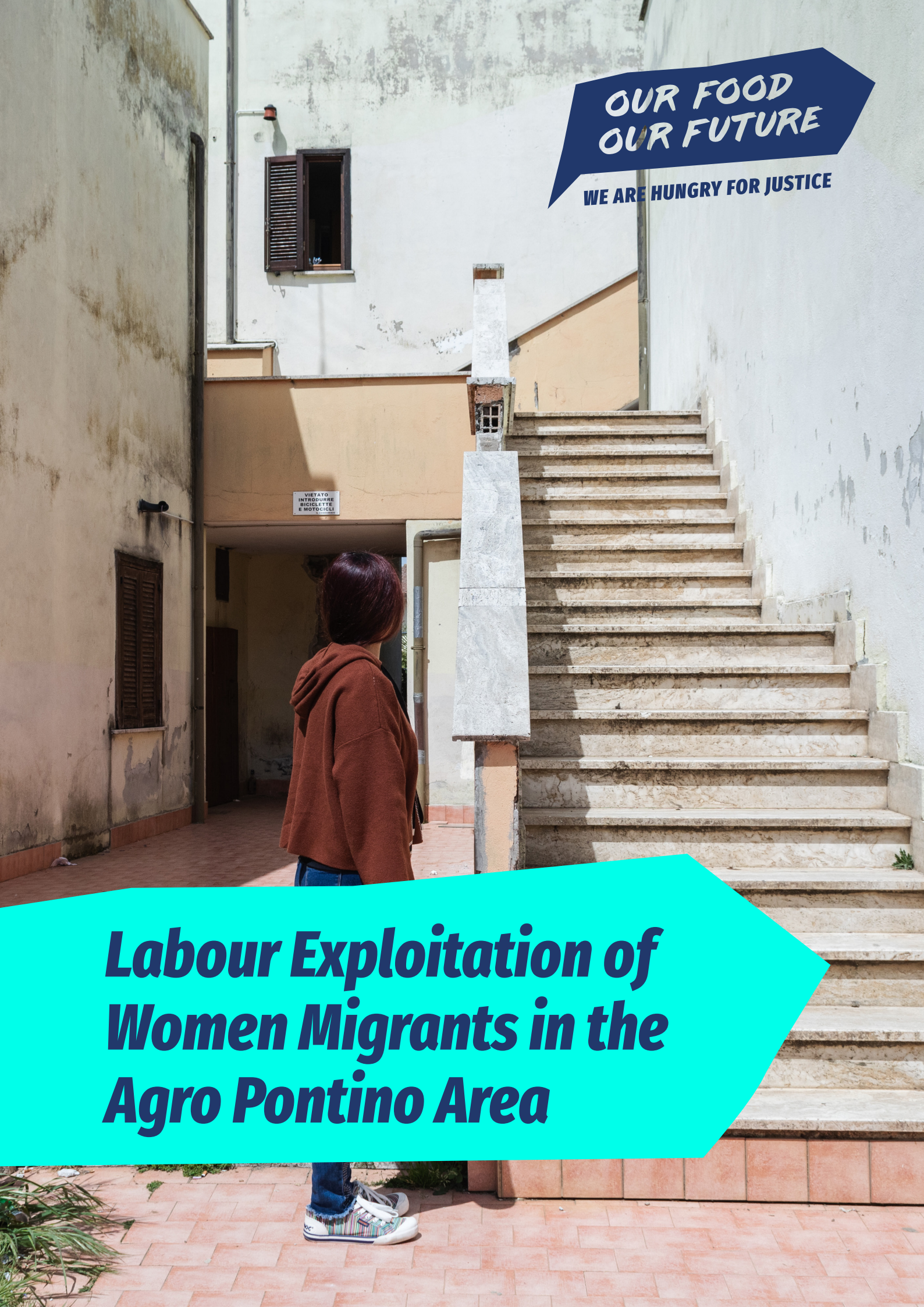


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WE ARE HUNGRY FOR JUSTICE

Labour Exploitation of Women Migrants in the Agro Pontino Area

Edited by
Marco Omizzolo
Sociologist and Eurispes researcher

Margherita Romanelli, Bianca Mizzi
WeWorld-GVC

WeWorld-GVC coordination
Margherita Romanelli (International Advocacy, Policy, Partnership and Evaluation Coordinator)
David Wiersma (Project Manager)
Rachele Ponzellini (Communication Expert)
Bianca Mizzi (Policy and Advocacy Officer)
Elena Caneva (National Advocacy, Policy and Partnership Coordinator)
Andrea Comollo (Head of Communication)
Stefano Piziali (Head of Advocacy Policy Partnership and European & Italian Programmes Departments)

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Foreword

This research was carried out within the framework of the OurFoodOurFuture project (CSO-LA/2020/411-443), funded by the European Commission as part of the DEAR (Development Education and Awareness Raising) Programme and promoted by WeWorld together with 15 other European organisations in order to promote new models of consumption, sustainable food supply chains and fair trade relations, respect for human rights of male and female workers.

The research investigates the labour exploitation of migrant women in the agro-food chain in Italy, in particular in the Agro Pontino area, in the Lazio region, interweaving elements of analysis concerning management of migratory flows, organisation of labour market, agro-industrial production, processing system and large-scale distribution, illicit labour brokering, the so-called "caporalato" (a form of illegal intermediation and exploitation of agricultural workers) and organised crime.

This research is based on processing of information, data and observations from leading national and international think thanks and experts and on a collection of primary information with a field research in the Agro Pontino area in Spring 2021, accompanied by interviews with 7 female labourers, 5 entrepreneurs, and other 16 stakeholders including associations, trade union representatives, administrators and policy-makers.



1.

Migration and labour exploitation in Italy

1.1. Migration in Italy

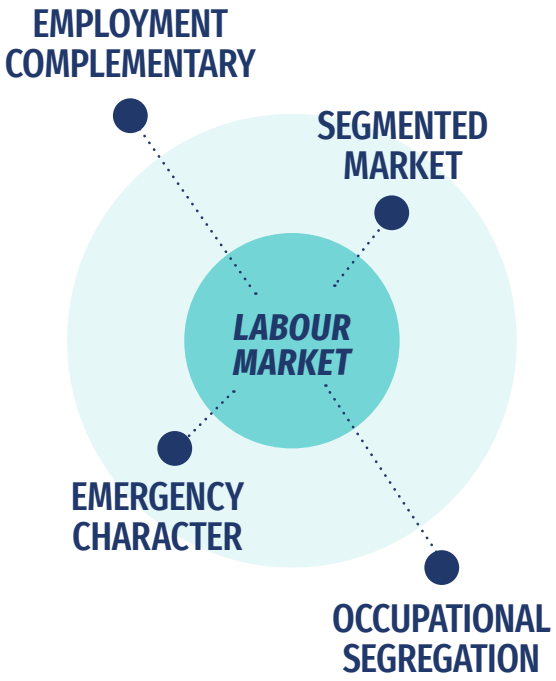
Migration in Italy has been a consolidated presence for decades and is one of the most important factors of social change and civil and economic progress.

According to the latest migration report by IDOS Study and Research Centre (2020), for example, at the end of 2019 there was a total number of 5,306,500 migrants regularly present in Italy, with an increase of about 47,100 people compared to the previous year. Comparing this figure with that of the Italian population, it can be said that resident migrants have reached about 8.8% of the national population.

On the other hand, from a statistical point of view, legally residing non-EU migrants have seen their total number decrease for the first time in many years by about 101,600 units, i.e. by 2.7% compared to the previous year, reaching a total of 3,615,000 people at the end of 2019, compared to 3,717,000 recorded at the end of 2018. This is one of the consequences of a series of decrees, regulations and practices that have raised political and legal barriers, have made procedures and practices more complex and reinforced stereotypes and discriminatory narratives. In addition to the 3,615,000 legally residing non-EU migrants, there are those who are without any residence permits. The latter, at the end of 2018, were estimated at 562,000 people (ISMU [Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity] Foundation, 2018), in addition to approximately 120-140,000 former beneficiaries of humanitarian protection that according to the 'Security Decree' have forcibly become irregular. This made it possible to reach, at the end of 2019, the figure of 610,000 new irregularly residing migrants. This figure would have risen to 700,000 at the end of 2020 had it not been for the so called "Provvedimento di emersione" [measure of regularization of irregular migrants] provided for by the Italian Government at the height of the pandemic (Italian Decree No. 34 of 19th May 2020). This measure has allowed approximately 220,500 irregularly residing migrants, and irregularly employed in the Italian labour market, to 'emerge' from this condition, although with a non-random prevalence of men and women employed in domestic or home care work and only to a small extent of agricultural workers.

1.2. The four characteristics of the labour market concerning the migrant community in Italy

The labour market in which the migrant community is largely employed has four main characteristics.



It should be noted that **migrants have** higher employment (61.0% vs. 58.8%) and unemployment (13.8% vs. 9.5%) rates than Italians. According to IDOS – Study and Research Centre (2020), male and female migrant workers are also underemployed at a rate of 6.8%, compared to 3.3% of Italian workers. These data confirm the greater instable and temporary nature of their jobs, which are often carried out intermittently and paid 60% less than that established in the **relevant employment contract**[1].

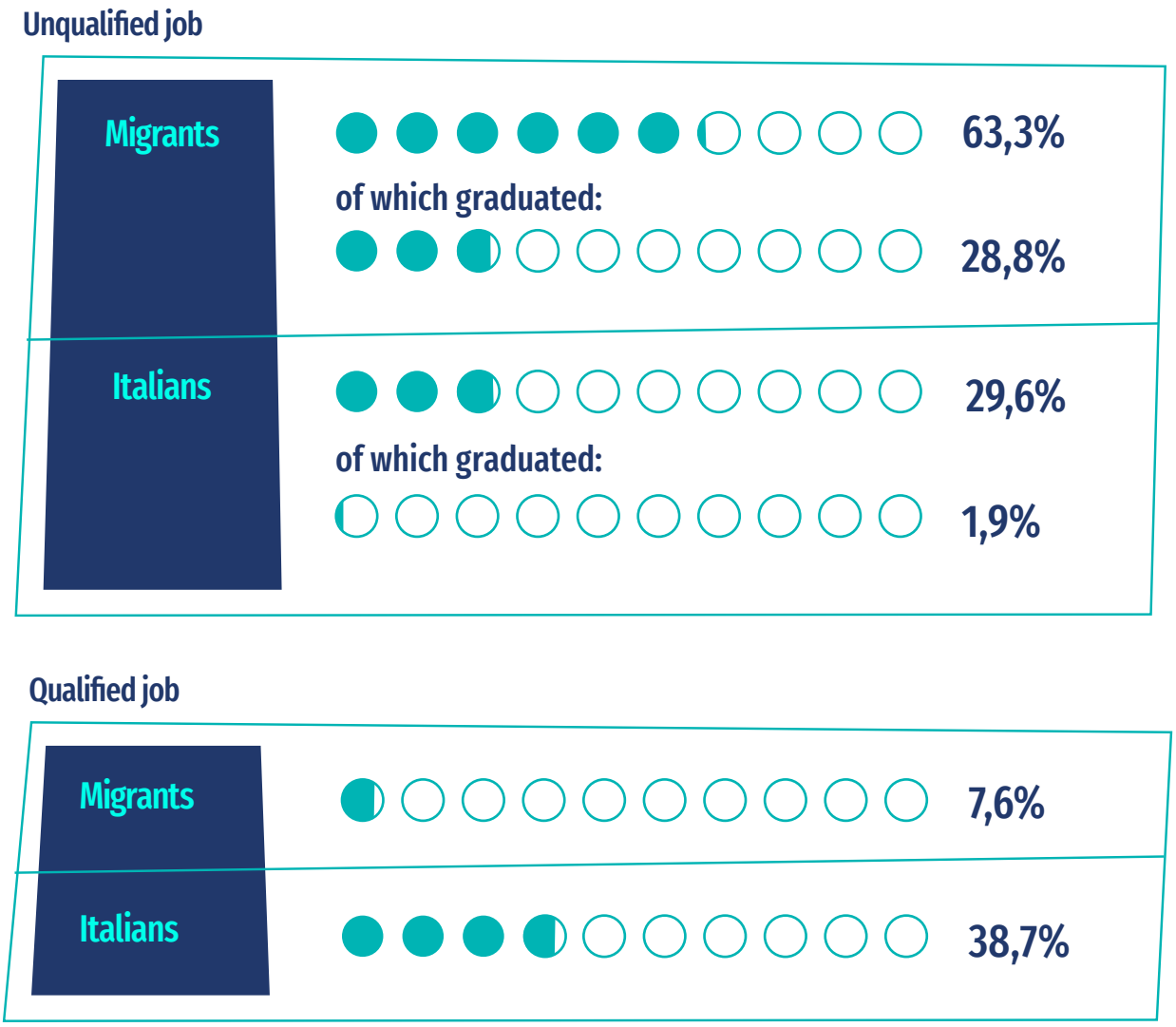
The **first characteristic** of the migrant labour market concerns the **complementarity** between the employment of male and female Italian workers and migrant workers, overcoming the widespread thesis of direct competition between migrant and native workers. The complementarity between Italian and migrant workers is most evident in the analysis of occupations. The majority of migrant workers, in fact, hold unskilled jobs (33.3%), with only 7.6% of migrants being employed with skilled and technical jobs[2]. In particular, migrants account for less than 2% among employees in general services of public administrations, credit or insurance institutions, information and communication and education sector; but almost a fifth among workers in agriculture (18.3%, 166,000 employees), hotel and restaurant sector (17.7%, 263,000 employees) and construction (17.6%, 235,000 employees); more than one-third among street vendors, porters, labourers, farmhands and unskilled restaurant staff (other collective and personal services 36%, 642,000 employees); and as many as 68.8% among those working in domestic and personal care services, where 40.6% of migrant women are employed (42.4% of foreign men,

1. Idos, Dossier statistico Immigrazione, 2020.
2. Fondazione Leone Moressa, 2020.

instead, work in industry or construction).

The relationship between migrant and Italian workers disproves any theory of substitution of Italians with migrant workers or of a downward competition between Italians and migrants that would generate conditions of exploitation. In fact, according to IDOS (2020), about 2 out of 3 migrants hold unqualified jobs or work as blue collars (63.3%, compared to only 29.6% of Italians), while only 7.6% have a qualified job compared to 38.7% of Italians.

In fact, it should be noted that neither nationality nor status determines the regulatory and economic framework of reference in the workplace, but solely the employment contract, which cannot provide for any form of discrimination between male and female workers[3].



Source: Idos, Dossier statistico Immigrazione, 2020.

3. According to a study by Banca d'Italia, the contribution of migration to the growth of the Italian economy, i.e. almost 2.5 million migrant workers, equivalent to 10.6% of total male and female workers, is estimated at approximately 139 billion euros, i.e. 9% of the national wealth. In absolute terms, most of the GDP of migration is produced in the field of services where most foreign workers are employed

The **second** characteristic concerns the **segmented** nature of national labour market, which is characterised by a regular component and another one that is instead 'underground' and widely irregular[4]. These first two characteristics highlight the greater fragility of migrant labour in Italy and its marked ethnicization towards an employment that is generally irregular, precarious and exploited. These characteristics amplify their relevance and power of incidence in the case of female migrants for the reasons that will be investigated below. According to the foregoing, a European ambiguity should be overcome once and for all regarding the structural weakness of male and female migrants that, accompanying their legal status and access to work, makes them fragile, precarious and constantly liable to be blackmailed. This 'liability to be blackmailed' is combined with the labour market's need for men and women willing to do the so-called 5Ps jobs *(Pesanti, Pericolosi, Precari, Poco pagati e Penalizzati socialmente)* [Heavy, Dangerous, Precarious, Low paid and Socially Penalised][5], where exploitation and marginalisation are specific and widespread conditions. It is the organisation of the Italian (and generally Western) labour market, both formal and informal, in association with the legal framework in force, with its practices and customs, and with the complex of economic interests, both legal and illegal[6], that make the migrants structurally fragile and subject to be blackmailed, and not the contrary. From this point of view, the social context in which migratory movements, especially those of women, take place, is the result of a paradox that sees the male/female migrant as an "untouchable resource for the economy, but very unwelcome to society"[7].

The **third** characteristic concerns the fundamental assumption of many policies, norms and measures concerning migration, i.e. the **emergency character** that is reflected in labour policies and in the conditions of recruitment, intermediation and employment of many of them. For years, Italian legislation has regulated incoming migration flows, considering them as an exceptional and essentially peripheral phenomenon. It is no coincidence that Italy has issued a total of eight amnesties since the 1980s, as evidence of the fact that the legislation has always been insufficient and approximate, and aimed more at "plugging leaks" than at managing and

4. E. Reyneri, Gli immigrati in un mercato del lavoro segmentato, in Introduzione alla sociologia del mercato del lavoro, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2017, pp. 251 ff. According to Piore's dualistic labour market theory of 1979, a link between development of Western economic systems and increase in the demand for poor labour is one of the main factors explaining contemporary migration.
5. These are works that Ambrosini, taking his cue from the 3Ds that define the occupations: Dirty, Dangerous and Demanding of immigrants (M.I. Abella, Y. Park, W.R. Bohning, Adjustments to Labour Shortages and Foreign Workers in the Republic of Korea, Ilo, Gene va 1994), defines Heavy, Dangerous, Precarious, Low Paid and Socially Penalized (M. Ambrosini, Sociologia delle migrazioni, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005, p. 59).
6. In 2018, the unobserved economy, which includes the underground economy and the illegal economy, would amount to 211 billion euros, accounting for 11.9% of the national GDP. This figure results from the latest ISTAT report, which points out that the underground economy amounts to just under 192 billion euros and illegal activities to around 19 billion, driven by drug trafficking. ISTAT likewise specifies that the irregular work units in 2018 were 3,652,000, down by 48 thousand units compared to 2017. The decline in irregular work was 1.3%, with the component of undeclared employment falling by 1.4% (-39 thousand units) and self-employment falling by 0.9% (-9 thousand units).
7. A. Valzania, Inserimento lavorativo fra reti etniche e processi identitari, in M. Ambrosini, F. Buccarelli, Ai confini della cittadinanza. Processi migratori e percorsi di integrazione in Toscana, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2009, p. 142.

organising reception in an integrated manner. The emergency regulations include the Italian Laws No. 943/86[8] and No. 39/90[9], although the latter is more organic than the former.

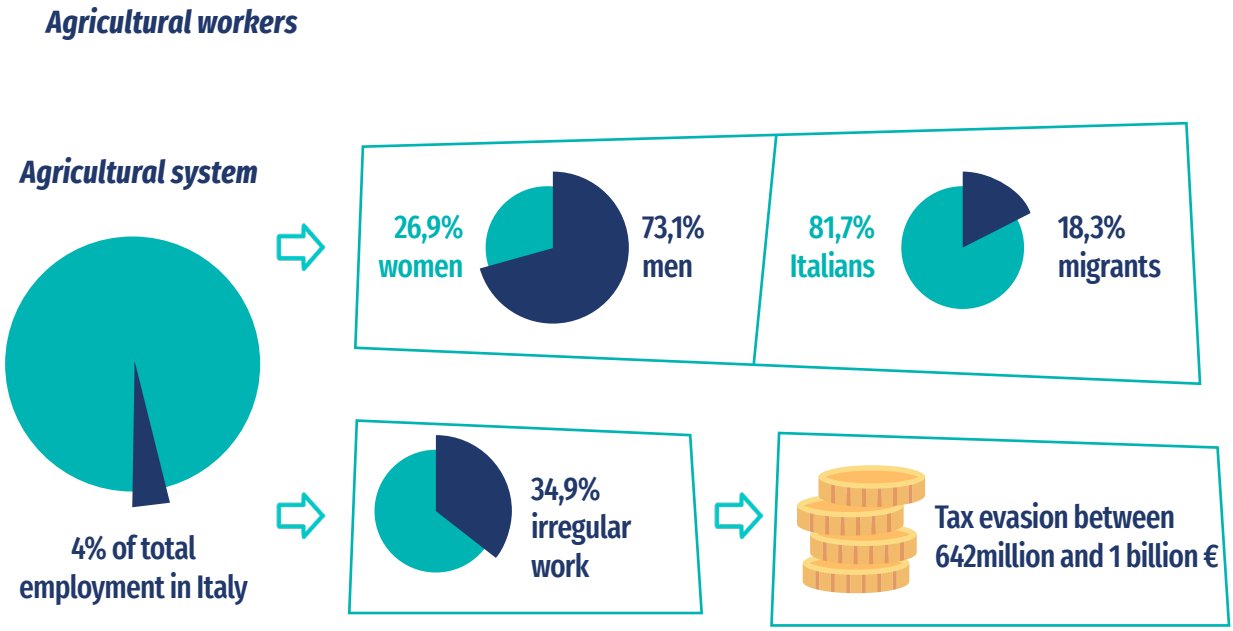
Finally, the **fourth** characteristic concerns the **occupational segregation** of migrant women in activities that are generally dangerous, with a high rate of exploitation and discrimination, sometimes even sexual, and exposed to various forms of violence[10]. The declination of these characteristics is similar to that of their male work counterparts and fellow countrymen, but takes on some original features with reference to verbal and non-verbal violence, including sexual violence, blackmailing and various forms of pressure induced by *caporali* [illegal hirers of day labourers] and employers, to the point of determining a worsening spiral based on gender discrimination. These occupations concern the agricultural sector, but also home care, self-employment and trade. Women, regardless of their nationality, find it difficult to be employed in socially prestigious and safe activities. This generally means falling into dangerous, gender-subordinate activities that are very poorly paid and exposed to violence of various kinds (psychological, social, sexual, verbal, etc.).

1.3. Labour exploitation of migrants in the Italian agricultural system

In Italy, various forms of labour exploitation have persisted for years in the agricultural sector (and beyond), illegal intermediation ("caporalato"), occupational blackmail, violence and humiliation against male and female migrant workers, in relation to whom a public debate is dramatically behind schedule, as is the commitment of the Italian ruling class. According to the "Agromafie e caporalato" (2020) dossier by Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto, irregular work in agriculture includes between **400,000 and 450,000 male and female workers who are potential victims of illegal intermediation and labour exploitation**, subject to violence of various kinds, blackmail and continuous fraud, of whom more than 180,000 are forced to live and work in conditions of serious social vulnerability and severe employment distress.

8. Italian Law No. 943 of 30th December 1986 Regulations concerning the placement and treatment of non-EU immigrant workers and against clandestine immigration. (GU Serie Generale n.49 del 12-01-1987).
9. Italian Law No. 39 of 28th February 1990 Conversion into law, with modifications, of the Italian decree-law No. 416 of 30th December 1989, containing urgent regulations in the field of asylum, entry and stay of non-EU citizens and regularisation of non-EU citizens and stateless persons already present in the territory of the State. Provisions concerning asylum. (GU Serie Generale n.49 del 28-02-1990).
10. Among the best known studies, inter alia: J. Andall, Gender, Migration and Domestic Service. The Politics of Black Women in Italy, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000; F. Bimbi, R. Trifiletti, Madri sole e nuove famiglie. Declinazioni inattese della genitorialità, Roma, Edizioni Lavoro, 2006.

This scenario is part of a situation in which the rate of irregular work in agriculture is the highest of all economic sectors (24.2% in 2018), with an incidence of irregular work among employees equal to 34.9%[11], not including migrants without residence permits. According to the 2018 Observatory's dossier, there were **140,000 severely exploited male and female workers, around 80% of whom were migrants.** This means that, over the course of two years (2018-2020), the total number of women and men variously employed in the agricultural sector,



victims of severe labour exploitation, blackmail and marginalisation, **increased by about 40,000 people, or about 28%.** In addition, more than 300,000 male and female agricultural workers, i.e. about 30% of the total, work less than 50 days a year, or at least these are the days documented, most actually work 28-30 days a month for 10-14 hours a day. These conditions are also recognised and denounced by important United Nations reports[12]. According to the sixth Agromafia report by Eurispes (2018) and the Observatory on Agribusiness Crime led by Judge Gian Carlo Caselli, moreover, the **agromafia business in Italy is worth 24.5 billion euros a year[13].**

11. ISTAT, Occupazione regolare, irregolare e popolazione, ISTAT, edizione settembre 2019.
12. Urmila Bhoola, UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, at the end of her visit to Italy between 3 and 12 October 2018, says: "The significant reduction of quotas appears to be at odds with a highly increased need for agricultural workers [...] as a consequence, employers resort to irregular migrants who work without contracts in highly exploitative conditions amounting to slavery. We were informed [...] that the rigid linkage between a residence permit and the existence of an employment contract risks pushing migrants further towards irregular channels, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation". The UN Special Rapporteur visited Rome, Calabria, Foggia and Cerignola in Puglia, Latina, and met with many migrant workers who, because of their living and working conditions, can be included among contemporary forms of slavery due to the amount of hours they work, salaries well below the minimum contractual wage, health and safety hazards in the workplace, and work-related accidents, as they are abandoned by caporali [gangmasters] near hospitals for emergency treatment and threatened if they do reveal the farm where they work.
13. Eurispes, Osservatorio sulla criminalità nell'agroalimentare, Dossier Agromafia, 2018.

It is a flow of money that informs and deforms the Italian democratic and production system, an expression of power relationships that develop and consolidate practices, social approaches, interests and criminal behaviours. The victims are men and women, often migrants, who do not enjoy the protections and rights guaranteed by the labour contracts in force and by national legislation, becoming a typical expression of the paradigm of subordination, vulnerability, blackmail and exploitation, which may include violence.

This picture highlights at least two essential points. The first one concerns the **deep roots of the presence of migrants in Italy** with their consequent rootedness in the social and economic fabric of the country, even if with a partial slowdown due to the discriminatory effects of some regulations (e.g. the Security Decrees). A second point, **the persistence of a state of fragility, blackmail and marginalisation of a still relevant percentage of residing migrants** due to the persistence of discriminatory laws and a segmented labour market oriented to the exploitation of the most fragile categories.





11.

Female migration: characteristics and fragility

2.1. Characters, reasons and role of female migration in Italy

As reported by the IDOS Study and Research Centre (2020), according to ISTAT [Italian Statistics Institute], **women migrants in Italy are 2,748,476 and account for 51.8% of the total**[14]**.** This means, first of all, that **women are**, in percentage terms, **the major quota**, albeit slightly. They are originally from Romania, Albania, Morocco, Ukraine, China, the Philippines, Moldova, Poland, India and Peru, and are joined by other migrant communities that include many Eastern European countries (Russian Federation, Georgia, Belarus, Lithuania, etc.) and Asia (Thailand and Indonesia)[15].

Box 1

The reasons for female migration

As Saskia Sassen has stated, women's migration is linked to global dynamics, such as growth of unemployment and burden of debt in the so-called developing countries, which have had as a counterpart the production of a series of "survival circuits that have emerged in response to the deepening misery of the global South"[16]. Other reasons for female emigration and employment, when not caused by a flight for life[17], include family reunification, desire for emancipation and autonomy, marriage to a fellow countryman who has previously emigrated to escape economic fragility or various forms of relative poverty. In particular, the instrument of family reunification represents an important indicator of stabilisation, highlighting how women play a key role in the social inclusion processes of a family. This is a specific feature of Indian migration in the province of Latina, linked to its subsequent employment in the predominantly agricultural sector.

In absolute values, at the beginning of 2019, according to ISTAT, employed migrant women in Italy were 1,086,000, i.e. 44.2% of migrant workers estimated by the Italian institute of statistics. On the other hand, 213,000 female migrants were unemployed, equal to 52.7%

14. Idos, Dossier statistico immigrazione, 2020.
15. G. Demaio, Che genere di cittadine? Le donne immigrate in Italia tra integrazione e discriminazione, in B. De Sario, E. Galossi, Migrazioni e sindacato, IX Rapporto, Roma, Ediesse/Futura, 2020.
16. S. Sassen, Città globali e circuiti di sopravvivenza, in B. Ehrenreich, A. Russel Hochschild, Donne globali.Tate, colf e badanti, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2004, p. 234.
17. E. Drudi, Fuga per la vita, Tempi Moderni, Macerata, Simple ed., 2017.

of 402,000 migrants without employment, while those who were inactive were 727,000. Moreover, in 2018, migrant women increased by 0.4% and represented 53.3% of all unemployed migrants in Italy (400,000). This indicates a **growing feminisation**, as will be seen below, **of employment activities** and at the same time the persistence of a manifest reluctance on the part of the Italian labour market to fully accommodate this demand for work, preferring to channel it into the maze of irregular work, often subject to labour exploitation, whether conducted in the homes of Italian families or in the Italian countryside.

Box 2

Migrant women, bridges between cultures

It is useful to point out that migrant women, even when they are employed in the national labour market, play a number of roles: a fundamental economic support for their families, their employment in activities that are generally tiring and precarious such as agriculture or personal care, childcare and relative transmission of their culture of origin, including their religion. They are also entrusted with a task of balancing relations between the cultures of origin and destination, constantly mediating between their families and the host society[18].

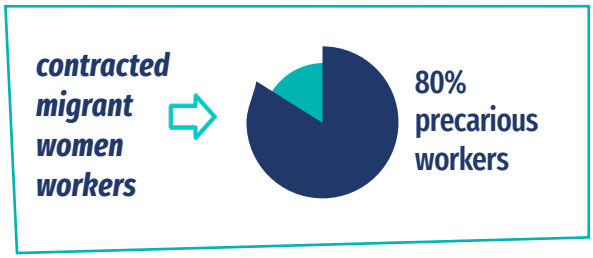
These considerations must not reinforce the widespread stereotype of migrant women destined exclusively to exploitation, their character of almost natural subordination, generating or reinforcing, in Europe and in Italy, the stereotype of the migrant as expression of an inferior subjectivity and therefore somehow 'liable to be made inferior'. This would deny actions, emancipation paths, often laborious, instances of liberation from any form of gender constraint, including those developed also in Europe[19].

18. Women's migration is therefore characterised by a complexity, versatility and multiplicity of situations and strategies of settlement, stabilisation and emancipation, which requires analysis and reflection on the specific ways in which they are manifested, as well as on the effects produced on the host society and on second generations.
19. C. Borderias, Strategie della libertà. Storia e teorie del lavoro femminile, Roma, Manifestolibri, 2000.



2.2. Racialization and sexualisation of migrant women workers' occupations

The specific organisation of the Italian labour market, together with its internal dynamics, the related supply chains with reference to distribution, commercial and promotional systems, outsourcing together with a descent of the primary sector towards widespread forms of exploitation and irregularity, a consequent increase in low specialisation and qualification as well as temporary or seasonal jobs, have increased the vulnerability of female migrant labour.



Suffice it to consider that about 80% of the contracts entered into in Italy with migrant women in 2018 were precarious and 40% were employed in part-time activities, compared to 13% of men[20]. It is clear that the set of fundamental rights for personal and family emancipation is not recognised, in some cases denied or difficult to access for female migrant workers, as will be investigated below. The violation of rights of migrant women is led by a systemic subordination resulting from the specific organisation of the labour market and its social functioning, discriminatory practices and procedures and widespread prejudices that accentuate the exploitation and marginalisation of migrant women employed in Italy.

In particular, occupational segregation of migrant women is strictly linked to the **cultural construction of feminized occupations** (process of sexualisation) in the production system of host societies with specific reference to caring and farm-labour activities[21]. This condition does not derive from a natural inclination of women, especially migrants, to carry out specific tasks, but from a specific organisation of the relative labour market that ethnicizes and sexualises in relation to its own convenience, generating products, in this case agricultural products, that are the result of this process and the expression of a systemic blackmail and marginalisation[22].

20. Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Security, X Annual Report, Foreigners in the Italian labour market, 2020, https://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/studi-e-statistiche/Documents/Decimo%20Rapporto%20Annuale%20-%20Gli%20stranieri%20nel%20mercato%20del%20lavoro%20in%20Italia%202020/X-Rapporto-Annualestranieri-nel-mercato-del-lavoro-in- Italia.pdf.
21. Sarti, La costruzione dell'identità di genere nei lavoratori domestici, in R. Catanzaro, A. Colombo, Badanti & Co. Il lavoro domestico straniero in Italia, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009, p. 59.
22. N. Piper, International Migration and Gendered Axes of Stratification: Introduction, in Id., New Perspectives on Gender and Migration: Livelihood, Rights and Entitlements, New York-London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 1-18; K. Calavita, Gender, Migration and Law: Crossing Borders and Bridging disciplines, in «International Migration Review», Vol. 40, n. 1, 2006, pp. 104-132.

Box 3

Liability to be blackmailed as an essential condition of labour exploitation

Liability to be blackmailed refers to social, juridical and psychological condition of those men and women who experience variably unbalanced power relations and (sentimental, work and/ or economic) relationships and therefore submission to other subjects, to the point of falling into a state of sometimes permanent subordination. Therefore, liability to be blackmailed constitutes one of the fundamental constraints imposed on a person in order to force him/her to act in a subordinate way and convenient almost exclusively to the blackmailer (seriously exploited work with the obligation of silence, acceptance of blackmail or sexual violence, continuous psychological violence that must be concealed for the protection of the offspring). The condition of being blackmailed, especially when permanent or persistent, may include limitation or even cancellation of a person's fundamental rights. Blackmail and vulnerability are central elements of migrants' subordination in the social and labour spheres.

According to the Observatory on female migration of the Coordination of anti-violence centres of Emilia-Romagna (2018), among those elements that hinder women to get out of situations of violence, *"blackmail of economic dependence exercised by partners and/or family and/ or exploiter"*. To this dependence, *"we must add that deriving from difficulty of accessing rights and becoming fully aware of the violence suffered"*. Even when migrant women try to leave their homes or workplaces, where they are subjected to various forms of violence, blackmail and exploitation, to escape from a criminal network or to become autonomous, they run into numerous difficulties, *"in addition to those typical of re-integration into employment, to others arising from racism and sexism* - states the Observatory - *A woman who wants to get out of violence therefore encounters other forms of institutional, cultural and social violence as a woman: discrimination, exploitation, compulsory flexibility, lack of guaranteed and accessible welfare for the management of her daughters and sons, sexual harassment and mobbing by the employer or workmates"*. As a migrant, *"she has the difficulty of sustaining her choice of autonomy with respect to the community to which she belongs and will be discriminated against because of the colour of her skin, the choice to wear a veil or not to wear one, language difficulties and more"*.

Female migrant labour in agriculture is generally characterised by being imposed by a complex of cultural and economic rules, practices, norms and cross-interests, constantly considered low cost and with very low social value, forced into a logic that is often 'machist', bossy and criminal, and liable to be blackmailed also because of family needs and related constraints. In short, there is a sort of racialization and sexualisation of legal and illegal occupations of migrant women that leads to widespread prejudice, violence and racism on the part of the natives when they benefit from positions of power. In this way, the categories of race, gender and class merge into a socially accepted whole. According to Ambrosini (2005), the ethnic and gender stereotypes are closely linked. Take for example the domestic worker, once called "la donna" [the woman], now often referred to as "la filippina" [the Filipina].

The same applies to Indian women employed in agriculture. In past years, female workers were called by their employers, when they were of Italian nationality, by names such as "le donne" [the women].

With the entry of migrants onto agricultural labour, and in the specific case of Indian women labourers, there has been a change in terminology, and now the term "Indian women" is used. It is "the Indian women" who work in agriculture and it can happen, as has been the experience in the province of Latina, that some employers do not know the first name of their Indian workers but limit themselves, also to avoid a somewhat friendly and non-authoritarian relationship, to calling them "Indian/s". The racialization of women labourers thus generally implies their segregation on the basis of supposedly perceived and often "naturalised" ethnic and sexual differences, when in fact these are only culturally ascribed. This racialization and sexualisation of work is part of a hierarchy of duties and silences that limits or even cancels out migrant women's fundamental rights and freedoms, especially when they are employed in certain particularly tiring and socially undesirable activities.

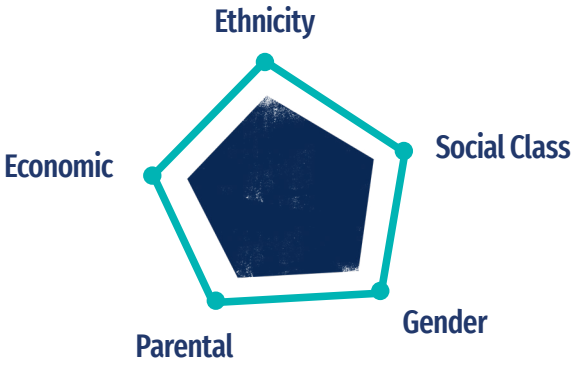


2.3. The prism of discrimination against female migrant workers: the five variables of gender exploitation

The labour market is organised according to a segmentation not only of class and ethnicity (or race) but also of gender, which compresses the rights of migrant women according to a kind of five-variable discrimination. This defines a prism of gender discrimination of migrant women employed in labour-intensive sectors that is evident from the interviews conducted for this study of migrant women employed in agriculture in the Agro Pontino area.

The **first variable** is typically ethnic and concerns **being migrant,** i.e. a person born abroad (or in Italy but without citizenship) and therefore not entitled to formal rights and expectations,

The prism of female discrimination



which are considered socially legitimate for natives but not for migrants, particularly if they come from non-European countries, fleeing conditions of poverty, war and discrimination.

The **second discrimination** derives from the **social class to which they belong**, which in this case is that of the labourer, i.e. a job that is socially considered to be of a lower level and therefore subordinate.

The third one, instead, is a gender variable deriving from being a woman and, for this reason, in the context of reference and according to stereotypes and approaches dramatically still transversal and widespread in the country, naturally and easily to be exploited, objectified and relegated to the bottom rungs of social and productive organisation.

The **fourth discrimination** is **parental** or **maternity** discrimination, exercised against female workers who are also mothers, with a twisting of the discriminatory system, exploitation and relative blackmail that is elevated on this specific status, making it a motive for further blackmail, violence, even psychological, and subordination.

Box 4

Blackmailing Indian working mothers

A specific form of exploitation and violence is exercised by some employers and some Indian *caporali* against female migrant workers because they are mothers as well as wives. It involves the mother-tongue hirers falsely telling the woman's children, her family in the province of Latina, her family in her country of origin and the community to which she belongs, her false submission to sexual demands of the employer or of the *caporale*, or the acceptance of serious forms of labour exploitation. This is a form of double stigma, aimed at defining the migrant working mother as "a bad lot" in the eyes of her children and the community to which she originally belongs, leading to serious forms of social marginalisation and intra-community discrimination, due not to her real acceptance of sexual blackmail or exploitation but to her resistance to such criminal action.

"I have a child, life is not easy for a woman with a child and no husband in a foreign country, working as a temporary labourer. It is not just a problem of money. People see a foreign woman alone with a child and think you are easily available, open to casual encounters, willing to do anything. But I try to think of my son and I try not to listen to these rumours."

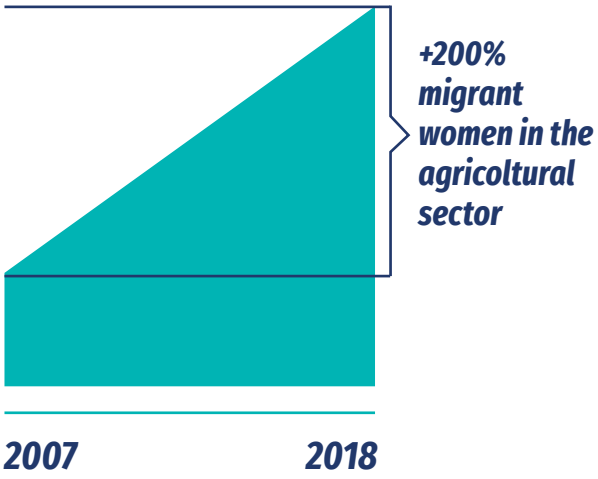
Sunita Kaur, 32-year-old Indian female labourer with a 9-year-old son

The **fifth** and final expression of the discriminatory system within which migrant women labourers are placed is **economic**. Often, these are women who, precisely for the reasons mentioned above, live in conditions of economic poverty that even become social poverty. Systematically living in conditions of poverty leads these women to an almost insuperable marginality, which consolidates the stereotype of naturally fragile subjects and naturally to be exploited, also insofar as they can be substantially violated and raped .

This prism of discrimination makes the range of blackmail, pressures and forms of exploitation and related punishments more sophisticated, in addition to building a framework of codes of silence, which contribute to making the related analysis complex. In this specific context, we witness a continuous devitalisation of the subjectivity of the migrant worker, accelerating her transformation, according to the wishes of the exploiter, into an object (of work and pleasure) in his hands. In fact, the worker is stripped (or attempts are made to strip her) of her identity, history and subjectivity, to become a body of exclusive property and availability to the owner.

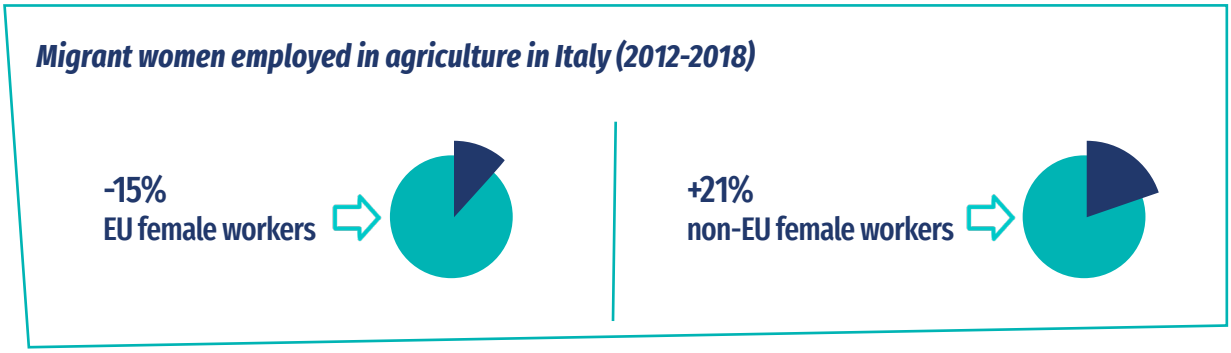
2.4. Migrant women exploited in agriculture

According to the Placido Rizzotto Observatory (2020)[24] and the 2019 ISTAT data, between 2007 and 2018, **the number of female migrant workers employed in the agricultural sector in Italy increased by approximately 200%[25].**



This percentage would only partly correspond to the data provided by INPS [Italian Social Insurance Agency] on fixed-term work in agriculture, which is the prevalent type of contract in this sector.

INPS reports, in the years 2012 to 2018, a reduction in the number of Italian and migrant women employed in agriculture, more precisely EU female agricultural workers, of about 15%, while non-EU women would have increased by almost 21%.



In general, **the data show that in almost all Italian regions, foreign female labour is provided by young women under 40 years of age[27].**

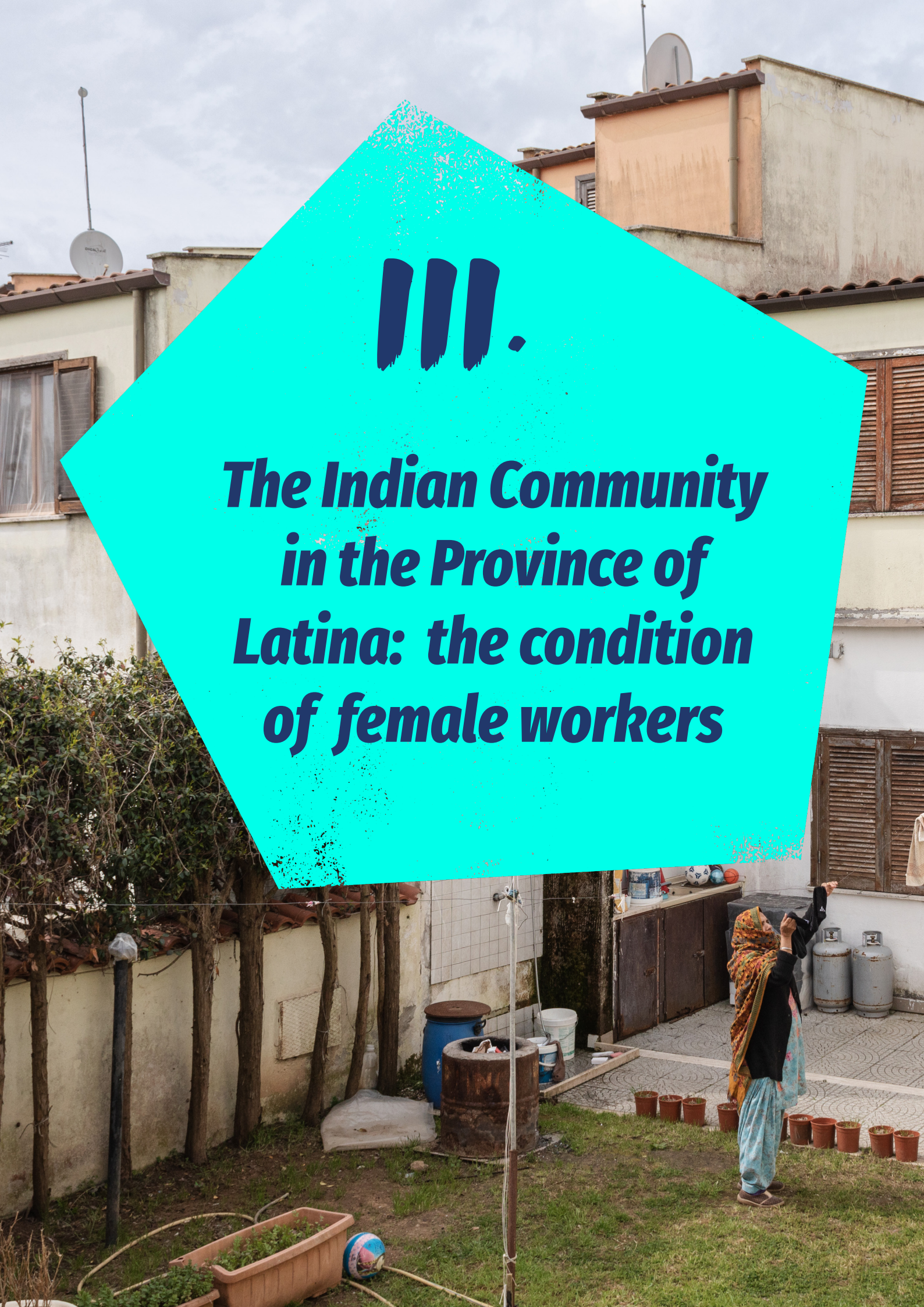
On a strictly statistical level, according to the Italian data of anti-trafficking projects relating to women victims of trafficking and/or serious exploitation, domestic servants and agriculture

24. Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto, Agromafia e caporalato, Roma, Ediesse, 2020, in particular the essay by M. G. Giammarinaro e L. Palombo.
25. CREA PB data on ISTAT data Immigrati.istat. CREA, Il contributo dei lavoratori stranieri all'agricolturaitaliana, 2019.
26. Inps data. M. C. Macrì, G. Valentino, C. Zumpano, Lavoro e imprenditoria femminile in agricoltura, XIII Commission (Agriculture) of the Chamber of Deputies, Hearing of 24 September 2019, p. 18.
27. CREA PB data on ISTAT data Immigrati.istat. CREA, Il contributo dei lavoratori stranieri all'agricoltura italiana, 2019. p.51.



represent the **two main areas in which this phenomenon is manifested** with particular specificity and recurrence.

The agricultural occupation and the related production system, with its national and international processing and marketing chain, the prevalent seasonal nature of migrant labour, the important role of large-scale retail trade and the various fruit and vegetable markets with international size, make it very difficult to reconstruct in detail the overall articulation of the phenomenon of labour exploitation of migrant women employed in agriculture. An exploitation that is produced, and at the same time produces, marginalisation, blackmail and subordination, yet is often central to the production of vegetables, fruit, wine and dairy products that represent the quality of Made in Italy in the world. Exploitation, blackmail and violence against female migrant workers can be found in different parts of Italy, from North to South. These are consequences arising from policies of precariousness of the labour market and management of the economic, environmental and employment crisis within the artificial paradigm of exceptionality, emergency and speculative and vertically oriented economy of a linear nature, whose aim is to achieve maximum profit through maximum subjugation and exploitation of the most blackmailed and socially fragile labour force, corruption, use of illicit money, violence, fraud of various kinds and environmental aggression and pollution.



III.

The Indian Community in the Province of Latina: the condition of female workers

3.1. Origin and characteristics of the Indian community in the Province of Latina

The first migrants of Indian origin arrived in the Province of Latina around the mid-1980s. Indian immigration in the Agro Pontino area has followed a number of different paths, which generally fall into three main categories:

Three dimensions of influence of Indian migration in Agro Pontino

Macro	- transformations imposed by economic globalisation (Green Revolution) - social transformation, economic fibrillations - political and regulatory policies in countries of departure
Meso	- migration policies and regulations of the last 40 years - economic crises - consolidation of migratory flows towards the Mediterranean area
Micro	- actions, policies and territorial practices of a regulatory, social, and economic nature - interconnection of such practices with legal and illegal paths of recruitment, remuneration and family reunification.

In summary, the first Indians came to the province of Latina directly from the Indian Punjab, a north-western region of India, traditionally characterised by a generally developed agricultural system and by the majority presence of Indians of the Sikh religion, while others, probably the majority, came from some northern European countries and in particular from Germany, England and France.

This presence was originally **established mainly along the coastal strip of the Province of Latina** and, in particular, in the "Bella Farnia Mare" residence in Sabaudia, in the countryside of the Municipality of Pontinia, in the hamlet of San Vito in the Municipality of San Felice Circeo, in Borgo Hermada in the Municipality of Terracina and the peri-urban area of the Municipality of Fondi.

It officially counts about **13,000** people. However, according to some estimates, it could reach almost **30,000** between irregularly staying migrants (out of a resident population of 50,000 in 2016[28]), fictitious residences and mobility of irregular migrants. The majority of these are men, 60% of whom work in agriculture as labourers, although following family reunifications the presence of women is increasing (Omizzolo 2015), who arrived from Punjab or were born in the area, and are often employed in various local farms as farmhands or workers in farm sheds washing and packaging fruit and vegetables harvested in the fields.

Box 5

The agricultural system in the Agro Pontino area

In order to understand the relevance of the agricultural system in the Agro Pontino area, it is worth mentioning the presence, according to INPS (2021), of about 7,000 enterprises and cooperatives in the whole area, generally of small and medium size, with the exception of some that refer to international agro-industrial production systems. The fruit and vegetable market of Fondi, located in the town of the same name, is a nerve centre for logistics and marketing of Italian and European fruit and vegetables.

The province of Latina ranks first in Lazio in terms of number of employees (men and women) in agriculture, 66% of whom are foreigners, 80% of whom are non-EU (i.e. 53% of all agricultural employees in the province of Latina)[29]. According to ISTAT data, in Italy, female workers in agriculture account for 29% of the total number of persons employed, 46% of whom are foreigners and 52% of whom are non-EU women (24% of all women in agriculture in the province)[30].

The experience gained by the first migrants contributed to form, at least for some of them, a heritage of knowledge and experience necessary to start, within the local labour market, various forms of mobility indispensable to organise and consolidate early experiences of **(licit and illicit) intermediation of Indian labour and international trafficking** for the purpose of exploitation (Omizzolo 2019). These 'assets' have allowed the sedimentation of various forms of recruitment, intermediation and labour exploitation.

28. CREA PB data on ISTAT data Immigrati.istat. CREA, Il contributo dei lavoratori stranieri all'agricoltura italiana, 2019.
29. Ibidem.
30. Ibidem.

3.2. The origins of Indian women's work in the Agro Pontino area

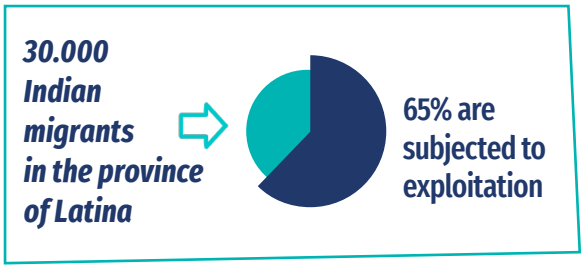
Indian women arrived in Agro Pontino, mostly, from the early 1990s. In the first five to eight years of their stay in the area, they carried out purely domestic activities and only in a few cases did they take on a work role, generally in the field of domestic assistance, agricultural labour, commerce and caring activities of various kinds. In the first phase of their stay in the local labour market, these activities were largely carried out without a regular employment contract, with salaries up to 50% lower than those established by the national contracts in various sectors, and with no recognition of rights such as holidays, weekly rests, sick pays and safety in the workplace.

Even in the perception of Indian male workers employed mainly in agriculture and especially in labour, **Indian women's work**, especially that of their wives, **was perceived as accessory**, useful to round out the family economies, as well as to face fewer difficulties in the renewal of their residence permits. These activities were therefore "instrumental" and not immediately perceived as legitimate and useful for individual and family emancipation.



3.3. Characteristics of agricultural exploitation of Indian women in the province of Latina: forms of new slavery

During the two-year period, in the Agro Pontino agricultural labour force, there was an **irregularity rate of 39%** and an estimated 20,000 exploited migrant workers[31]. In spite of the social and trade union protests in the area, the enquiries and numerous investigations carried out by the Police and the Judiciary, the exploitation, marginalisation and violence against male and female migrant workers, in this case of Indian origin, persist. Of the 30,000 Indian migrants in the province of Latina, **it is estimated that 65% are subjected to some form of exploitation** (IDOS, 2020).



In this context, identifying the labour exploitation of Indian migrant women in the province of Latina employed in agriculture is extremely complex because it intercepts various dimensions and variables.

The interviews help to capture the specific characteristics of the economic, social, physical and psychological sexual violence that many migrant women employed in agriculture have to endure. The methods of recruitment, intermediation, employment and remuneration, which are in part the same and in part different from those of their male countrymen and workmates, **reflect wage inequalities, forms of illicit recruitment and intermediation and subordination based on (gender) prejudice according to which the master is entitled to demand the exploitation of women for the fact that they are women.**

This means that many vegetables produced in the area and which reach the tables of Italians and other Europeans are the result of this system of violence, subordination and gender blackmail. These include courgettes, aubergines, tomatoes, artichokes, carrots and other vegetables that are grown with the sweat of Indian female workers who are forced to suffer serious forms of exploitation and violence. In fact, **there are several cases in which, the attentions of *caporali*, who are often migrants themselves, and some employers result in sexual demands and blackmail in exchange for the renewal of the work contract** (upon which

28. Idos, Dossier statistico Immigrazione, 2020.
https://tempi-moderni.net/2021/08/12/dal-quotidiano-domani-lo-sfruttamento-dei-migranti-al-tempo-della-pandemia

the renewal of the residence permit depends) and/or a partial increase in the agreed salary. Moreover, these are not occasional cases, but repeated over time, to the point that the public importance they assume, i.e. the fact that they are performed by the employer or the *caporale* in front of the entire group of labourers, Italians and migrants represents **the exhibition of an employer and his machist power that is in some way direct and not disputable, the exercise of a form of domination that finds its legitimacy in the acquiescence of the group, in a code of silence of those who witness it**, as evidence of the power of the master and the consent that such practices and behaviour consequently assume on a collective level.

The **rule of silence** as a prerequisite to avoid any enquiry, investigation or narration of what some Indian women workers systematically experience and the continuous threats, in some cases even with weapons, made against them. These conditions have a major impact on women's dignity, on their ability to fully enjoy their rights and to protect themselves against violence and persecution, including sexual violence.

3.3.1. The last in line

Forms of exploitation of female migrant labourers, reinforced by gender discrimination, can be seen right from the recruitment phase. With regard to the forms of illegal **recruitment** and intermediation, i.e. *caporalato*, Indian female migrant workers are generally recruited in the same way as their workfellows and fellow countrymen. This means that they can be found in the same areas (squares, crossroads, roundabouts, places of transit) as the men, but in a secondary position. **The organisation of the physical space intended for recruitment reflects gender relations in which men predominate**. It is men who find work before their female workmates and fellow countrywomen, through scouting and selection activities of *caporali*.

Indian female migrant workers are generally considered the last in line, not because of a sort of competition between genders induced by the search for work, also because they often occupy different positions in agricultural work (men are generally labourers/gatherers, while women generally work in the sheds washing and collecting agricultural products), but because of the reflection of a relationship between genders that is unbalanced in favour of men and that produces consequences in the processes of marginalisation and exploitation also within the local agricultural entrepreneurial system. **This "last in line" relationship is also reflected in the positions they occupy, for example, in the vans in which they are generally recruited.**

The women are always positioned laterally within the loading space of the vans used for recruitment by *caporali*, i.e. near the corners of the vans. Moreover, these positions are not only out of the way but also very dangerous in case of accidents, because they are more directly exposed to impacts and therefore to injuries, even potentially fatal and the last ones to get out of the van in case of any kind of breakdown or police stop.

"I used to see how female migrant farm workers were treated. They were always the last in line, always exploited, sometimes even verbally abused. (...) The boss had a scale of precedence, according to which the Italian male labourers came first, also because some were his friends, then the Italian female labourers like me, then the male migrant workers - with the exception of the caporali who were paid immediately after the Italian men - and finally the foreign women, first of all Romanian and then, last of all, Bangladeshi women."

Paola, Italian female labourer from Agro Pontino

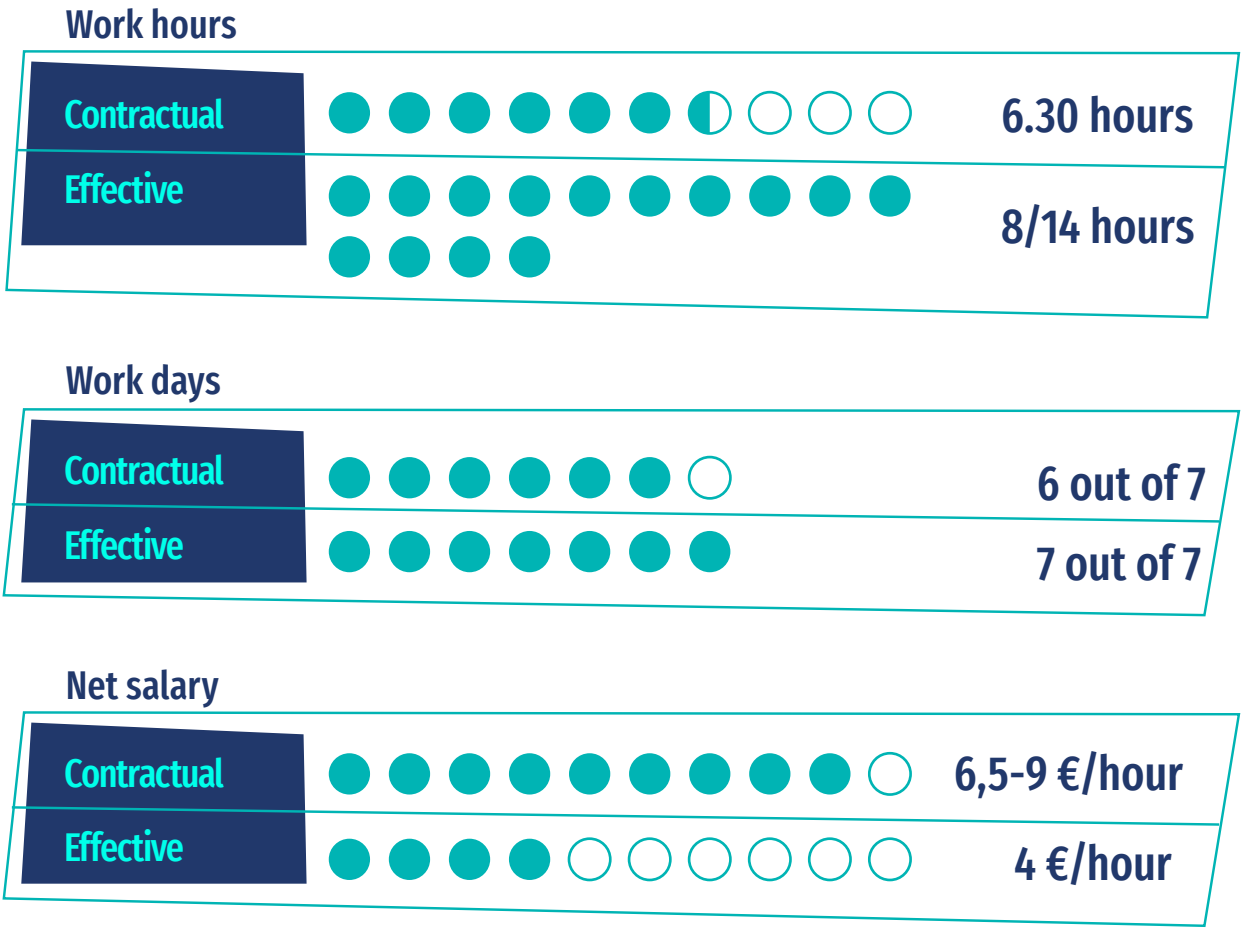
"Many new women, for example, during breaks, when it comes to eating, don't know where to sit because the chairs and the best seats are taken by the older men. This is the hierarchy. They exploit you and you are always the last in line. So you can eat in a corner, or you can stand, or you can eat in the middle of the ground, while the others are sitting. Nobody tells you where you can wash your hands, where the toilet is. You learn by watching the others and if you make a mistake you are punished."

Irina, a Moldovan female labourer formerly employed in a Latina company

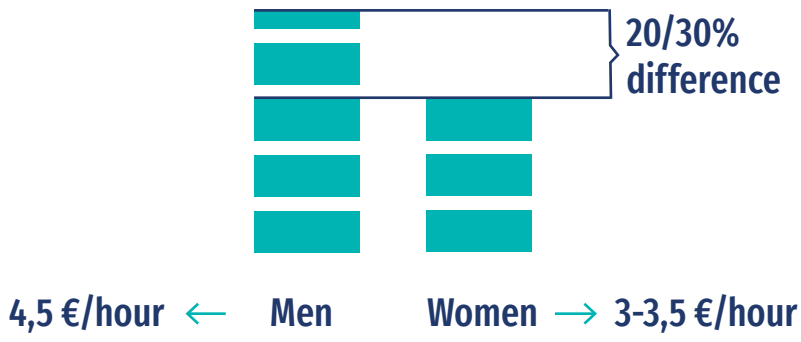
3.3.2. Underpaid contracts and wages

In the province of Latina, the working conditions to which the Indian labourers of the Agro Pontino area, as well as their fellow countrywomen, are often forced, involve daily employment that, during the most demanding harvesting periods, can include **8 to 14 hours** a day (including Saturdays and Sundays) for 16-28 days a month, **for an average of about 4 euros per hour of pay**. It should be noted that the provincial national labour contract foresees 6 hours and 30 minutes of work per day for about 9-12 euros per hour of gross pay, for a net pay that varies between 6.50 and 9 euros per hour. The number of working days per week is supposed to be 6, but there are cases of Indian labourers working 7 days a week.

Differences between real and contractual work situation of migrants (men and women)



Wage difference between men and women





As far as the **difference in wages between men and women** is concerned, it is not uncommon for female labourers to be **paid 20-30% less than their male fellow countrymen**[32]. This means that while for male labourers the informal wage agreed upon with their employers is on average about 4.5 euros per hour, for migrant women employed in the Italian agricultural supply chain, it is about **3.00/3.50** euros per hour of work registered by their employer or *caporale*.
Moreover, in most cases, Indian migrant female workers employed in agriculture in the province of Latina have seasonal contracts but work far more days than those declared by their employers[33].

"If a migrant woman who is a victim of caporalato earns 40 euros a day to work as a labourer harvesting or washing vegetables for about 10 or even 12 hours, she must then give 10 euros to the "caporale". This already amounts to 30 euros. The pay for 10 hours of work should be about 80 euros, but instead you get 40 euros if you are a female migrant labourer, and then 30 because you have to give 10 euros to the person who takes you to the field with a battered old van."

"Discrimination is between men and women, and then also between Italians and migrants. If you are a woman and a migrant, then you are even more exploited. This is evident starting from the hourly wage. An Italian labourer got 5.50 euros per hour, while we Italian women got 4.20 euros. And foreign women even less."

Paola, Italian female labourer from Agro Pontino

"We had worked for about six months and the Italian boss gave us a single cash payment of 300 euros. (...) But we cannot live without money. You can wait for a month's payment, maximum two, not six continuous months. We are not animals. We are women."

Akhila Kaur, Indian female labourer from the province of Latina

28. CREA, Il contributo dei lavoratori stranieri all'agricoltura italiana, 2019.
29 P. Campanella, Vite sottocosto, Aracne ed., 2019; F. Staiano, La discriminazione delle lavoratrici straniere nel settore agricolo: il quadro emerso dal Progetto Net. Work-Rete antidiscriminazione, in G. C. Bruno, Lavoratori stranieri in agricoltura in Campania, una ricerca sui fenomeni discriminatori, CNR ed., Roma, 2018, pp. 77-96.

Box 6

Patriarchy, bargaining and gender discrimination

The forms of bargaining reserved for women indicate at least two forms of discrimination. Firstly, only in a few cases it is the migrant woman who goes directly to the *caporale* male compatriot or to the employer to ask for a job. In 95% of the cases recorded in the province of Latina by Indian workers, it is in fact the husband who approaches the Indian *caporale* or employer on behalf of his wife, negotiating hours and hourly wages. This is a mediation through the family that is intertwined with the activity of illicit intermediation or *caporalato* and that foresees the man (husband) as the authority of representation and mediation even when he has to negotiate working conditions and wages that concern the woman (wife). If, in fact, a labourer agrees with the *caporale* or employer upon an hourly wage of 4.5 euros per hour, the same worker will agree on a lower hourly wage of about 20% if he has to negotiate for the recruitment of a job similar to his own on behalf of his wife.

Secondly, the mediation carried out by the worker/husband/mediator generally involves an agreement that is lower in terms of remuneration than that which the worker/husband/mediator agrees to for himself. This does not derive exclusively from the *caporale's* or employer's capacity or power of blackmail, but from the premise of the woman's subordination, which is rooted in the family relationship between husband and wife. It is a gender subordination that is recognised and reinforced by informal labour agreements signed by the worker/husband/mediator with the *caporale* or employer.

The amount of hours and days worked, however, does not show up in contractual documents and pay slips. Pay slips and employment contracts often appear to be regular, except that they always contain incorrect data to the advantage of the boss: labourers who work twelve or fourteen hours a day every day of the month are only paid for three or four days of work a month, while the remaining hours are 'hidden' or pencilled in on sheets of paper.

In fact, as INPS data reveal, many female migrant farm workers have fixed-term contracts with less than 50 registered working days per year or 102 biennial days. As a result, they are excluded from access to a number of welfare measures, such as agricultural unemployment and maternity benefits, which are only guaranteed to those with contracts of more than 51 working days per year.

This is a serious limitation with highly limiting consequences on the emancipation and social growth of women, who end up being prisoners of a social and productive circuit based on discrimination and gender violence.

"I always have about one third of the days actually worked in my pay packet. Italian female workers always have a few more days."

Sunita Kaur, 32-year-old Indian female labourer with a 9-year-old son

"In the pay packet, you always get a few days. Maybe you work 25 days but they only write down 10. It is not fair. This is particularly true for migrant women like Indian women who do not understand Italian and do not know the laws. I have seen Indian colleagues working up to 30 days a month and only getting 5 or 6 days in their pay packets. Then these farms shield themselves with lawyers, accountants and bookkeepers who always fill us with words and tell us only that you must remain good and silent if you want to work, otherwise you can look for work elsewhere."

Irina, a Moldovan female labourer formerly employed in a Latina enterprise

Furthermore, according to a study by the Italian NGO MEDU [Medici per I Diritti Umani (2015), conducted with ASGI [Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration] and the Legal Clinic of the University of RomaTre, the most common method of payment in the province of Latina among Indian labourers is by the hour. In fact, more than 80% of those interviewed are paid by the hour. 67% of the labourers declared that they were paid directly by the employer, 7% by an Indian intermediary, while 24% preferred not to answer.

Behind this same formula lurks discriminatory behaviour and forms of pressure to consolidate exploitative mechanisms, as confirmed by the testimony of a farmhand interviewed in the context of this study in the Agro Pontino area:

"In a farm, the bosses decided to impose on us the use of Italian during working hours, that is, even for ten or twelve hours a day, and if we disobeyed, that is, if we started to speak in our language of origin, they fined us. The fine was 10 euros for us migrant workers and 20 euros if it was the women they had put in charge of the work teams who violated the rules."

"I returned to work in a farm in March 2016 approximately until 2018. (...) Sometimes I worked 14 hours, but they marked down 5. Then there were those who worked without a contract and were paid even less than me. And unfortunately there is no one in the farm who can help you. (...)

Akhila Kaur, Indian female labourer from the province of Latina

In addition, an investigation published in an Italian newspaper and edited by Marco Omizzolo and Angelo Mastrandrea[34] confirms the very frequent *modus agendi* in the Agro Pontino area, which has already emerged on other occasions and reveals the contradiction between wages and working conditions, which we will address below: the labourers, both women and men, were forced to sign the receipt of the pay slip with omission of accounting for the hours actually worked. Those who refused (but it was rare) to sign, risked retaliation or not being paid at all.

"(...) It means that even though we all worked together and worked the same hours, there were those who took many days, even if not all of them, and therefore had more pay, and others like us women who took half the money. The problem is that if you report it, then you do not work and you do not get the money you are entitled to".

Paola, Italian female labourer
in the Agro Pontino area

3.3.3. Working without breaks, protection, in toxic environments and under doping substances

Without breaks and under the effects of doping substances

The working conditions for migrant women require a particularly demanding physical activity that may involve standing or bending over (depending on the type of work involved) for several hours. In the case of employment within the production chain inside the farm sheds of various farms, this often means cleaning, washing and packing the vegetables harvested during the day, which requires having one's hands, in some cases without gloves, immersed in cold water at temperatures that can be close to zero.

According to some ethnographic research conducted through participatory observation, **work breaks**, even for Indian women, on several farms, especially until 2016, were at most two, usually of twenty minutes each, throughout the working day (Omizzolo 2019).

"We used to have 40-minute breaks in a day, while the Italian men and women had more time."

Akhila Kaur, Indian female labourer
from Latina province

34. Reference is made to the investigative report published in the weekly magazine "Il Venerdì di Repubblica", by Angelo Mastrandrea and Marco Omizzolo, on the spread of clandestine and carcinogenic phytopharmaceuticals used in certain companies in the province of Latina and in some areas of Sicily (http://www.tempi-moderni.net/2019/09/16/fitofarmaci-illegali-tossicie-cancerogeni-nelle-campagne-pontine-siamo-tutti-morti-che-lavorano/).

"I work from 7 AM until 5 PM, with thirty minutes break for lunch and ten minutes in the whole day to rest. Then the boss tells you to go faster and faster. Always. He is all over you. Some women, partly because they do not speak Italian or because they are afraid, withhold any physiological needs during working hours. They only go to the toilet when they get home or as soon as the day is over for fear of being reproached or fired."

Sunita Kaur, 32-year-old Indian female labourer with 9-year-old son

"The work was very hard. I was not used to working fifteen hours a day in the greenhouses picking radishes or courgettes. Sometimes we also worked every day of the month, with half a day off only on Sunday morning."

Shergill Kaur, Indian female labourer in the Agro Pontino area

Many of them also say that they do not have their own toilets, but have to use the men's toilets and the rented chemical toilets located in the fields, which are also used by men.

Moreover, **the working conditions of Indian labourers are so harsh that some of them use painkillers and other substances such as opium, methamphetamines and antispasmodics to resist their fatigue.** This phenomenon was analysed and denounced as early as 2014 by the cooperative *In Migrazione* with the dossier "Doparsi per lavorare come schiavi" [Doping oneself to work like slaves], while in May 2021 the phenomenon was also investigated by the police, specifically by the NAS [Office for the prevention of the adulteration of beverages and food] of the Carabinieri of Latina, who together with the local public prosecutor's office, investigated the matter.

Dangerous substances

The activities carried out, in some specific cases, involve **direct contact with phytopharmaceuticals** that are very dangerous. In particular, in agricultural greenhouses, migrants are not only forced to endure stifling heat in summer and very low temperatures in winter, but also to continuously **breathe in substances that are harmful to their health, such as pesticides and herbicides.**

The spread of these chemical products, which are banned by national legislation but still used in some farms, have a high contaminating and deadly power, with direct damage to women workers, the surrounding environment and even the families of migrant workers when they return to their homes and come into contact with their children, husbands and relatives before they have washed thoroughly. The latter activity is still rarely carried out on the farms themselves.

"Poisons were a big problem for me. I did not have any licence to use poisons. Before the strike, an experienced Italian boss did the job. Then they made me do it, but I was very sick. I breathed in those strong smells and felt sick every time. I had pains in my stomach, in my eyes and sometimes my nose was dripping. I could not sleep at night because I was so stressed. In my opinion, those poisons were not good for me. The master was punishing me because I was the one who complained the most. But I was starting to have health problems, very serious ones. So I decided to change farm".

Akhila Kaur, Indian female labourer
from Latina province

"When I used to take showers at home, I had fiery red rashes on my skin because of the moulds, midges and poisons or products we were given in the greenhouse. One day I felt sick, (...) I could not stand up anymore. That day I went to the doctor, who told me that my liver was overloaded and that I also had a very high level of toxicity due to those working conditions and what we were breathing. So there I decided to end it. I had reached the point of deciding whether to work or die and, honestly, looking at my son, I decided to live."

Irina, a Moldovan female labourer formerly
employed in a Latina company

Among the compounds used, there could also be carcinogenic substances (altered Rizolec and Adrop) imported from China, smuggled into Italy through some ports, such as Gioia Tauro and Naples, and processed in Italy in clandestine laboratories run by organized crime.

Accidents

Migrant workers also face **recurrent accidents** at work, sometimes with dramatic results and often unreported[35]. They occur during working hours and in many cases are concealed by the Italian employer or his trusted man in order to prevent the farm from being checked and reported. In many cases, the injured Indian men and women are accompanied by the employer or the *caporale*, who acts on the former's orders, to the nearest hospital or the local emergency room with the imposed ransom-recommendation not to tell the doctor in charge of taking care of them about the accident and its dynamics. This was to prevent the report drawn up by the doctor from reaching the local Public Prosecutor's Office and, for this reason, to solicit the interest of a Deputy Prosecutor in investigating, by initiating controls on the relevant farm.

35. See for example: https://ilmanifesto.it/braccianti-indiani-in-sciopero-contro-agrilatina/

"Another problem was injuries. If you had an injury you could not do anything, they would not take you to hospital. This was true, from what I heard from my husband's friends, for many farms, not just the one I worked at. One time a worker cut his finger. The boss gave him some water and a handkerchief and took him home and asked him not to go to the emergency room."

Pallavi Kaur, Indian female labourer
from the province of Latina

"Sometimes there were also injuries. (...) There were never any complaints, hospital admissions and none of us was ever taken to the emergency room. You never go to the emergency room or if you do go, the owner tells you that you have to declare that you were injured at home."

Akhila Kaur, Indian female labourer
from the Latina province



3.3.4. Gender-based violence

A characteristic element of the exploitation of female migrant labourers is related to gender-based violence. These are approaches, behaviours and actions that clearly refer to a patriarchal conception organised and acted upon by some employers and *caporali*, often from India, which is manifested towards migrant women employed in agriculture. It must be stressed that this phenomenon follows a 'concealed' pattern that is difficult to monitor in detail.

A first piece of data useful to imagine the size and complexity of this issue concerns the number of voluntary terminations of pregnancy: as reported by ISTAT data for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, many of the voluntary abortions of Romanian women in Apulia took place in the Province of Foggia, representing the highest number at regional level. In the Italian agro-industrial districts, many migrant women, often very young, are also exploited as prostitutes in the countryside and in ghettos[36].

"(...) They tell you that if you want your contract renewed then you have to give something in return, or be nice to them, or follow them behind the greenhouses or into the bathrooms or behind the shed."

Shergill Kaur, Indian labourer
in the Agro Pontino area

"If the master asked you directly or through a caporale to sleep with him, you had to go and do it. This was true for both Indian and Romanian women. It was enough that you were a beautiful

36. In Italian ghettos, female immigrant workers almost always have to pay a share of their earnings to those who manage the premises where they live and work. This obligation does not arise if they are able to set up their own connection house. It should be remembered, in this regard, that during 2016, about 50 Nigerian women victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in ghettos, in the provinces of Foggia and Caserta, turned to IOM operators. The case of the Romanian women workers in the greenhouses of the Province of Ragusa can be considered paradigmatic of the serious and varied forms of exploitation and abuse suffered by women employed in the agro-food sector in Italy. (cf. https://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2014/09/15/news/violentate-nel-silenzio-dei-campi-a-ragusailnuovo-orrore-delle-schiave-rumene-1.180119) In fact, due to the permanent presence of migrant labourers, especially from various Eastern European countries, farms are responsible for the management and provision of accommodation for workers and their families, which in most cases consist of old warehouses, garages or sheds located in the countryside, within the farm units or however isolated from transit routes, and therefore several kilometres from the first inhabited centres and from any inspectors sent out to investigate. According to INPS data, in 2017 there were 3,454 female migrant agricultural workers in the Province of Ragusa, and among these the most numerous component was represented by workers of Romanian origin (1,914). It is plausible, according to the main surveys and interviews collected, to assume that at least 80 per cent of these female workers work in local greenhouses. Many Romanian female workers live with their children in remote dilapidated houses and shacks inside farms in the countryside. In this scenario of total dependence on the employer, of invisibility and isolation, also due to the lack of public transport services, the exploitationof women workers is also characterised by blackmail and sexual abuse. According, for example, to ISTAT data on voluntary interruptions of pregnancy by... ...Romanian women in Sicily, the highest number of abortions at a regional level was recorded, from 2012 to 2018, in the province of Ragusa. Another hard-to-find figure is the number of minors living in complete isolation and absolute invisibility in the greenhouses of the transformed belt of the Vittoria territory. Many of them are not vaccinated or have never been visited by a paediatrician. They do not benefit from the national health or by the school system, they are subjected to violence or witness violence and therefore experience it as part of their daily lives and sometimes within their own families, with serious social, psychological and educational consequences. There is no lack of widespread cases of intra-familial assistance by minors for other minors, especially when their parents work long hours a day in the camps. In other cases, girls and boys (aged 13 to 18) also work as labourers, in exploitative conditions, often for 8-9 hours of work a day in the countryside, for a salary of around 10-15 euros a day, without any protection and, of course, without a contract.

woman, not too young, and you could receive this request. Then you had only two options: to accept and continue working, or refuse and run away. You had to leave everything, even your documents in the offices, and leave, maybe go back home. Women, especially Indian women, do not talk about these things, sometimes not even to their husbands because then there is trouble. Some men think the woman has slept with the boss, even though it is not true, and then there are serious problems in the house."

"We women are sometimes seen as people to be exploited under the greenhouses and also in bed. The bosses think this. They feel they own the workers and especially the women workers, that is the problem. If I had a daughter one day, I would never let her be a labourer because being in these situations is really bad."

Akhila Kaur, Indian labourer
from the Latina province

(...) In the past, some Indian, Romanian and Bulgarian colleagues gave in. They gave in because the boss threatened them and promised to pay them more, to renew their labour contract and to move them from hard work such as inside the greenhouses to office work. When you are a foreigner and you are threatened like this, you may give in. But then they don't leave you alone anymore. If you give in once, as I myself have seen, then they are after you every day. They pass behind you and say things in your ear, or they rub you, laugh at you in front of their colleagues who then see you as easy and helpful and your life is over. I too have received such attention."

Sunita Kaur, 32-year-old Indian labourer
with 9-year-old son

This subordination often extends to the whole family sphere and has serious consequences in the dynamics of social networks and community life. According to the interviews conducted, the victim's children run the risk of being publicly accused of being the children of a woman who has given herself sexually to bosses and *caporali* in order to obtain an economic or work advantage, and therefore responsible for a behaviour that is not acceptable and/ or reprehensible in terms of public morality. This is a risk that is reminded to the same foreign women workers by the bosses and *caporali* in order to induce them to accept the proposals and requests made by them in order to sexually abuse them. Even within their own families there are forms of pressure, guiltiness, and subordination of women that induce them to accept blackmail and violence and not to talk about it with their husbands, parents or other references. All this reflects a master and machist logic that facilitates a **process of objectification** of Indian women workers as an instrument in the hands of entrepreneurs and criminal bosses

who use them to pursue objectives of profit and domination over the work of women workers, their bodies and their lives.

Access to the bodies of migrant female agricultural workers is considered a right by employers and *caporali* according to a patriarchal conception that goes so far as to consider them constantly at their disposal, on whose bodies and psyches, frustrations, violence and perversions of various kinds can be poured.



3.4. Exploitation during the COVID19 pandemic

According to the findings of the Tempi Moderni study centre[37], during the Covid-19 period, there has been an increase of 15-20% in the number of exploited male and female migrant workers in the Italian countryside, which in overall terms means an increase of about 40-55 thousand exploited people. This increase occurred in the twofold direction of worsening working conditions and an increase in daily working hours. It should be noted that, during the two-year period 2018-2019, the work irregularity rate in agriculture was 39%. However, during the Covid-19 period, particularly in phase 1 (general lockdown), the work irregularity rate reached 48%. This means that almost one out of two migrant labourers in agriculture during the pandemic was employed irregularly.

In fact, **many employers perceived Covid-19 as a great opportunity to increase their profits**, both legal and illegal, generating a serious resurgence of working conditions and

37. Centro studi Tempi Moderni: www.tempi-moderni.net

exploitation of their migrant labour force, reorganising their management and forms of employment in a very short time and leading to the deterioration of their fundamental freedoms. While, for example, more than 300,000 agricultural migrant workers, i.e. almost 30 per cent of the total, worked less than 50 days per year in the pre-pandemic phase, as officially declared by their employers, although in reality they worked at least three times as much, during Covid-19 the number of working days officially registered by farms decreased by 20 per cent, with an increase in the number of hours per day worked and not registered, in the pace of work, and in the intensity of daily work with a corresponding increase in the risk of serious accidents.

During the pandemic, the average working time for migrants employed in agriculture oscillated **between 8 and 15 hours per day**, again recording an increase especially in medium and large farms, also due to their ability to intercept, through large-scale distribution, the increased demand for these goods sold in urban shopping centres and supermarkets. As far as female migrant labourers are concerned, in this case the **gender difference**, as is often the case in other sectors, **played a role of serious disadvantage**. Indeed, f**emale migrant workers** during phase 1 of Covid-19 **continued to receive 20-30% lower wages than their male colleagues and workmates**. In addition, the lockdown resulted in their **greater social marginalisation**, with increased cases of violence at work and in the family.

If the lack of personal protective equipment is common practice, **pandemic has also further worsened safety conditions**. With reference to the anti-Covid-19 measures provided for by the various D.P.C.M. [Decree of the Italian President of the Council of Ministers] - and in particular to work with face masks, gloves and antiseptic gel - it appears that, **in about 85% of cases, these sanitary devices are purchased by the workers themselves, further reducing the already meagre salary**[38]. In the most extreme cases, i.e. in 25% of those involved, for purely economic reasons, the same face mask is used for several weeks or even without the relevant compulsory sanitary equipment[39].

On the whole, Covid-19 has not led to a stand-by of exploitation but to an acceleration and often worsening of the living and working conditions of migrant labourers, which the so-called *provvedimento di emersione* from irregular work has not remedied but only disappointed well-founded expectations of reform and justice.

"In the farm where I worked, for example, we women had to buy our own gloves, and during the pandemic we also had to buy masks, boots, hats... in short, everything we needed to work.

38. Tempi Moderni, 2021, https://tempi-moderni.net/2021/08/12/dal-quotidiano-domani-lo-sfruttamento-dei-migranti-altempo-della-pandemia.
39. Ibidem.

The farm never gave us anything. Even the knives we used to pick the salad or clean the courgettes, we brought from home. (...) It seems like a small thing, but you have to change a face mask when you work long hours in the countryside, especially in greenhouses, at least twice a day, sometimes even three times. It means that every day you throw away at least five or six euros. It means that at the end of the month you have spent between 60 and 100 euros of your salary working for the farm. That is not cheap. With that money you can do the shopping for whole family and anyway its money that the employer should pay and not us women."

Shergill Kaur, Indian labourer
in the Agro Pontino area

3.5. Exploitation along the value chain

Subordination to bosses, labour exploitation, violence, migrant and gender discrimination are part of the strategies deployed by a part of the territory's production system in order to contain its production costs[40], favour its activity through unfair competition with farms that work in a regular way and, at the same time, a way of restructuring its production system through a sort of "in situ delocalisation". These actions are also determined by the formal and informal rules in force and by the functioning of the commercial system, with the fragmentation of the relevant agricultural supply chain and a tendency towards a corporative management by the major food companies worldwide. **The *doppie aste al massimo ribasso* [double auctions at the highest discount]** (a practice responsible for a system bottleneck that binds honest producers and the world of work to a relentless 'race to the bottom') are one of the links in the national agricultural production chain and among the actions responsible for compromising the rights of the agricultural workforce, including women, and exposing them to blackmail and situations of need that are never satisfied. The value chain, including the commercial chain, produces some of the fundamental pillars on which the system of exploitation of agricultural labour, including that of migrant women, is built and developed.

The exploitation of Indian male and female labourers is characterised by the fact that it hides behind pseudo-legal forms intended as

40. C. Colloca, A. Corrado, La globalizzazione delle campagne, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2013.

experiences of life and work that are formally legal but not free from serious forms of marginalisation, violence, labour exploitation and segregation. This condition continues to be underestimated by the Italian government and its migration and labour policies.

The persistence of formal laws, practices and procedures, starting with the so-called "Bossi-Fini" law, which do not prevent the exploitation and ghettoization of migrants, both men and women, constitutes an evolution of the criminal and marginalisation system that requires a mature political will to intervene and reform, which is still lacking.

In most cases, in fact, workers have a regular residence permit, with apparently legal contracts, formally correct pay slips, and apparently normal daily working hours. This strategy is favoured by the legislation itself, which allows farms to declare their working days retrospectively on a quarterly basis.

Moreover, too frequently illegal practices along the agri-food chain are intertwined with a recognised mafia presence. There are numerous judicial and investigative proceedings, trials and judgments that have become final, which have recognised the conditioning of various Mafia clans in the fruit and vegetable sector in the south of the Agro Pontino area and, consequently, the conditioning of the whole national and international fruit and vegetable sector . According to two of the most authoritative scholars of the phenomenon, i.e. Judge Gian Carlo Caselli and Professor Gian Maria Fara, President of EURISPES, the Mafia (...)

(...) "conditions the market, establishing crop prices, managing transport and sorting, controlling entire supermarket chains, exporting our real or fake Made in Italy, creating abroad production plants of the Italian sounding "[42].

3.6. Disputes, reports and prejudices against Indian female labourers in the Agro Pontino area

Female migrants working in agriculture, as has been said and proven through the testimonies collected, are subjected to serious forms of pressure and psychological and physical violence, where subordination passes through sexual abuse, by criminal entrepreneurs and *caporali*, rooted in a predatory and male chauvinist logic. This system is also reproduced thanks to a **persistent patriarchal culture both in Italy and within the social and family context**

41. F. Fanizza, M. Omizzolo, Caporalato. An authentic Agromafia, Milano, Mimesys International, 2019.
42. See: https://mafie.blogautore.repubblica.it/2018/03/14/1648/

of the Indian community. Not only is bargaining managed by the men of the family who accept lower pay for women, sanctioning connivance between the male sphere of employers and workers.
The role played by husbands in women's retaliation against abuse is also significant.

Female migrant workers in the province of Latina **have more than 60% fewer disputes than their male fellow countrymen.** Despite the fact that they have developed a course of action against labour exploitation, forced labour and all forms of discrimination and violence with various committed social realities, there is a manifest reluctance on the part of husbands to continue along this path until they make a more or less public complaint. **A complaint is generally interpreted as an act of "rebellion" that is essentially male and not female.** In fact, the male Indian labourer is not more inclined to file a complaint, but interprets it as a "men's affair" and discourages, prevents or restrains female workers, especially those belonging to his own family, from filing a formal complaint or organising a labour dispute. This expression is considered as an act of emancipation of women even within the family and the relationships developed with their husbands, an abnormal behaviour that is more legitimate and consistent for men and exceptional for women. This is why female migrant workers employed in agriculture tend to experience a sort of "open-ended exploitation", a widespread social prejudice, also present within the worker's family, which needs to be overcome by means of reception, training and information paths that are territorially developed and adapted to its articulation. **There is no shortage of cases of complaints made by Indian women who are kept hidden from their husbands**, or female workers who are able to represent the conditions of exploitation they have suffered during interviews with lawyers, mediators and assistants, but who also express their desire not to officially report the situation because of the consequences that they would determine also within the family.

The result is a framework in which many migrant women are squeezed by a triple stranglehold, the reasons of a predatory and criminal capitalism, the exercise of a machist power in the workplace, the subordination to the husband and to the male sphere in the family and community that weakens the possibility of reaction, already strongly compromised by linguistic, educational, integration barriers and by a regulatory system that has many loopholes in the effective protection of human, social, economic, gender rights both in the production chains and in life paths, especially of the migrant population.

"(...) the bosses know that it is very difficult for the Indian female labourers to speak out and they do not easily press charges: some women risk not only their

jobs but also having problems with their families, friends and parents, despite various forms of discrimination".

Shergill Kaur, Indian labourer
in the Agro Pontino area

(...) When I can, I advise women to make complaints, but it is necessary to remember that if you are a woman, a wife and a mother, (...) you have to confront your husband before taking this decision. You have to think about it carefully because the whole family is exposed, starting with your son or daughter, and this often prevents you from making any complaint. (...) It is very difficult to file a complaint and, if you are a woman, immigrant, exploited, wife and mother, you speak little Italian and you are a victim of a caporale, not only do you not file complaints but you do not even speak because the consequences are very high and I understand them well. (...) It is not only migrants who are afraid to report, but also Italians. The problem is that if you make a complaint, you don't work and you don't get the money you are entitled to".

Paola, Italian female labourer
from Agro Pontino

"They took information about our lives, they followed what we wrote and posted on social networks, especially Facebook. If someone vented her situation on social networks, she was immediately filmed and asked to delete."

Irina, Moldavian female labourer,
former employee of a company in Latina

"My husband did not want to do anything at first because we are foreigners and he does not trust Italian justice. Some Indians were cheated by lawyers who had committed themselves to defend them and who instead settled with the farms and took most of the money owed to the workers. Besides, we do not speak Italian well and they can easily cheat you. Even going to court is not easy. We work all day in the countryside, so it is difficult to have time to go to court. If the boss does not give you the day off, you cannot go. And then we do not have a car and we would have to pay some friend with a car to drive us to court. (...) We thought about it a lot and then, thanks to the Tempi Moderni association, we decided to file a complaint for the months we worked where I only got a few hundred euros. We turned to a lawyer who does not want money and seems very good. He comes from Rome, his name is Arturo, he has no friends among the farms and we trusted him. We didn't pay a single euro and this is fundamental for us."

Pallavi Kaur, Indian female labourer
in the province of Latina



Conclusions and proposals for action

Conclusions and proposals for action

"The farm produced many vegetables, such as carrots, courgettes, radishes, cucumbers, aubergines, pumpkin flowers, watermelons. The work was uninterrupted because the farm had many hectares under cultivation and also many greenhouses. Trucks came from all over Europe and took the crops everywhere. Certainly in Germany, for example. I know this for sure because we were constantly told to pack the vegetables well, otherwise the truck would be sent back by the Germans."

Pallavi Kaur, Indian female labourer from the province of Latina

The relevance of the phenomenon of labour exploitation poses a **fundamental ethical, political and economic issue also for the agro-food chains of the agricultural sector, including those of processing, trade, large-scale distribution and consumption.**

Illegal or improper behaviour, interests and practices occur in the production, harvesting and processing of agricultural, wine or dairy products, which are often part of an advanced business system, with commercial relations, including international ones, capable of producing official and unofficial turnovers in the millions, together with a persistent evasion of taxes and social security contribution to the detriment of the State. INPS (2021) points out that, in the province of Latina, in the period January 2020-May 2021 (16 months) there has been, in the very middle of Covid-19 pandemic, a tax evasion of 7,424,877 euros.

The assumption of responsibility by the main players in these sectors with regard to the issue of exploitation and violence suffered by female migrant workers, as well as the necessary regulatory reforms proposed for this purpose, are essential to overcome this problem once and for all.

The presence on the shelves of several Italian and European supermarkets of fruit and vegetable products, processed and otherwise, **grown and harvested using various forms of exploitation and violence on female agricultural workers,** including migrant workers, expresses a no longer postponable criticism of the production system itself, its processing, distribution, commercial and consumption chain, as well as their necessary reforms. These include, for example, the final approval of the **law prohibiting "double-bidding" auctions.**

The combination of these sectors, business systems, interests and organisations leads to a serious reduction in rights, wages (often passed on to the community through the improper use

of agricultural unemployment) and working conditions, including safety of male and female workers. This criticism must include the issue of human rights and personal dignity, which is evident starting, as in the study proposed here, from the testimonies of female migrant women employed in the agricultural sector, with particular reference to that of the areas with the highest production and commercial density of fruit and vegetables in Italy, namely the province of Latina, just one hundred kilometres from the capital city of Italy.

Ultimately, the exploitation of migrant labour in agriculture is not improvised or the result of criminal powers and interests alone, but also involves the organisation of the Italian labour market, both formal and informal, the practices and customs in force, the business system that can be developed within the various production sectors, such as large-scale distribution and agro-industrial production and processing, the rules that regulate migratory flows and the processes of emersion and social inclusion of welfare in its various dynamics. In this respect, the issue of labour exploitation and illegal labour intermediation (or *caporalato*) of thousands of migrant labourers in the Italian countryside, their living conditions and the binding constraints that prevent them from embracing a path of inclusion and emancipation, with particular reference to migrant women, remains open.

In the light of this analysis, actions to be undertaken in the area of prevention and counteracting labour exploitation in agriculture, as well as protection and assistance of victims and their socio-occupational inclusion and reform of national and EU distribution systems are indicated below:

- an **information and awareness campaign** on the rights of male and female workers in informal settlements and in areas at risk of exploitation aimed at increasing migrants' awareness and tools at their disposal to oppose any form of marginalisation and exploitation;
- **raising awareness among companies,** including through its trade associations, **on the application of existing rights and laws as well as providing assistance to small farms** for the management of hiring practices for migrant workers in Italy;
- **strengthening of *Centri Pubblici per l'Impiego (CPI)*** [Public Employment Centres] for the management of reservation lists of agricultural labour;
- **creation of a Coordination Table** for the provision of accommodation for seasonal workers in a given territory, socio-health and legal assistance;
- **networking of transport companies** to meet the needs of male and female farm workers;
- provision of a **range of assistance and support services for victims of exploitation** with professional and gender-differentiated interventions;



- **strengthening of labour inspectors** on formal identification of victims of labour and gender exploitation and support with adequately trained cultural male and female mediators;
- **the provision of social and labour integration pathways** in cooperation with social services, including victims of socio-occupational exploitation practices;
- **gender equality campaign** for the whole population, including resident migrants;
- **full implementation of the Italian Law No. 199/2016** to combat *caporalato*, starting with the nationwide dissemination of the *Rete del Lavoro Agricolo di Qualità* [Quality Agricultural Labour Network];
- the **adoption of a regulatory framework against "double-bidding" auctions and unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain;**
- **promotion of a European ethical certification system** for products in the agro-food and distribution chain, starting with a public recognition of the price at source of fruit and vegetables on sale and raising consumer awareness on the transparency of the labour, distribution and production chain;
- **the inclusion of conditionality with respect to human rights and the environment** in any national public incentive to the agri-food chain and in the contributions deriving from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP);

- the **application of ILO Convention C190 against violence and harassment in the workplace,** which has already been ratified by Italy but needs adequate measures to ensure its implementation;
- **the adoption of an EU law on mandatory corporate human rights and environmental due diligence,** which makes compliance binding throughout the agro-food value chain and identify specific administrative and criminal responsibilities of business enterprises. Small and medium-sized agri-food enterprises cannot be excluded from these responsibilities, also to prevent and halt the existing "externalisation" of exploitation. However, they should be supported and incentivised to have the capacity to adapt their organisational and control systems without jeopardising their sustainability in all dimensions, including the economic one.

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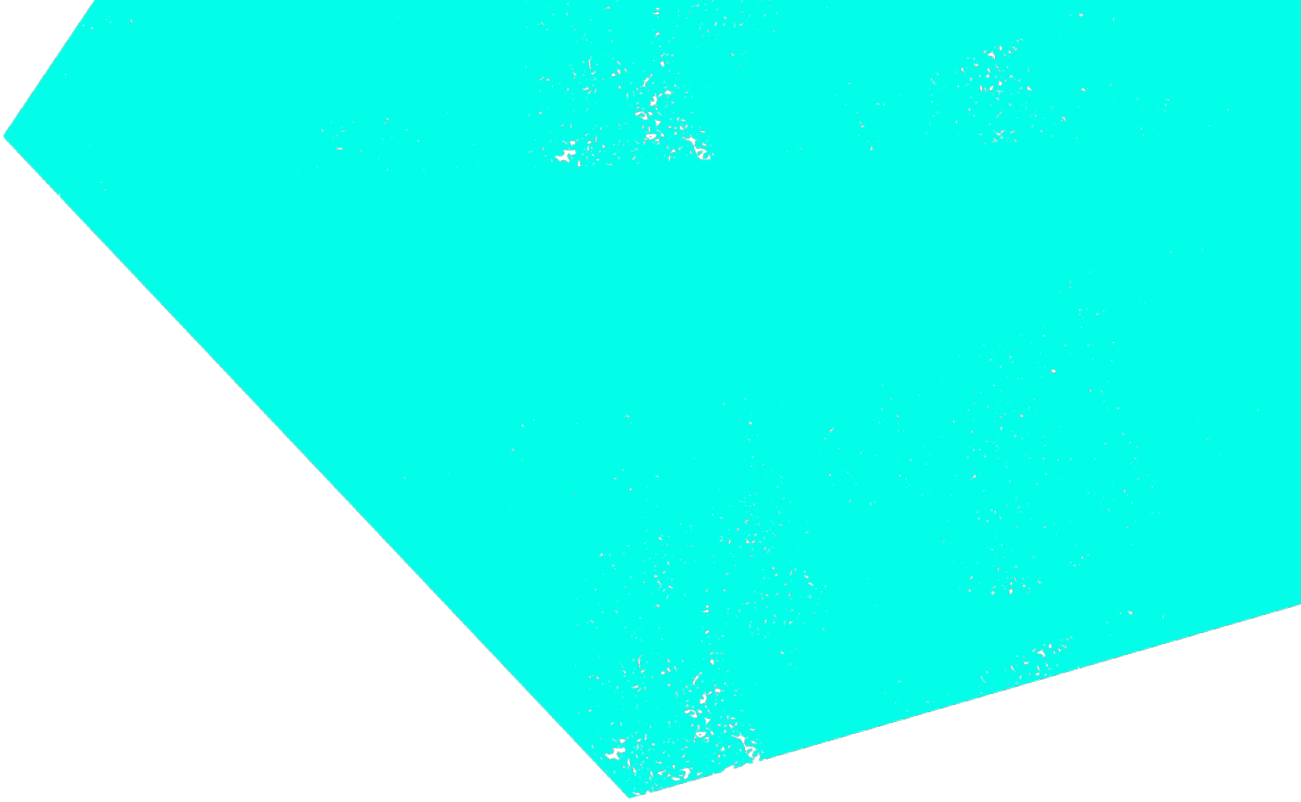
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