

## NEW RESEARCH PROJECT SPANNING 10 COUNTRIES IS LAUNCHED TO STUDY THE IMPACT OF MIGRANTS IN RURAL AND MOUNTAIN REGIONS ACROSS EUROPE

*Migration is steadily at the core of European debate. Against this backdrop, MATILDE seeks to inform the discussion by focusing on the migration perspectives of rural and mountain regions. How does foreign immigration impact on these regions, often marred by the feeling of being “places that do not matter”?*

Funded under the EU research flagship programme H2020, the research project MATILDE, coordinated by the Institute for Regional Development of Eurac Research (Bolzano/Bozen), aims to understand the true development potential migration carries, with a specific focus on rural and mountain regions. The project is to be presented for the first time in Brussels, at a seminar organised by Euromontana on **December 11, 2019**.

MATILDE, an acronym which stands for Migration Impact Assessment to Enhance Integration and Local Development in European Rural and Mountain Regions, is a 3-year project starting on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 programme. The project involves 13 regions across Europe: these will provide the setting for 13 case studies that explore and assess the specific local **impact of migration in these rural and mountain regions**. Case studies in 10 European countries cover **different governance models** and **diverse policy fields**, spanning education and life-long learning, labour integration, health, mobility and equality.

Local stakeholders and citizens in rural and mountain regions have been largely marginalised in the debate about migration governance and impact. Utilizing an **action research methodology in 13 local case studies**, MATILDE engages local public spheres outside urban areas, thus contributing to **addressing misperceptions**, promoting long-lasting transformation of attitudes towards migration and contributing to a more informed participation of citizens in the migration debate.

“We aim to contribute to reversing the perspective on migration, too often depicted as a burden for receiving societies and territories. Thanks to cooperation between research institutions and practitioners, MATILDE will provide guidance on the conditions and policies that can turn migration into a resource for local development”, explains Andrea Membretti, the scientific coordinator of MATILDE. “With 80% of EU territory made up of rural, mountainous and remote areas, there is an urge to give due visibility to the perspective of these regions on such a key topic as migration nowadays”, he adds.

**Building on the expertise of 25 partners based in 10 different countries** (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Finland, Italy, the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Turkey), the project will consider the role of public institutions, economic and third sector players in facilitating or limiting the positive impact of migration, specifically with regard to the specific needs and capacities of rural and mountain regions.

When debating the impact of migration, media and public opinion tend to overemphasise the role of asylum seekers and refugees and their arrivals by sea: indeed, Italy currently hosts 95000 asylum seekers and refugees in its reception programmes. Their situation and chances of successful integration deserve our attention, however at the same time we should keep in mind that more than 5 million foreign citizens live in our country, representing the 8,7% of the population: their impact and needs should also be considered when discussing the topic of migration. For this reason, MATILDE adopts an **inclusive understanding of Third Country Nationals**, considering economic and family migrants, students and researchers, highly skilled migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, status holders and vulnerable groups.