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Spanish workers maintain strong presence in French grape harvest despite industry changes

Stable demand persists as higher wages and established migration patterns draw thousands to vineyards each year

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Around 13,500 Spanish workers are expected to travel to France this year to take part in the annual grape harvest, according to sources from Spain’s agri-food sector. This figure is similar to last year’s, reflecting a stable demand for Spanish labor in French

vineyards despite ongoing changes in the industry.

The number of Spanish grape pickers heading to France each year depends largely on forecasts for grape production, which can fluctuate due to weather conditions. In recent years, the number has shown a gradual decline. Between 2015 and 2017, about 15,000 Spaniards made the journey each season. The lowest recorded participation was in 1992, when only 10,800 workers traveled for the harvest. Industry experts attribute this downward trend not only to variable harvest sizes but also to increased use of technology and robotics in French vineyards. These advances have reduced the need for manual labor during the harvest.

The first groups of Spanish workers are scheduled to arrive in southern France during the second half of August. Most will stay for an average of 20 to 25 days, although some may extend their stay up to 40 or even 50 days by participating in both early and late harvests. The workforce is diverse: about 58 percent are men and 42 percent are women. Nearly 90 percent of those traveling this year have previous experience working in French vineyards. Many join established crews from their home regions, often bringing along family members or friends. This mix results in teams that include both seasoned pickers and younger newcomers.

One of the main reasons Spanish workers continue to seek employment in the French grape harvest is higher pay compared to similar jobs in Spain. The French minimum wage stands at €11.88 per hour, while Spain’s is €9.08 per hour. The standard workweek in France is 35 hours, with overtime paid at rates between 25 and 50 percent above the base wage. French labor laws also provide additional financial benefits: employees are exempt from certain health and retirement contributions, which increases take-home pay by about 12.25 percent without affecting their rights to social security or retirement benefits.

The annual migration of Spanish workers for the French grape harvest remains a significant event for both countries’ agricultural sectors. While technological advances may continue to reduce the need for manual labor over time, thousands of Spaniards still rely on this seasonal work as a source of income and opportunity each year.