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NIJHOFF

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF MIGRATION
AND LAW 24 (2022) 179–192

European
Journal of
Migration
and Law

brill.com/emil

Migrant Labour in the Agri-Food System in Europe: Unpacking the Social and Legal Factors of Exploitation

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1 Introduction

The aim of this Special Issue is to critically explore the complex links between labour migration and the agri-food sector in Europe, drawing attention to the variety of legal and social vectors and issues at stake in the contemporary forms of exploitation underpinning the agri-food system.

Our intention is to contribute to scholarly discussion on the protection of the rights of migrant workers in the agri-food system by providing an in-depth analysis of the interplay of legal, social, economic and cultural factors that foster the recourse to a low-wage and exploitable labour force in the agri-food sector, and that produce the conditions of vulnerability experienced by migrant workers in Europe. We therefore seek to provide a critical overview of the diverse drivers and processes contributing to a system that fosters workers' dependency on employers, confines a migrant labour force to specific sectors,

 | DOI:10.1163/15718166-12340125

and, simultaneously, facilitates their continuous replacement, profiting from specific situations of social, legal and economic vulnerability.

By adopting an interdisciplinary approach and focusing on the complex links between agri-food, migration and labour regimes, this Special Issue critically explores the dynamic socio-economic relationships between relevant European and national policies on labour mobility, migration and asylum, and agri-food restructuring processes.

Specific attention is devoted to the current and potential impact of the Covid-19 crisis on migrant labour in the agri-food sector, investigating the effectiveness of national institutional actions in addressing migrant labourers' working and living conditions, and in supporting long-term social and economic inclusion. From this perspective, the Special Issue intends to reflect on the extent to which the current pandemic crisis constitutes an opportunity for a new EU and national push to enforce labour rights and strengthen migrants' rights, ensuring fair labour and living conditions.

Lastly, while over recent years special attention has been paid to the conditions of exploitation of migrant workers in the agri-food sector in Southern Europe, in particular in Italy, Spain and Greece, several studies have also reported on the sub-standard and even abusive working conditions that migrant workers experience in Northern EU member states. The Special Issue deepens the analysis on this topic through a critical overview of, and comparison between Southern and Northern European countries, highlighting the impact of different socio-political systems, labour market dynamics and modes of production in fostering or preventing practices of exploitation and abuse in the agri-food sector.

Before illustrating the key issues addressed by the five papers of this Special Issue, we focus on the complex relationships between agri-food and migrant labour, and a more nuanced framing of exploitation in the agri-food system that links contemporary forms of exploitation to relevant legal and policy framework on migration and labour rights, as well as to existing status hierarchies and social relations.

The contributions to this Special Issue build on the findings of two projects funded by the Open Society Foundation (OSEPI) – "Going beyond raising awareness about migrant exploitation in Italian agriculture: why the system works the way it does" (2018), and "Is undeclared work in agriculture really just a Southern European problem and, if not, what is driving the demand elsewhere? Case studies on migrant labour in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden" (2019–2020) – which were coordinated by the editors of this Special Issue Letizia Palumbo, Alessandra Corrado and Anna Triandafyllidou under the auspices of the European University Institute's Global Governance Program and Migration Policy Centre. The findings of first projects were published

as three summary project reports: Corrado A., Caruso, Cascio M., Nori M., Palumbo L., Triandafyllidou A. (Eds.) (2018), *Is Italian agriculture a 'pull factor' for irregular migration – and, if so, why?*, OSEPI, Brussels; L. Palumbo and A. Corrado (Eds.) (2020), *Are Agri-food Workers only Exploited in Southern Europe? Case Studies on Migrant Labour in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden*, OSEPI, Brussels; and Palumbo, L. and Corrado, A. (Eds.) (2020), *Covid-19, Agri-food Systems, and Migrant Labour. The Situation in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden*, OSEPI, Brussels.[1] The contributions presented in this Special Issue pursue these arguments further and add an analytical reflection that aims to break new ground in underlying the ways in which the restructuring of the agri-food sector in Europe and globally has intertwined with migration and asylum policies in ways highly detrimental to migrant workers' and asylum seekers' rights.

2 The Agri-Food Sector and Migrant Labour

Although data cannot provide an effective picture of the labour force in the agri-food sector, due to the rate of temporary and undeclared work, especially with regard to migrant labour, official estimates show a significant increase in migrant workers in this sector over recent years. Between 2011 and 2017, more than 1.3 million natives employed in agriculture in the EU countries left the sector. This exit was partially offset by the entry of EU-citizen migrants and third country migrant workers: in that period the number of EU migrants working in the agricultural sector increased by 36% while the number of non-EU migrant workers increased by 31% (totaling 585,000 and 837,000 workers, respectively). As a result, throughout the EU there was an increase from 4.3% to 6.5% in the share that migrants (including both EU and non-EU foreign workers) represented out of the total number of people employed in the agricultural sector.[2]

In other words, the employment of migrant workers, often in precarious and exploitative conditions, has become a structural element of the agri-food system in many EU countries (including both Southern and Northern EU countries). Performing various activities in the production of staple crops, fruit, horticulture and viticulture, in the animal husbandry and meat sectors, and

1 The contribution by Letizia Palumbo to this Special Issue has also received funding from the EU's H2020 project VULNER (GA n. 870845), www.vulner.eu.

2 Kalantaryan, S., Scipioni, M., Natale, F. and Alessandrini, A., 2021. Immigration and integration in rural areas and the agricultural sector: An EU perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 88, pp. 462–472.

dairy production (in the processing and packaging phases), most migrant agri-food workers work long hours, are exposed to toxic pesticides and endure summer heat and winter cold for low pay.[3] Many live in degrading and unsanitary conditions, in some cases without access to fundamental and basic services.

Several studies[4] have pointed out how agri-food restructuring processes affecting most European countries, especially over the last thirty years, have constituted one of the main factors driving recourse to a labour force characterized by high flexibility, low wages and exploitative working conditions.

On the one hand, in a context of general and progressive rural exodus and labour market segmentation, rural areas have represented, in many European countries, a favourable setting for newcomers, as they provide easier access to basic livelihood sources and employment opportunities. Rural areas also offer degrees of non-visibility and informality that help accommodate migrants with different types of legal status, although this simultaneously paves the way for irregular practices and situations of harsh exploitation.

On the other hand, processes of farming modernization, increasing regulation and progressive integration within long and verticalized supply chains, marked by a strong imbalance of power, have produced price-cost squeeze on agriculture. This has resulted in the economic failure of many small farms and, at the same time, financial dependence among value chain actors at the level of agri-food production, processing and distribution, under a progressive market concentration. The employment of a cheap and exploitable migrant labour force has been a key element in these dynamics, not only for the survival and sustainability of agri-food enterprises, but also to support innovation and restructuring processes within the corporate-environmental regime in the neoliberal post-Fordist phase at a global level.[5]

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3 Corrado A., Caruso, F., Cascio M., Nori M., Palumbo L., Triandafyllidou A. (Eds.) (2018). *Is Italian agriculture a 'pull factor' for irregular migration – and, if so, why?*. OSEPI, Brussels; Schuh, B et al. (2019), Research for AGRI Committee – *The EU farming employment: current challenges and future prospects*, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels; Fiałkowska, K., and Matuszczyk, K., 2021. Safe and fruitful? Structural vulnerabilities in the experience of seasonal migrant workers in agriculture in Germany and Poland. *Safety Science*, 139, 105275.

4 Corrado, C. De Castro, D., and Perrotta, D. (2016). *Migration and Agriculture. Mobility and change in the Mediterranean area*. Routledge, London; Gertel, J., and Sippel, S.R. (2014). *Seasonal Workers in Mediterranean Agriculture. The Social Costs of Eating Fresh*. Routledge, London; Rye, J.F. and O'Reilly, K. (2021). *International labour migration to Europe's rural regions*, Routledge, London; Rye, J.F. and Scott, S., 2018. International labour migration and food production in rural Europe: a review of the evidence. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 58(4), pp. 928–952.

5 Bonanno, A. and Cavalcanti, J.S.B. (2011). *Globalization and the time-space reorganization: Capital mobility in agriculture and food in the Americas*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, UK; McMichael, P. (2013). *Food regimes and agrarian questions*. Fernwood

The European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has contributed to the transformation of rurality and agriculture by consolidating sectorial, social and territorial inequalities, often to the advantage of larger farms and companies, higher-potential areas and specialized agriculture.[6] Conversely, and as a consequence, family farming and rural areas have undergone dramatic processes of abandonment and depopulation. These dynamics have been partially 'fixed' with the arrival of migrants, who – as already underlined – have matched the demand for low-cost and flexible labour, but have also countered the rural exodus and demographic decline.

Recent studies have reflected on the conceptualization of the 'agriculture-migration nexus' as a kind of nodal or connected system with multiple relationships, highlighting the numerous, reciprocal links between agri-food production and human migration that co-construct and shape one another.[7]

A 'prosperity paradox' has emerged: as incomes increase, the share of local workers employed in the agri-food sector decreases, while at the same time the share of agricultural labour performed by precarious wage workers increases as agricultural production becomes concentrated in fewer, larger and more intensive farms. The tendency, in what are gradually resembling 'vegetable factories' or 'factories in the fields', is increasingly to hire workers in conditions of vulnerability, especially migrant workers with limited non-farm employment opportunities.[8]

Labour and migration regimes play a crucial role in the intersection of the restructuring of the agricultural production system and the exodus of local workers. Stringent migration legislation and policies, together with labour mobility policies and the labour market liberalization process, produce and influence the legal and social situation of vulnerability of migrants, rendering them the temporary, just-in-time and low-cost force required by market

Publishing, Nova Scotia; Fudge, J. and Strauss, K. (Eds.) (2014). *Temporary Work, Agencies and Unfree Labour Insecurity in the New World of Work*. Routledge, London.

6 De Roest, K., Ferrari, P. and Knickel, K., 2018. Specialisation and economies of scale or diversification and economies of scope? Assessing different agricultural development pathways. *Journal of Rural Studies* 59, pp. 222–231. Hennis, M. (2005). *Globalization and European integration: the changing role of farmers in the common agricultural policy*. Rowman & Littlefield; Lanham, Maryland, USA; Papadopoulos, A.G., 2015. The impact of the CAP on agriculture and rural areas of EU member states. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 4(1), pp. 22–53; Van der Ploeg, J.D. (2012). *The new peasantries: struggles for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalization*. Routledge, London.

7 King, R., Lulle, A. and Melossi, E., 2021. New perspectives on the agriculture–migration nexus. *Journal of Rural Studies 85*, pp. 52–58.

8 Martin, P. (2020). *The Prosperity Paradox: Fewer and More Vulnerable Farm Workers*. Oxford University Press, Oxford; Pedreño Cánovas, A. (1999). *Del jornalero agrícola al obrero de las factorías vegetales*. Universidad de Murcia, Murcia.

functions. This stimulates labour market segmentation on the basis of gender, nationality and legal status, producing a 'multiplication of labour' that is marked by different forms of spatial mobility, irregularity, and a stratification of social and legal categories.[9]

These dynamics have become all the more visible during the past three years as the Covid-19 pandemic has unfolded at the global level. The pandemic has highlighted (and perhaps exacerbated) challenges and mechanisms that are structural to the agri-food system, further exposing the limits of long supply chains, including in terms of price distortions, unfair competition and distribution dynamics.[10]

At the same time, by affecting the migration and movement of thousands of foreign seasonal workers from EU and non-EU countries, the pandemic has also shown how agricultural policy is closely intertwined with migration policy, bringing under the spotlight the 'essential' character of migrant workers for the agri-food sector overall, as well as their conditions of vulnerability.[11]

The primary impact of the pandemic on migrant workers has been on their incomes. With movement restricted, many were unable to migrate for work. In some countries, such as Sweden and Germany, not only undocumented migrants, but also temporary and seasonal migrant workers – many of whom work in the agricultural sector – have been de facto excluded from benefits and services. This exclusion highlights the broader problem of many migrants being left out of social protection schemes in general.[12] The pandemic has also underscored the problems of poor housing and sanitary conditions (i.e. in informal settlements or collective dormitories) for many migrant workers. A lack of physical distancing and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the workplace has also facilitated the spread of the virus for some agri-food

9 Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013). *Border as Method, or The Multiplication of Labour*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC; Triandafyllidou A., 2022. Temporary migration: category of analysis or category of practice?. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2022.2028350.

10 Palumbo, L. and Corrado, A. (Eds.) (2020). *Covid-19, Agri-food Systems, and Migrant Labour. The Situation in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden*. OSEPI, Brussels.

11 Kleine-Rueschkamp, L. and Ozguzel, C. (2020). *COVID-19 and key workers: What role do migrants play in your region?*. OECD.

12 European Migration Network/OECD (2020). *EU and OECD Member States responses to managing residence permits and migrant unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic – EMN-OECD Inform*, European Migration Network, Brussels.; Mallet-Garcia, M.L. and Delvino, N. (2021). Re-thinking exclusionary policies: the case of irregular migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, in: *Social Policy Review 33: Analysis and Debate in Social Policy*. M. Pomati and A. Jolly (Eds.), University Press/Social Policy Association, Bristol.

workers. For example, in the Netherlands, Germany and Spain, the virus has been especially prevalent throughout the meatpacking industry where PPE is underutilized, and where many migrants are employed.

3 Framing Exploitation in a Complex Picture

Over the past decade, European and national legislation and policies have paid increasing attention to the exploitation and violation of the rights of workers – especially migrant workers – in the agri-food systems of many EU countries.[13]

However, most of the responses, at both EU and national levels, have tended to focus on criminal law interventions aimed at punishing unscrupulous employers/intermediaries. Such an approach, as a notable legal and social scholarship has underlined,[14] has contributed to feeding the 'false' idea of exploitation as contingent, exceptional and produced by pathological individual relationships. On the contrary, exploitation – including in its severe forms, as official data reveals – is a massive scale phenomenon in Europe and everywhere globally. It is an integral element of contemporary capitalist systems,[15] such as the agri-food system.

As social and legal scholars have pointed out, capitalism operates by constantly creating differentiations,[16] resulting in a significant segment of population that has limited rights and scarce social protection. Several aspects of contemporary globalization align with this process, including neo-liberal policies, dispossession through wars and conflicts, ecological disasters, structural adjustment policies, transnational criminal activity, and restrictive migration

13 Corrado, A. et al. (2018).

14 Giammarinaro, M.G., 2022. Understanding Severe Exploitation Requires a Human Rights and Gender-Sensitive Intersectional Approach. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 4.; Fudge, J., 2018. Modern Slavery, Unfree Labour and the Labour Market: The Social Dynamics of Legal Characterization. *Social and Legal Studies*, 24(4), pp. 414–434; Dines, N. and Rigo, E. (2015). Postcolonial Citizenships and the "Refugeeization" of the Workforce in: *Postcolonial transitions in Europe: Contexts, practices and politics*. S. Ponzanesi and G. Colpani (Eds.), pp. 151–172, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland. Caprioglio, C. and Rigo E. (2020), Diritto, migrazioni e sfruttamento nell'agricoltura italiana, in: *Braccia rubate dall'agricoltura, Pratiche di sfruttamento del lavoro migrante*. I. Ippolito, M. Perrotta and T. Raeymaekers, (Eds.), Edizioni SEB27, Torino.

15 Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2021). *Operazioni del Capitale. Capitalismo contemporaneo tra sfruttamento ed estrazione*, Manifestolibri, Roma; Giammarinaro, M.G. 2022.

16 Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2021); Bhattacharyya, G. (2018). *Rethinking Racial Capitalism. Questions of Reproduction and Survival*. Rowman & Littlefield International, London-New York.

and social legislation. In particular, the restriction in regular migratory paths, especially for 'low- and medium-skilled' third country national workers, and the simultaneous compression of social and labour rights, in many European countries, confirm – as Maria Grazia Giammarinaro argues – that the creation of an 'edge population', mainly involving migrants in situations of vulnerability to exploitation, is instrumental to the functioning of economic systems globally.[17]

Far from being something static, fixed or inherent to specific categories of people, individuals or groups, the notion of vulnerability should be considered – as several feminist theorists[18] have argued – by taking into account its context specific dimension as always related to people's positions in society and in power relations. Vulnerability is indeed caused by the interplay of personal factors and structural/contextual circumstances which render a person vulnerable to exploitation or abuse by others.

Contributions to this Special Issue highlight that irregular migration status is not the dominant factor in situations of vulnerability to exploitation in the agri-food sector. Indeed, what is evident today is that dynamics of exploitation do not involve only undocumented migrant workers, but also regular seasonal migrants, beneficiaries of international protection, asylum seekers (as it is evident in Italy) or intra-EU mobile citizens. In this context, the link between exploitative working conditions and irregularity of migration status is less obvious, while migrants' different situations of vulnerability – with respect to legal status, gender, nationality, and race – become prone to being exploited, in different ways, in the agri-food systems.[19] For instance, temporary or seasonal labour migration schemes for third-country nationals, contribute to the selection and assortment of migrant labour workers, with limited labour and social rights, strongly dependent on employers and, as a consequence, easily exploitable.

Changes in production (e.g. substitution of more profitable or more in-demand crops), cultivation patterns (e.g. in greenhouses), related operations (e.g. harvesting or packaging), and new technologies (genetic, automation and digitisation), have all altered labour requirements in the agri-food sector. Labour has also had to adapt to just-in-time value chains, and has been

17 Giammarinaro, M.G. (2022).

18 Fineman, M.A., 2008. The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition, *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20 (1), pp. 177–1911; Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, London.

19 Palumbo, L. and Sciurba, A. (2018). *The vulnerability to exploitation of women migrant workers in agriculture in the EU: The need for a human rights and gender based approach*. Study commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Brussels.

impacted by climatic changes. All of these factors have influenced the criteria of seasonality or temporality.

With regard to EU migrant workers, their employment in the agri-food system has offered the possibility to respond to the need for a fresher and more compliant workforce in the agri-food sector, in response to the ongoing transformations. The possibilities of mobility within the EU have progressively provided EU migrant workers with new opportunities and tools to participate in the agricultural labour market. On the other hand, the same possibility of easily crossing EU internal borders produces a 'circular migration' that facilitates their involvement in irregular employment conditions and practices of exploitation.

Dynamics and forms of exploitation have also been also fostered by changes in labour regulations to allow for greater flexibility through the forms of contract, labour recruitment and intermediation.[20] This has resulted in an increasing recourse, even in the agri-food sector, to the outsourcing of work through the involvement of new actors and mechanisms, including subcontracting and posting work through employment agencies, which on different levels and from different positions contribute to the compression and violation of labour and social rights of seasonal and temporary agri-food workers.[21]

Discourses and ideologies of racialization and gender imbue and exacerbate forms of exploitation in the agri-food sector. Blackmail, as well as other forms of exploitation, leverage social roles, bodies and sexuality. In particular, feminist (and especially Marxist feminist) scholars[22] have stressed how patriarchal norms pervade dynamics of exploitation, underlining how labour exploitation cannot be understood without considering the division between production and social reproduction, which is at the basis of economic and social systems and especially burdens women. As the papers in this Special Issue reveal, prevailing gender norms aggravate women's exploitation, exposing them, especially in cases of women with family and care responsibilities, to sexual blackmail and abuse.

20 Fudge, J. and Strauss, K. (Eds.) (2014). *Temporary Work, Agencies and Unfree Labour Insecurity in the New World of Work*. Routledge, London.

21 Corrado, A. et al. (2018). Palumbo, L. and Corrado, A. (Eds.) (2020). *Are Agri-food Workers only Exploited in Southern Europe? Case Studies on Migrant Labour in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden*. OSEPI, Brussels.

22 Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Automedia, Brooklyn, NY; Fraser, N., 2018. From Exploitation to Expropriation: Historic Geographies of Racialized Capitalism. *Economic Geography* 94(1), pp. 1–17;. Mezzadri, A., 2016. Class, Gender and the Sweatshop. *Third World Quarterly* 37(1), pp. 1877–1900.

The above highlights the important limitations of the repressive and 'humanitarian-emergency'[23] approach followed by most EU and national actions to fight labour exploitation. Aimed primarily at punishing abusive employers and intermediaries and assisting – mainly through a paternalistic approach – victims of exploitation, these actions do not address the root causes of the problem.

Over recent years political measures at the EU level have indirectly and directly dealt with the conditions fostering migrant workers' exploitation. With regard to supply chain dynamics, Directive (EU) 2019/633 *on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain* contains new rules that ban for the first time certain unfair trading practices (UTPs) imposed unilaterally by one trading partner on another. These rules aim to improve the position of businesses and farmers in the food supply chain. Following its latest reform, the CAP will include social conditionality, meaning that CAP beneficiaries will have to respect elements of European social and labour law to receive CAP funds and will be incentivized to improve working conditions on farms.

This change in the CAP is the result of a strong mobilization by trade unions and civil society organizations. While most of the member countries have decided to implement this reform starting from 2025, governments have adopted specific ad hoc measures to address the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis on migrant workers. Such measures have mainly extended work visas for temporary and seasonal migrants, in the agriculture sector. The regularization scheme adopted in Italy in May 2020 drew particular international attention. This regularization scheme targeted undocumented migrant workers in the agri-food, care and domestic work sectors. However, the initiative was largely unsuccessful especially in regards to the agriculture sector, as the requirements were quite strict and the role of employers crucial (see Corrado and Caruso in this Special Issue).

In general, in most EU countries, the outbreak of the pandemic caused shortages of EU migrant workers who were trapped at their countries of origin and unable to cross national borders. In Spain and Italy, in particular during the first months of the pandemic, these workers were replaced by asylum seekers and non-EU migrant workers trapped in those countries, often in very dire living conditions and unable to travel between regions to seek employment. In Sweden, the opposite happened, as non-EU workers were unable to travel (e.g. Thai for berry picking) and were replaced by intra-EU migrant workers

23 Dines, N. and Rigo, E. (2015).

from Bulgaria or Romania. The same was true in the Netherlands and Germany where in any case those sectors mainly attract intra-EU migrants.

Lastly, with regard to the role of trade unions, they have difficulties in interpreting and representing migrant agricultural workers, and are often providers of mere services to 'clients'.[24] The claims of migrants have progressively found expression in forms of mobilization or practices from below that can be traced both to contextual factors – such as the tightening of policies, the condition of irregularity and exclusion from residence – and to subjective and relational factors, such as the situation of stigmatization that fosters solidarity, previous political and trade union experience, the role of networks, and alliances with civil society actors.[25] Mobilizations to demand regularization during the Covid-19 pandemic in Spain or Italy have been emblematic in this sense.[26]

Forms of mobilization involving migrant workers in agriculture, e.g. in Andalusia (Spain), often take the form of direct action, identifying objectives that go beyond working conditions. These often also occur in close relation to social movements – conflicts generated within the dynamics of social reproduction determined by capitalism are becoming increasingly important. In addition to the sharing of work and life experience (e.g. housing), nationality, gender and kinship play an important role in the formation of the networks that organize and mobilize.[27] Community-based organizations (i.e. worker centres) provide services, conduct political advocacy and organize workers.

4 The Contents of this Special Issue

In the final main section of this introduction paper we foreground highlights from the five articles in this Special Issue. The papers are presented sequentially, so as to unravel an analysis of migrant agricultural labour in different comparative contexts, from the Mediterranean to the far North of Europe, considering the production of fresh fruit and vegetables in fields and greenhouses,

24 De Luca, D., Pozzi, S. and Ambrosini, M., 2018. Trade unions and immigrants in Italy: How immigrant offices promote inclusion. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 60(1), pp. 101–118.

25 Ambrosini, M., 2016. Cittadinanza formale e cittadinanza dal basso. Un rapporto dinamico. *SocietàMutamentoPolitica* 7(13), pp. 83–102.

26 López-Sala, A., 2021. Luchando por sus derechos en tiempos de Covid-19. Resistencias y reclamaciones de regularización de los migrantes Sinpapeles en España. *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* 29, pp. 83–96.

27 Reigada, A. (2021). Collective Action, Experience and Identity in Global Agrarian Enclaves: The Case of Andalusia, Spain, in: *Migrant Organising: Community Unionism, Solidarity and Bricolage,* E. Martín-Díaz and B. Roca (Eds.), pp. 154–180, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands.

berry picking and meat processing, and how this has been impacted by labour market transformations and labour reforms, interventions to address the vulnerable conditions of workers in the agri-food sector, and the effects of Covid-19.

The development of fruit and vegetable production in Spain and Italy has relied on migrant labour due to integration in verticalized value chains and competition in the context of neoliberal globalization. The dynamics characterizing the two countries and specifically their agri-food enclaves highlights the agri-food-migration nexus. The contribution by Caruso and Corrado analyzes how migration and asylum policies, as well as mobility policies together with private mechanisms, have made labour differentiated, precarious, cheap, flexible and constantly renewed to match the specific demand in the sector. Changes in the composition and segmentation of the agricultural workforce, its conditions of vulnerability and its exploitation are outcomes of these mechanisms. The Covid-19 crisis has revealed how migrant workers are essential for the agri-food system to function. In both Spain and Italy national governments have promoted different interventions to address labour exploitation, migrant workers' vulnerabilities, and also labour shortage risks, following internal socio-political confrontation and pressures by different actors. However, measures taken to address the sector's needs and migrant workers' vulnerabilities renew the role of migrant labour as shaped in the current agri-food regime. In the long run, it will be interesting to see how labour and food chain reforms on the one hand, and interventions to address the specific vulnerable conditions of migrant workers on the other, will be effective in resolving the serious exploitative situations observed in the two countries.

Interestingly, the cases of North-Central EU member states also confirm the essential role played by migrant labour in agri-food systems.

In Dutch horticulture, Central and Eastern European workers' low labour and living standards contrast with the sector's high performance. Siegmann et al. disentangles these contradictions by analyzing their legal, economic, and social causes through the lens of the power resources approach. The authors' argument is that abuses of rights are not exceptional and the fault of dishonest employers, but are instead the outcome of 'regulated precarity' in the context of the highly flexibilized Dutch labour market and an agri-food chain dominated by retailers. In particular, the regularization of agency workers' phased social and economic rights, as well as the legal interlinkage of employment and accommodation contracts, disempowers workers. Engaging with the sources of migrant farmworkers' disempowerment, the authors identify entry points for change, such as more rigorous enforcement of labour inspection, the reorientation of the inspectorate's approach towards migrant workers, and

emerging new forms of outreach to them. However, it emphasizes the need for institutional innovation to ensure fair prices for producers (e.g. through the regulation of 'living price' parameters and living wages for agricultural workers), in order to humanize the agri-food chain in the Netherlands.

The agriculture industry in Southern Sweden is also affected by exploitative practices of substandard work and employment of migrants, mostly in relation to the latest trends in the labour market, such as outsourcing of labour services and casualization and flexibilization of employment. Iossa and Selberg analyze the simultaneous and dynamic relationship between space and time in defining legal meaning: temporalization (time-limited work permits and seasonality of work) as well as spatialization (migration status in relation to the national labour market and dislocation of work in fields and remote forests) become the simultaneous tools of governance of migrant workers in the agri-food sector. In the Swedish case too, trade unions have not been very successful in addressing migrant workers' rights. While the Swedish model for labour regulation might serve local workers well, the model is less suited for temporary migrant workers. The remedies against precarious working conditions are based on state/government action which represents a shift away from the inherited 'Swedish model' for labour relations favouring autonomous enforcement of workers' rights.

In Germany, the Covid-19 pandemic was a disruptive event for meat production as well as for agricultural and horticultural farming. Mass infections occurred in meat factories and housing facilities for seasonal migrants, and a looming shortage of harvest workers evoked rapid regulative responses, albeit with a different focus. In the agricultural fruit and vegetable sector, security of supply, labour shortages and farm survival took centre stage, prompting adaptive measures to comfort farmers, retailers and consumers. In the meat industry, reforms were much more profound and marked a fundamental policy change towards improved working conditions. In their article, Schneider and Götte show how migrant workers in both industries are vulnerable to undeclared work and exploitative employment structures, by shedding light on the frameworks for recruiting, employing and (potentially) exploiting migrant workers. The paper critically contextualizes legal, political and institutional changes since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and finds that different reforms have quite different potentiality to sustainably improve the precarious working conditions of migrant workers in agriculture and meat production, respectively.

Finally, Letizia Palumbo shows in her comparative analysis how, in all the countries considered in this Special Issue, despite differences in migration regimes and labour market regulations, relevant policies on migration and

labour mobility have contributed to the sustainment of an agri-food system aimed at lowering the price of production by compressing the rights of workers. In particular, after stressing the structural character of exploitation as a continuum, and the situational dimension of the notion of vulnerability, Palumbo underlines that migration and labour mobility policies of the examined Southern and Northern EU countries have contributed to creating specific 'situational' vulnerabilities which are utilized and exploited, each one in a particular way, within agri-food systems. In other words, the specific situations of vulnerability of seasonal workers, asylum seekers, student visa migrants, or poor EU migrant workers – which are produced and accentuated by relevant EU and national legislations and policies – are easily taken advantage of in the agri-food sectors of many European countries. In this context, gender based discriminations and power relationships constitute a further factor that generates and exacerbates situations of vulnerability to exploitation and abuses in the agri-food sector. Women with family responsibilities tend to be particularly exposed to such dynamics. Palumbo highlights that, while there have been relevant national initiatives aimed at addressing the rights of migrant farmworkers during the pandemic, in most of the examined European countries these have mainly consisted of short-term and reparative measures that do not tackle the root causes of vulnerabilities to exploitation.