The spatial mobility of workers over the course of individual working lives – Analyses for rural areas in Germany (MobiLä)

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- **The migration balances of the rural regions in Germany are characterized by marked heterogeneity**

- **More than 30 percent of workers moving within Germany to a rural area are return migrants**

- **The fact that the probability of migrating depends on the individual skill level tends to harm the regional labor supply in rural areas**

- **The specialization of the regional labor market, local public financial resources, cultural offerings and the (touristic) attractiveness of a region turned out to be important determinants of individual residential decisions**

Background and aim

The regional supply of (highly-)skilled labor is of high importance for the development of rural areas in a more and more knowledge-based economy. In times of demographic change, the relevance of the regional migration balance increases. Therefore, the project »MobiLä« aimed at providing new insights on the migration balances of rural areas in Germany. Furthermore, a focus was on the determinants of individual location decisions in the context of different types of internal migration, that is, emigration from rural areas, immigration to rural areas and return migration.

Data and analyses

The primary data source used in the project were the IAB-Integrated Employment Biographies (IEB). The IEB provide detailed information on about 90 percent of the workforce in Germany. Specifically, the data cover all employees subject to social security and the unemployed but exclude the self-employed and public servants.

Based on the IEB, we studied regional migration balances with a special focus on rural regions. Among other approaches, we applied machine learning techniques. Furthermore, we investigated the frequency of return migration and its significance for the immigration of labor to rural areas.

We studied individual residential decisions by means of micro-econometric regression analyses using information from the IEB and the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS).

Selected results

Regional migration balances in Germany are characterized by marked heterogeneity. They vary between and within types of regions, over time and across different groups of workers.

Compared to the national average, a larger share of workers moving to rural areas are return migrants. However, a high share of return migrants in total regional immigration from other regions often means comparatively few workers moving into the region who have not lived there before.

The better individual skills match with regional labor demand, the higher the probability is that, for instance, a young worker who recently graduated from a university (of applied sciences) or completed vocational training will choose the respective region as a residence. Local public financial resources, cultural offerings and the (touristic) attractiveness of a region turned out to be further regional characteristics important for individual residential decisions.

The probability of leaving a rural region increases with the worker's skill level, while the higher the individual skill level is the lower the probability of subsequent return migration. In general, this has an adverse effect on the regional labor supply in rural regions.