

Spanish and Portuguese Construction Workers Close to Blows

Voice-over 1:

When is it all right for a worker to jump the border to go to work? Rui is Portuguese, but his job is in Spain. His case is common. He'll do the drive sixty kilometres from his home in northern Portugal with a vanload of colleagues to a building site in Vigo, Spain. That's causing a lot of bad feeling on the Spanish side. But Rui says the math is pretty simple.

Voice-over 2:

It's the wages! In Portugal, we were earning about half.

Voice-over 1:

Pick a number. The government says one thing; the unions say another. It's thought that around 15,000 Portuguese are labouring away in Galicia, the top-left corner of Spain, half of them under the official radar. Rui says he has everything in order, but he knows a lot of people who are having a bad time with it.

Voice-over 2:

They have to earn a living. There's no other way. There hasn't been much work in Portugal for some years, and now there's less of it in Spain as well. We didn't start out with those conditions. But I know lots of people living all together in one apartment. I wouldn't accept staying abroad. I'd prefer to work in Portugal.

Voice-over 1:

Construction in Spain has flourished in the past ten years, and somewhere along the way the cross-border flow of workers from Portugal became a torrent. Now Spain's unemployment rate has topped 10 per cent, and construction is one of the most affected sectors. Local labourers say that it's unfair that Portuguese workers work for wages lower than the union rate, on-site for excessively long hours and no social benefits.

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