, by Nina Drejerska [2018]), indicate the role of education and skills acquiring while rural individuals/households make decisions on labour market supply. This perspective was also acknowledged during the XVII EAAE Congress during the Digital Innovations in Agribusiness Education session, which spotlighted inspiring practices to foster the European information society in agribusiness management and rural development. One contribution [Chatzichristou 2023] referred to the comprehensive study of CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), whose report reflects unique CEDEFOP skills intelligence regarding developments and trends in employment and skills in the EU as well as the impact of the twin transition and demographic ageing on skill shortages. Some examples of innovative practices and pedagogies were presented. Agata Malak-Rawlikowska et al. [2023] contributed on innovative solutions and methods in professional agribusiness education within the e-AgriMBA Learning System, providing a high-quality, innovative educational and cross-border learning environment, which allows for the green and digital transformation of higher education [e-AgriMBA Erasmus+ 2023]. Nina Drejerska et al. [2023] covered the topic of the Creative Learning Method (CLM), an innovative training methodology to ignite creativity and motivate people to intentional learning, which may contribute to educational interventions with lectures-shows and interactive, inspirational talks and therefore aimed at making the students the protagonists of their learning process in a smart, creative and inclusive way [CL4Bio Erasmus+ 2023].

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the analyses conducted for the study demonstrate that labour market considerations are a pertinent element of the economic research landscape. The identified megatrends, including an ageing population, the influence of globalisation, the ramifications of urbanisation, environmental stewardship, climate change concerns, efforts to counteract unequal development and rural decline, the surge in food demand, infrastructural considerations, regional accessibility, and connectedness, as well as the evolving patterns of migration, collectively form a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in labour markets. Exploring detailed research problems within these overarching themes unveils potential future research directions and offers valuable insights into the intricate relationships unfolding in a constantly changing and dynamic environment. These research avenues, serving as beacons of knowledge, can further function as informed recommendations for evidence-based policymaking, particularly in agriculture and rural development.

In addition to the overarching conclusions drawn from the examination of megatrends affecting farms and their resources as well as labour market and migration, the review of contributions provided to the XVII EAAE Congress underscores the significance of addressing the inflow and outflow of the labour force in agriculture. Delving into specific aspects such as farm succession and the various factors influencing these processes, including the impact of agricultural policies, further solidifies the assertion that labour supply in rural areas holds paramount importance within economic research.

While this study provides valuable insights into the complex trends and processes shaping labour markets, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in its scope. Addressing the intricacies of multifaceted phenomena within the constraints of a concise paper necessarily involves a level of abstraction, and the depth of analysis might not fully capture the nuances of each identified megatrend and influencing factor. The comprehensive nature of the topic, encompassing aspects such as the inflow and outflow of the labour force, farm succession, and the influence of agricultural policies, means that a more granular exploration of each element would require dedicated and extensive research efforts. Consequently, this study can be viewed as a conceptual umbrella, providing a broad overview and a starting point for more detailed investigations into specific dimensions of labour dynamics. Furthermore, while encompassing a significant number of participants and their works, reviewing the XVII EAAE Congress's contributions may not comprehensively cover the entire landscape of research on the labour of rural inhabitants.

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## MIESZKAŃCY OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH W PERSPEKTYWIE WYZWAŃ RYNKU PRACY

**Słowa kluczowe:** zasoby pracy, obszary wiejskie, megatrendy, napływ do/odpływ z pracy w rolnictwie, dziedziczenie gospodarstw, edukacja, umiejętności

**ABSTRAKT.** W artykule dokonano analizy wyzwań, przed którymi stają mieszkańcy wsi na rynku pracy. Zmieniające się warunki społeczno-gospodarcze powodują potrzebę zrozumienia zależności między tradycyjnymi źródłami dochodu na wsi a nowymi trendami na rynku pracy. Przy użyciu mieszanych metod badawczych skupiono się na ograniczeniach i szansach, z jakimi borykają się mieszkańcy wsi, starając się znaleźć swoje miejsce na rynku pracy. Określono wpływ megatrendów zidentyfikowanych w ramach projektu Horyzont 2020 RURALIZATION na wiejski rynek pracy, jak również dokonano analizy tematów poruszanych podczas XVII Kongresu Europejskiego Stowarzyszenia Ekonomistów Rolnych w 2024 roku. Zidentyfikowane megatrendy obejmują starzenie się społeczeństwa, wpływ globalizacji, konsekwencje urbanizacji, zarządzanie środowiskiem, obawy związane ze zmianami klimatu, wysiłki na rzecz przeciwdziałania nierównomierному rozwojowi obszarów wiejskich, gwałtowny wzrost popytu na żywność, wzgłydy infrastrukturalne, dostępność regionalną i powiązania, a także zmieniające się wzorce migracji. Przegląd wystąpień przedstawionych na XVII Kongresie EAAE wskazuje na znaczenie badań nad napływem i odpływem zasobów pracy do rolnictwa. Bardziej szczegółowe wątki badawcze, takie jak na przykład sukcesja gospodarstw rolnych, w tym wpływ polityki rolnej, dodatkowo wzmacnia twierdzenie, że podaż pracy na obszarach wiejskich ma duże znaczenie w badaniach ekonomistów rolnych.

### AUTHOR

NINA DREJERSKA DR HAB. PROF. WULS

ORCID: 0000-0001-7591-8121

Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW

Institute of Economics and Finance

Department of Development Policy and Marketing

e-mail: nina\_drejerska@sggw.edu.pl

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Proposed citation of the article:

Drejerska Nina. 2024. Rural inhabitants in the perspective of labour market challenges. *Annals PAAAE* XXVI (1): 69-81.