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Onwards, upwards?

Climate adaptation and internal migration: opportunities and challenges in mountain areas

Signal or noise? Yesterday afternoon at Alpweek 2022 in Brig, Switzerland, more than 50 participants from Alpine countries and groups examined migration to mountain regions as witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic and the blistering 2022 Summer.

Co-organized as a world café by FoLAP, UNIGE, HAFL, and MRI, the participants found the phenomenon to be real but highly diverse across the Alpine range with respect to destination, migrant profiles, and seasonality. Inbound migration was seen to create challenges *and* opportunities. Destination regions and towns may benefit from the arrival of new knowledge, skills, and perspectives. But they may also experience strains on financial resources, face urgent needs to rethink mobility, transport and energy use and generation, and respond to calls for opening up institutional pathways to ensure that newcomers have a say in local decisions.

Participants emphasized the importance of local integration and participation but also a regional imperative to collaborate on migration issues. A careful balance must be found between needs and expectations so as to avoid the domination of external, often romanticized mountain imaginaries; this is all the more important because differentiations such as rural/urban do not neatly align with mountain boundaries.

Workshop moderator Jörg Balsiger concluded that evidence of the phenomenon remains anecdotic and partial, requiring systematic and sustained observation and dialogue with concerned parties. A summary facilitating follow-up action will be disseminated through the co-organizers' communication channels.