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(UN)EQUAL

The multi-exploitation of women in agriculture

QUADERNO 03



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(UN)EQUAL

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Women in agriculture, far from marginal

Maria Grazia Giammarinaro
former UN Special Rapporteur on human trafficking,
Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto

With **Quaderno n. 3**, the *'Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto'* continues, along with the entire FLAI [*t/n Italian Federation of Agricultural Industry Workers*], its commendable and, for much too long, solitary work aimed at training a spotlight on the reality of women agricultural workers. Significantly titled "(UN)EQUAL. The multi-exploitation of women in agriculture", the contents in no way betray the intent of the title. Entrusted to highly competent and experienced researchers and operators, the *Quaderno* confirms that the presence of women in agriculture is far from marginal, counting approximately 300,000 units, almost one third of the whole employed workforce, considering only those with a contract. But various studies in the field, albeit in limited geographical areas, have shown that the number of female workers could be three times the official count, if considering wholly informal work relations.
This is a reality that has remained invisible for far too long, because hidden behind stereotypes and prejudices, which in actual fact serve to legitimise discrimination, blackmail, and inhuman treatment. The *Quaderno* wishes to remember and honour the memory of Paola Clemente, who died of exhaustion in July 2015, in the field where she was working. The submission by Lucrezia Lo Bianco provides us with a vivid image of Paola's life and of her extremely harsh working conditions, under plastic tarps where the temperature during the summer could reach up to 50 degrees Celsius.
The indignation for that absurd and inconceivable death opened the way to the approval of Law n. 199/2016, which allows incriminating of intermediaries and employers when they recruit, or control, or exploit female and male workers, precisely specifying the indicators of exploitation. And the regulation set forth in the Consolidated Law on Immigration, which allows granting a residence permit and certain forms of support to anyone who has been subjected to exploitation, also in terms of labour, has finally begun to be applied.
The submission by Annelisa Giordano shows that wages for female agricultural workers are lower than the already extremely low wages paid to male workers. Hence, the gender wage gap is not merely a hypothesis, but an ascertained reality in the agricultural sector, even in the formalised employment segment. Another significant data point is that the wage gap is transversal, and independent of age, citizenship, level of education, and territory of residence. The gap appears less pronounced only in those

regions, such as Calabria and Puglia, where the wages of the male workforce are already lower than the already extremely low average of other regions. Women are almost always confined to specific roles, such as the initial stages of packaging, and picking. Instead of giving value to their competencies, often associated to dexterity and fine motor skills, the segregation of work tasks exiles them to a low retribution area, with respect to tasks that are considered heavier, and that are performed by men.
The article edited by Ginevra Demaio sheds light on the multiple factors that intertwine in determining the quality of life and the discrimination to which migrant women are subjected: exploited, blackmailed, and exposed to severe abuse, insofar as foreigners without documents, because they are victims of human trafficking, because they are alone, or, on the contrary, because they are wives and mothers burdened with family responsibilities. Demaio also reveals the patriarchal prejudices underlying the poor treatment of female workers, as they are expected to be submissive and to endure stressful working conditions, without making demands or rebelling. It is the husbands who negotiate the employment conditions of their wives and partners with the intermediaries and employers. The overall picture that emerges is that of a system steeped in male chauvinism and racism, that contributes to making the exploitation of women particularly distressing and burdensome. In fact, the data from the INPS [*t/n Italian National Institute for Social Security*] confirm that, despite the extremely low wages of the agricultural sector, especially for migrant labourers, the wages paid to foreign male workers are 18.3% higher than those paid to women. Migrant women are therefore at the very bottom of the wage pyramid. Add to this the lack of labour protection laws. In fact, even taking into account only contract-bound labour relationships, the hours declared by the employers are generally less than the 51 hours required for agricultural unemployment benefits or maternity leave, while the wages for the remainder of the hours are paid 'under the table'.
Monia Giovannetti analyses the living conditions of female agricultural workers with a migratory background, revealing the error of a widespread conviction, that is, that there are no women residing in informal settlements. In actual fact, many women workers live in makeshift housing, with no water or electricity. However, based on a study conducted by the ANCI [*t/n National Association of Italian Municipalities*], even in proper informal settlements, that is, in the so-called ghettos, in 4 out of 10 mapped settlements, the presence of a 17% female population was found. In some of these settlements, present in 9 Italian regions, the incidence of female residents actually exceeded 50%.
Luana Timperio reflects on the toxic connection between exploitation, stigma, and violence, and on the related consequences. Many women employed in agriculture are subjected to ongoing sexual blackmail, which is associated to social stigma, and trauma, that can persist over time and even be transmitted to future generations. These are relatively unexplored issues, worthy of greater attention. In fact, it is not always understood that labour exploitation can leave deep wounds, entailing, particularly for women, not only physical exhaustion and poverty, but also the loss of personal independence, the stress that derives from knowing that one is falling short of one's duties as caregiver, the constant exposure to sexual abuse by intermediaries and employers. There are also cases in which employer violence is accompanied by

domestic violence at the hands of the life partner, aggravated by the exhaustion deriving from gruelling work hours and alcohol abuse. Female resilience is tied to the creation of networks of solidarity among women, which often allow them to share responsibilities and support one another reciprocally.
The article edited by Federica Dolente concentrates on the co-existence of work and caregiver responsibilities, which are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile, due to the lack of local support services. There are no nursery schools that are accessible in terms of costs and hours, nor public transport that connects rural areas to the urban centres where essential services, including parenthood or childcare services, can be found, and there are no initiatives in support of parenthood and childcare.
Through their narration and analysis of the exploitation of women coming from EU countries, and especially from Bulgaria, Rosy Impalà and Rosanna Liotti reveal the mechanisms of the multi-exploitation of women. "This is a system that burdens women with invisible, un-remunerated and unrecognised tasks (...): they work in the fields, but they are also required to cook, clean, take care of the men in the group, with no recognition nor retribution. If they become ill, nobody takes care of them. If they become pregnant, they must have secret abortions, with serious risks to their health".
Finally, Valeria Cappucci tells the dramatic story of the jasmine pickers, who worked mostly in Sicily and in Calabria. A story that is not well known, made of exhaustion and struggles. They would wake during the night, to pick jasmine flowers between midnight and three in the morning, when the blossoms are still heavy with dew, to supply the perfume industry. The strikes by the jasmine pickers took place in the years spanning between the 1940s and the 1970s, and succeeding in obtaining higher wages for the women who were often the only ones supporting their families, decimated by the war.
(UN)EQUAL is a notebook that bears reading from start to finish. It turns on multiple spotlights and poses multiple questions. One in particular: for how long will the presence of women employed in the agricultural sector continue to be ignored? Researchers (and not only female researchers) and union representatives should be aware that a gender-based approach is indispensable, not only so as to detect significant elements related to the great social injustices that exist in this sector, but also to understand the pervasive nature of exploitation, which is not only limited to the economic aspect. The condition of women workers, due to the intersection between patriarchal oppression, segmentation of the work market on an ethnic basis, and the power of employers, reveals with great clarity that exploitation pervades every aspect of life. The misery of the wages and the gruelling work hours not only reinforce patriarchal inequalities, but they also risk turning family relations toxic, simultaneously not allowing those affected to benefit from any healthcare, psychological or parenting support services. Knowing is an indispensable precondition for a more in-depth comprehension of the relationship with female workers, and to intervene to fight, alongside them, a battle that is indispensable for social justice.


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Paola

Lucrezia Lo Bianco
RAI Documentary maker

There is a new mural in Andria. It was inaugurated on 14 July last, and was designed by the street artist Jorit. Painted on the external wall of the municipal building, it depicts the face of a female agricultural worker alongside a representation of the *Quarto Stato [t/n The Fourth Estate]* by Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo. The female agricultural worker is Paola Clemente, she was 49 years old, and she died of heat and exhaustion in the fields of Andria 10 years ago. Ten years ago, I was working for Crash, a RAI television program. We did investigative television: we dealt with social issues, immigration, exploitation and field workers, we interviewed dozens of them. Italians and migrants. We talked about their sacrifices, about human trafficking, about anger and resignation, about dreams and expectations. I never met Paola, and I know nothing about her dreams, her youth, although I can imagine something: simply a better life, maybe with a small owned home, perhaps a short vacation. Or who knows, probably only proper groceries, with some small purchase without having to count the pennies spent every day, without having to struggle to reach month's end.
I met many others like her, as I was saying. A few Italians but, more often than not, migrant workers who live in makeshift ghettos, sleeping in huts made of wood and sheet metal. Ghettos that should not exist, but that are still there, despite the funds from the PNNR [*t/n Italian National Recovery and Resilience Pla*n], allocated to tear them down, and never used. Full of people coming from faraway lands, in search of a better future, but instead lost in the fields, exploited, abandoned, bereft of any rights. Men and women without a story, slaves. Instead, Paola lived in a real house, and today many of us know the story of her last day: it is 13 July 2015. Paola lives in San Giorgio Ionico, in the province of Taranto. She wakes up like any other day, at three in the morning, and gets ready to go out: it is already very hot, it is a particularly muggy year. Her husband, Stefano, drinks his coffee with her. Then, Paola grabs a bottle of water, a few biscuits, and leaves. Stefano follows her with his gaze from the balcony. He waves at her from far away, without imagining that it will be his last goodbye. There is a bus waiting for her, where she will shortly be joined by her female co-workers. It is the bus that belongs to the gangmasters. Those who expect a percent of the meagre wages for providing transport, who check if the work is performed correctly, and who will make sure that no overly curious eyes come check on the working conditions in those fields.
The destination is the Zagaria District of Andria. From San Giorgio Ionico, the road is long; it is 160 km. Paola is not leaving for a prolonged work period, she will not sleep there: the bus picks up the workers and brings them home at the end of the day. Theoretically, they should return home in the early afternoon hours, but the work always lasts much longer than expected and, especially in the winter, in the end one leaves home when it is dark, and returns when it is dark. I have interviewed so many in these same conditions. Mostly foreigners, often with a residence permit that is either about to expire or already expired, with no labour contract. Instead, Paola does have a con-

tract: six hours of work for 27 euro a day, four and a half euro per hour, a pittance. Moreover, everybody knows: it's never just six hours, it's always more, and the rest, in the best of circumstances, is paid under the table. Ten years have passed since Paola's death, but hours being paid *"under the table"* is still common practice: not only in the agriculture sector, not only for those jobs where a history of exploitation has always dictated the rules. Under the table payments are alive and kicking in sales, in construction, in the services sector, and even in many offices in small businesses. In the agricultural sector, where even having a labour contract is often a miracle, under the table payment is a mere detail.

But let's get back to Paola and her co-workers. They have to start working at dawn to escape the implacable sun. So, when they arrive at the fields, it's still night. Theoretically, the work day should end at 11:00 a.m., because by that time the temperature is already 35°C, and under the plastic tarps, where Paola works, it reaches 50°C, and it's hard to breathe. In actual fact, work does not stop, but continues for at least three more hours. Stefano recounts that his wife could not escape the unbearable heat. When she returned home, he says, Paola would close herself in the bathroom and take infinite showers to clean herself of the toxins and the heat: she was reopening her pores, she would say, attempting to get the cool water to seep *"inside"*. The heat persecuted her; she could never find respite. During the year, agricultural work alternates: there are tomatoes, citrus fruits, olives, watermelons. The work changes, the exploitation remains the same. In the inquiries conducted by Crash, I understood that there is a way to exploit the poor during every period of the year. For example, for migrant workers, if they are not taken to the fields because there is nothing to pick, there is always a percent levied on begging, controlled prostitution, trafficking, document laundering, the promise of being taken care of that will lead to nothing, the promise of a job. Italian workers are exploited elsewhere, in factories or perhaps by Amazon. One would almost hope that the rotation in agricultural crops had no down-times.

During all those July days, the work was in the vineyards, and Paola's work consisted in the manual millerandage of grape bunches. It is a task the serves to present the product at its best, an aesthetic task, let's say. Paola must take one bunch at a time and remove any berries that have grown un-uniformly or that have defects. In short, she must make sure the bunches are aesthetically pleasing. She wears plastic gloves to work, because the sweat from her hands must not touch the berries, which can be easily ruined. Inside the gloves, her hands wrinkle, and while the hands wrinkle, at those temperatures, the rest of the body burns up. In the fields, your brain fries, everybody told me. Mid-morning, Paola collapses on the ground. Her co-workers call for help, but the vineyard is far away from urban areas and has no real address. Explaining where they are is difficult, and ten years ago sending a geo-location was not the automatic habit that it has now become. The first ambulance gets lost in the countryside and when it finally reaches the tent, there isn't even a defibrillator on board. So a second ambulance arrives, with a medic on board, but it's too late. Paola dies with no official declaration of death, only a report: cause of death, mechanical asphyxia. But in actual fact, Paola dies of heat exposure, of unsustainable work rates, of exhaustion, of exploitation. Paola dies of denied rights.

Giuseppe Deleonardis, then regional secretary of the FLAI CGIL Puglia Union, re-

counts that many days passed before this story even came to light, before a phone call by one of Paola's co-workers exposed that death. At that point, the family, supported by the Union, finally denounced the death, and the case exploded. It comes out of the silence, crosses the fields, the associations, the press, and finally the name of Paola Clemente reaches Parliament. On 29 October 2016, after demonstrations, strikes, interrogations, after advocacy campaigns and, unfortunately, many other victims, Law n. 199 against labour exploitation is voted unanimously. Nobody abstains; there are no nays. Against those who profit, against those who organise, those who intermediate and those who exploit. The crime of *"illicit intermediation and exploitation"* is introduced into the Italian criminal code (art. 603 bis of the Italian Criminal Code), putting gangmasters and employers on equal footing before the law. Finally there is a law that identifies the indicators that constitute exploitation and harm to human dignity: they are inhumane working conditions, inadequate and often starvation wages, no access to water, work hours often without breaks, unjustified and arbitrary withholdings on compensations, services provided in an exclusive and binding manner, such as the obligation to use and pay transport or housing provided by the employer or by the gangmasters. And also, threats and mobbing, if not actual gratuitous violence and sexual exploitation. And finally, arrest in *flagrante delicto* is voted into law. The law is morally dedicated to Paola Clemente. From that moment on, reports become a daily occurrence, and formal accusations double in number.

It has been 10 years now, and this law, let's admit it, is not sufficient. Illegal recruitment of labour has not disappeared. And not only that: it has changed, and is now more difficult to detect. It begins much farther away, along the very long chain of mass distribution, where the lowest market price and shortest delivery times win the game. And those who pay the price, at the end of the day, are always those who work the land. The new exploiters are investors, who live elsewhere, often abroad, and don't know and have no interest in who is working their products; sometimes they are not even interested in what type of product is involved. The land is an investment like any other, that brings in profit. And there are other problems as well: still today, legal employment in agriculture does not work; the intermediary gets there first, all it takes is an SMS, or a phone call, and it's easy to get the jump on legal day labour. And, as we have seen with our own eyes, the ghettos still exist. Not to mention the fact that just laws are still countered by an unscrupulous use of persons considered mere instruments to be exploited for as long as they produce profit, so an employer, when faced with a seriously injured worker, thinks it's perfectly normal to abandon the worker in a ditch instead of calling an ambulance, in order to avoid being caught for having hired the worker illegally. The tragic death of the Indian labourer, Satnam Singh, dates back to just a little more than a year ago, much more recent than the law against exploitation and illegal hiring. All we can say is that the road has been opened, the government is more present, and perhaps the general indignation is greater, and that we are more aware.

Too late for Paola, unfortunately: the appeal proceedings, that in first instance absolved her employer, are still underway. Her story is not yet finished, and we have no way of knowing how it will end. Too late for Paola, unfortunately. But not too late to give her death meaning. To honour her, to do justice by her. And so, if you happen to pass by Andria, go take a good look at that mural.

Women employed in agriculture between 2015 and 2023

Annelisa Giordano

Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics) Researcher*

Women boast a significant presence among regularly employed agricultural workers, but are penalised by the low wages of this sector, aggravated by the existence of a considerable gender gap: this, in extreme synthesis, is the picture that arises from the experimental analyses conducted on the integrated system of Istat statistical records, that reviewed women, residents of Italy, who have had at least one regular employment contract in the agricultural sector during the year.
The results that are discussed herein following do not take into consideration any irregular labour relationships, which in agriculture, as is common knowledge, are frequent occurrences: according to Istat estimations, irregular employment for this sector was at 20.2% in 2022 (the most recent year with available data) compared to 9.7% relative to the totality of economic sectors. Therefore, the results must be evaluated and interpreted keeping this aspect in mind.

Structure and dynamics of female employment

Women with a regular employment contract in the agricultural sector in 2023 were just over 300 thousand, and represent just under one third of all active employed labourers in the sector[1] (Tab1). This number is, however, progressively decreasing: as compared to 2015, their number has decreased by about 44 thousand units, with a percent reduction of 12.4%. Over the same period, the volume of the male component has instead increased slightly (+1.8%).
This occupational dynamic is accompanied by a rather distinct structural data point. The wages for female agricultural workers are lower than the already very low wages paid to men, whose annual per capita wages in 2023, for example, were about 7,200 euro: although women make up a third of employed workers in the sector, in fact their total earnings in 2023 represent just a fourth of regular agricultural employment retributions, at just under 1.7 billion euro, with a yearly per capita pay of around 5,400 euro. This pay gap, which may be attributed to both the lesser duration and intensity of the work hours by contract for women, and the lower hourly wages, is rather generalised, and appears not dependent on age, citizenship, formal education, and territory of residence: it is, therefore, a decidedly transversal phenomenon.

** The author is responsible for the opinions expressed in this piece, which do not invest the Institute to which she belongs.*
1 *This article takes into consideration women with regular employment contracts in the agricultural sector, regardless of the duration (number of months) and intensity (number of hours per month) of the employment contract. Instead, the study does not include either irregular employment relationships, illegal work, or, in terms of revenues, undeclared revenues, deriving from totally or partially undeclared labour positions.*

TAB 1 **Salary indicators for regularly employed female agricultural workers Years 2015-2023** (constant price values 2015)

Year	Number (.000)	Gross annual per capita salary	% incidence of women on the total [a]		Gender wage gap (Gender gap %) [b]
			Of agricultural employees	Of salary amount	
2015	351	4.774	34,8	27,9	27,6
2016	348	4.962	34,4	27,7	26,7
2017	348	4.971	33,8	27,4	25,9
2018	345	5.050	32,8	27,0	24,3
2019	332	5.285	32,2	26,5	24,1
2020	326	5.315	31,6	25,7	25,1
2021	320	5.536	31,7	25,6	25,8
2022	315	5.369	32,0	25,9	25,9
2023	307	5.391	31,5	25,7	24,9

Sources: Processing of Istat data, Population Register and Thematic Income Register, Years 2015-2023.
*Notes: (a) The incidence is calculated as a ratio of the number of females and the overall number of males and females. The formula used is F/(F+M)*100. The calculation for the salary amount was the same; (b) the gender wage gap expresses the wage gap in favour of males with respect to the total of male salaries ((M-F)/M*100).*

Socio-demographic characteristics of female agricultural workers and pay structure

If compared to the male component of the population, female agricultural employees display some distinguishing characteristics: they are more concentrated in the middle-high age bracket, have a lower incidence of the foreign component, have higher formal education levels, but much lower salaries. Three quarters of them are, in fact, between 35 and 64 years old (Tab 2), while among the males, the younger age brackets have a greater statistical weight. Furthermore, in over 80% of female cases, we are dealing with Italian citizens, compared to less than 70% of males. Among female foreign citizens, there is a prevalence of European citizens, particularly those within the EU: on the other hand, male agricultural workers have almost exclusively African and Asian origins. Finally, female agricultural labourers are more likely to have a senior school diploma, and just under 9% has an even higher level of education: women represent a significant percent (around 40%) of agricultural labourers with a three-year or specialistic university degree.
Annual per capita salaries for women are very low across the board, both during the 2015-2023 period, and as examined in light of the principle socio-demographic characteristics: however, for some categories this evidence is even more marked, in particular for extreme age brackets, for women coming from Africa and for those residing in Southern Italy.
The gender pay gap seems more contained first of all in those areas where per capita salaries for women are higher, such as the region of Emilia Romagna and, more generally, in Northeastern Italy; at the same time, low gender pay gaps can be also be found for female workers over 65, for African citizens and for women residing in Cal-

abria and in Puglia, that is, where the male population component is also characterised by per capita salaries that are markedly lower than the national average, and so low as to not allow for sufficient margins to give rise to detectable gender pay gaps.

TAB 2 **Salary indicators for regularly employed female agricultural workers, by age bracket, citizenship, level of formal education, and territory of residence Year 2023** (current price values; only individuals residing in Italy)

Year	Number (.000)	Salary amount (mln. euro)	Gross annual per capita salary	% incidence of women [a]		Gender wage gap (Gender gap %) [b]
				Number	Salary amount	
Total	**288**	**1.947**	**6.752**	**32,9**	**25,7**	**29,6**
Age						
Up to 24 years	25	102	4.081	25,7	20,2	26,9
25-34	46	295	6.424	28,2	22,4	26,7
35-44	60	424	7.010	33,6	25,8	31,2
45-54	82	613	7.466	39,3	30,5	32,1
55-64	66	472	7.118	35,5	26,6	34,2
65 and +	9	41	4.787	20,8	19,8	5,9
Citizenship						
Italian	232	1.549	6.668	36,3	28,0	31,8
UE	25	188	7.521	45,5	39,4	21,8
Europe extra UE	14	103	7.308	38,6	30,8	29,5
Africa	10	58	5.932	11,4	9,7	17,0
Asia	5	37	6.797	10,2	8,1	22,8
Other	2	10	6.773	42,2	34,0	29,6
Level of education						
Up to middle school diploma	146	957	6.571	30,7	24,6	26,2
Senior school diploma	118	817	6.917	34,7	27,0	30,6
3-year degree or 1st Lev. Acc. dipl.	11	75	6.918	40,8	32,7	29,4
At least 4-year/ spec. degree	14	98	7.116	39,3	32,1	27,1
Area of Residence						
Northwest Italy	23	167	7.244	23,1	15,1	40,7
Northeast Italy	59	508	8.593	34,7	30,1	19,0
- Emilia Romagna	*30*	*277*	*9.215*	*38,7*	*34,7*	*15,7*
Central Italy	34	280	8.252	28,6	23,7	22,7
Southern Italy	172	992	5.758	35,3	28,5	26,9
- Campania	*27*	*150*	*5.491*	*42,4*	*33,2*	*32,4*
- Puglia	*56*	*317*	*5.604*	*38,2*	*33,7*	*18,1*
- Calabria	*41*	*190*	*4.662*	*39,5*	*38,0*	*6,2*
- Sicily	*29*	*189*	*6.432*	*49,4*	*18,8*	*76,3*

Sources: Processing of Istat data, Population Register and Thematic Income Register, Year 2023.
*Notes: (a) The incidence is calculated as a ratio of the number of females and the overall number of males and females. The formula used is F/(F+M)*100. The calculation for the salary amount was the same; (b the gender wage gap expresses the wage gap in favour of males with respect to the total of male salaries ((M-F)/M*100).*

Extra-agricultural regular employed work

About 38 thousand female employees with a regular labour contract, active in the agricultural sector (13% of the total) in 2023 were recorded as having also had regular employment in private businesses in the industrial and services sectors. The incidence is just lower than that recorded for the male population (Tab 3). The majority of these women worked for business in the services sector (80%), in particular, hotels and restaurants, commerce, temps and cleaning services: all sectors generally characterised by very modest wages. Almost all of these female workers (90.2%) received very low annual salaries from this extra-agricultural employment, below the poverty income threshold (which corresponds to 60% of the median value of contract salaries calculated over all regular employment positions in the industry and services sectors). Where, on the one hand, this is due to the fact that these are short-term employment contracts, not continuative and often part-time, on the other hand it is also true that for almost one out of five workers, the hourly wages for extra-agricultural work are under the poverty threshold (in this case, set at 66% of the median value of hourly contract wages for full-time, indefinite term positions). In some areas of the services sector, such as cleaning businesses, this type of pay disparity is very widespread. It is a disparity that, be it annual or hourly, is only barely less so in the analogous collective male population.

TAB 3 **Regularly employed female workers in the agricultural sector with record of extra-agricultural regular employment Year 2023** (only persons residing in Italy)

	Number (.000)	Distribution	% Females[a]	% incidence with extra-agriculture wages under the poverty threshold[b][b]	
				Yearly salary	Hourly wages
Total	**38**	**100,0**	**28,1**	**85,9**	**19,7**
Industry, of which:	7	19,3	17,3	67,9	8,0
- Food/beverages	*5*	*13,4*	*36,2*	*66,4*	*4,0*
Services, of which:	31	80,7	33,7	90,2	22,5
- Commerce	*6*	*14,5*	*34,6*	*85,1*	*9,9*
- Horeca[c]	*12*	*31,1*	*40,0*	*93,8*	*20,9*
- Temps	*4*	*10,6*	*27,9*	*88,7*	*26,5*
- Cleaning	*3*	*8,5*	*34,8*	*94,4*	*42,8*

*Sources: Processing of Istat data, Population Register and Thematic Income Register, Statistical archive of active businesses, Year 2023. Notes: (a) The incidence is calculated as a ratio of the number of females and the overall number of males and females. The formula used is F/(F+M)*100; (b) % of female agricultural workers working also in the industry and services sectors with yearly salaries or hourly wages under the salary poverty threshold; (c) Hotels, restaurants, cafés/catering.*

Confirming this data, between 2015 and 2021 the median regular income from regular agricultural employment was extremely low, and the presence of other employment income guarantees a modest supplementation: in 2021, for example, the median value of only agricultural income was just a little over 1,400 euro on a yearly basis, and reached almost 11,200 euro if supplemented by other contract employment income (Tab 4). Another source of income, albeit more limited, derives from non-pension welfare benefits (unemployment, family allowances, maternity leave benefits, etc.): the median income for female workers who, in addition to agricultural income, also qualified for these benefits increased to about 3,000 euro, while that relative to female workers who, during the same year, also added income from other subordinate contract work rose to about 11,800 euro. On a territorial level, it bears highlighting that the highest percent of women benefitting from welfare reside in Southern Italy, while those in the Northeast register the highest income from extra-agricultural employment.

TAB 4 **Female workers residing in Italy and gross median income, divided by territory of residence and source of income – Year 2021** (values in euro at current prices)

Territorial subdivision	Only agricultural income		Agricultural income and other income from extra-agricultural employment contracts (a)[a]		Agricultural income and non-pension transfers[b]		Agricultural income, supplemented by other income from employment contracts and non-pension transfers [c]	
	N (.000)	Income [d]	N (.000)	Income [d]	N (.000)	Income [d]	N (.000)	Income [d]
Northwest	5	1.040	1	12.271	12	3.009	5	11.915
Northeast	10	812	2	16.636	36	3.139	12	12.995
Centre	6	1.382	1	13.480	21	3.070	5	11.675
South and isl.	20	2.278	2	10.479	153	2.958	12	10.957
Total	**40**	**1.447**	**6**	**11.168**	**222**	**3.041**	**34**	**11.804**

Sources: Processing of Istat data, Population Register and Thematic Income Register, Year 2021.
Notes: (a) Female workers with income from employment contracts, both agricultural and from industry, services or public sector, not benefitting from non-pension money transfers; (b) Female workers with only agricultural income and benefitting from non-pension money transfers; (c) Female workers with multiple sources of employment income and benefitting from non-pension money transfers; (d) median values.



Family income of female agricultural workers

The economic vulnerability of female agricultural workers is not mitigated even by the income of other family members[2]: in 2021, even family incomes were very limited, and their distribution also shows a reduced variability (Tab 5).
Family economic vulnerability is more marked in Southern Italy (where about 62% of female workers residing with their families is concentrated), in the families of employed workers with foreign citizenship, and in the families of those who count a lower number of years of activity in the agricultural sector for the years 2015-2023.
In conclusion, female agricultural workers are characterised by income from regular employment and in general by a very low overall declared personal income: the issue of low income rates that characterises the entire sector is, for women, even more marked, and impacts, in a widespread and transversal manner, the entire population of female workers, who are not able to find economic relief even within their own family unit. This analysis needs to dig deeper, and must be extended to include the undeclared income component as well, which unfortunately finds a breeding ground in a sector that is characterised by low salaries, unstable employment relationships, and an elevated seasonality.

TAB 5 **Quintiles of equivalent available family income of female workers with a regular employment contract in the agricultural sector- Year 2021** (values in euro at current prices; only persons living with their families)

		Equivalent available family income (a)			
	N. female workers (.000)	I quintile (b)	II quintile (b)	III quintile (b)	IV quintile (b)
Total	**302**	**9.437**	**13.087**	**16.492**	**21.259**
Citizenship of the la female worker					
Italian	250	9.574	13.321	16.840	21.741
Foreign	52	8.862	12.171	15.054	18.878
Territory of residence					
Northwest Italy	22	10.611	14.739	18.681	23.821
Northeast Italy	60	12.902	17.254	21.349	26.397
Central Italy	33	10.560	14.740	18.464	23.187
Southern Italy/islands	186	8.626	11.830	14.712	18.444
Number of years of work in Agriculture between 2015 and 2023					
At most 3	67	7.890	11.992	15.652	20.870
Between 4 and 6	63	9.282	12.949	16.277	20.990
At least 7	172	10.058	13.535	16.854	21.473

Sources: Processing of Istat data, Population Register and Thematic Income Register, Year 2021.
Note: (a) The equivalent available family income is calculated by dividing the sum of all available income from members of the family unit by modified OCSE scale of equivalence, which allows eliminating the effects of the composition of the family unit. The equivalence scale assigns a score of 1 to the first adult member of the family, 0.5 to each other adult (aged 14 or older) and 0.3 to each family member younger than 14 years; (b) the first quintile includes 20% of families, with the lowest equivalent available incomes, the second 40% of families, with medium-low incomes, and so forth up to the last quintile, that includes 20% of families, those with the higher incomes.

2 *For this purpose, the equivalent available income was used, equal to the net overall family income, rendered equivalent based on the modified OCSE scale of equivalence, to standardize based on the size of the family unit (in terms of equivalent adults). The equivalence scale assigns a score of 1 to the first adult member of the family, 0.5 to each other adult (aged 14 or older) and 0.3 to each family member younger than 14 years. The calculation is based on the income components available at the time of the last annuity of the Register of Incomes, 2021, and on the database family composition resulting from the Population Register for the same year.*

Migrant female workers in agriculture: the exception that confirms the rule

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As regards the work of female migrant workers in Italy, the highly penalising conditions and the limited – if not exclusive – job placement, that sees them mostly relegated to the lower rungs of the work market in terms of quality of occupation, salaries, types of contracts, sectors and tasks, are all issues that have long been known. Their job placement is the plastic representation of a society that is organised by dividing by gender, class, nationality, and also of a work market that is extremely segmented, with white males at the vertex, and at the base – which however, as such, supports and allows the entire structure to exist – foreign women and, among these, the poorest and most "ethnicised".

The first work environment that comes to mind when thinking of migrant female workers is the caregiving sector – housekeeping and caregiving – and, therefore, domestic work in the homes of families and single people who outsource these tasks, that is house chores and caregiving for the elderly, the ill, and children (always in private homes), but also cleaning work in offices (public and private) or in points of sale. According to Istat sample surveys on the labour force, more than half of foreign women employed in Italy holds one of these three jobs only. And this is the first, big discrimination to which migrant women are subjected, when they are able to access the work market: a downward levelling to caregiving functions and work that is considered of low economic and social value.

There is, however, another environment that is associated to the care sector and the reproductive chain, in which foreign female workers are employed (and often exploited) and that is the agricultural sector. Once again, a sector associated to reproduction because, on the one hand, it guarantees collective food sustenance, and on the other hand it sees women placed in those stages of the agri-food chain that require higher precision, such as manual tasks in the various stages of harvesting, transformation processes, washing and packaging of fruit and vegetable products, and their boxing and storage. All work that is considered (wrongfully so) support work, and that often their same male counterparts consider as "a given", based on a persistent model that historically sees the overlapping of caregiving within the home with the work of the same women in the fields, the two encroaching one on the other reciprocally. A commingling that leads to considering duties in the fields as part of the sphere of family caregiving and to clouding the severe working conditions and exploitation to which these women are subjected.

As much in domestic and caregiving work as in the agri-food sector, female immigrant workers are exposed to high levels of isolation, dependence on employers, undeclared

work (either partly or totally undeclared), difficulty in separating work hours and spaces from their personal life, as well as widespread forms of exploitation (including sexual) and the negation of rights, although with varying levels of intensity and severity.
With respect to domestic and caregiving work, work in the agri-food sector is less well known on a social level, but has progressively gained visibility thanks to researchers, union organisations, and social work organisations that have reconstructed and reported the severe working conditions, aggravated by the gender difference. In fact, migrant female workers are exploited, poorly paid, blackmailed and exposed to severe abuse because they are women, because they are foreigners, because they have no residence permits or need to renew them, because they are poor, because they are victims of human trafficking, because they are alone or, to the contrary, because they are mothers/wives with family responsibilities.
At the basis of this long series of abuses are various gender prejudices. One is that women are more reliable than men, which explains the types of tasks they are given within the agriculture and food production chain. The second prejudice is that, insofar as women and foreigners, they can be paid less and blackmailed more easily. Agricultural entrepreneurs and gangmasters expect them to be more inclined to be submissive and to better bear harsh working conditions: heat in the summer, cold in the winter, uncomfortable and tiring work positions held for hours, lack of transport between home and the workplace, homes that are far away from everything and dilapidated. In turn, family members and husbands, in addition to delegating to women all family caregiving tasks, can also rely on the work of the women in the fields, although considered not so much full-fledged work, but more as instrumental and accessory work, "useful for increasing the household earnings, accelerating the realisation of the immigration project, and reducing the difficulty of renewing the related permits to stay", says Pina Sodano in the seventeenth Report, *Osservatorio sulle migrazioni a Roma e nel Lazio*[1]. In the Agro Pontino area, for example, Indian women employed in the agri-food sector have rarely found their work on their own; it is the husbands (or other male family members or compatriots) who find it for them, negotiating the conditions of employment[2] directly with the gangmasters or employers. A matter for men and amongst men, from which the parties directly involved are excluded. As if this were not enough, the cases in which the employers, gangmasters and other labourers consider access to the bodies of migrant women workers, equating them to merchandise at their disposal, are not rare. In such cases, sexual exploitation is added to labour exploitation: "women provide mostly caregiving and sexual services for labourers, alongside their work in the fields or in the manufacturing plants" states E.S. Rizzi in the volume Donne straniere, diritti umani, questioni di genere. Riflessioni su legislazione e prassi.[3]

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1 *Pina Sodano,* ***Lo sfruttamento delle braccianti agricole nell'Agro Pontino, in Osservatorio sulle migrazioni a Roma e nel Lazio.*** *Seventeenth Report, Edizioni IDOS, Rome, 2022, pp. 279-284. See also WeWord,* ***Lo sfruttamento lavorativo delle donne migranti nella filiera agroalimentare: il caso dell'Agro Pontino****, edited by, Marco Omizzolo, Margherita Romanelli, Bianca Mizzi, 2022, pp. 49-84.*

2 *Pina Sodano, op. cit.*

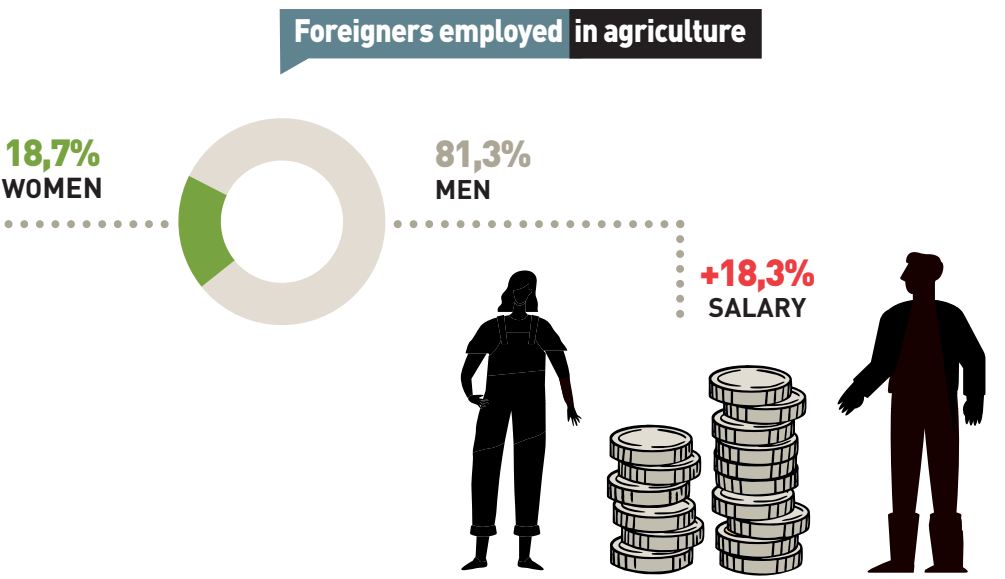
3 *Erminia Sabrina Rizzi,* ***"Le donne straniere negli insediamenti informali tra discriminazioni intersezionali, grave sfruttamento e violenza"****, in Anna Brambilla, Paola Degani, Marco Paggi, Nazzarena Zorzella, edited by,* ***Donne straniere, diritti umani, questioni di genere.*** *Riflessioni su legislazione e prassi, University of Padova - Asgi, 2022, p. 241.*

There is no explanation for such a brutal scenario, if not as the result of a system – social, cultural and economic– steeped in male chauvinism, racism, and patronage, the utmost expression of which is the power dynamics between male employers (almost always white) and foreign female workers, even more so if in vulnerable conditions, coming from poor or deprived contexts, with a medium-low education. Their vulnerability is generated by a system that wants them to remain subordinates within the social construct (Italian as well as of origin), within their families, in the work market, and in terms of rights, increasing their exposure to the most varied forms of abuse, of which the agricultural sector is perhaps the most extreme case. Migrant female workers – like and more so than their male counterparts – are forced to work every day for over 10 hours, always standing or bent over, in contact with pesticides and poisonous chemical agents, living in insalubrious and isolated dwellings.
In exchange for such harsh and exhausting conditions, they receive wages that are much lower than those provided for in the national labour agreements of reference and also lower than those paid to their male counterparts, often without a contract and without access to vacation, leaves, weekly days off, sick days or any other labour rights. And even with a regular contract, employers declare less work days than those actually worked, and so they pay them less than what is due, and part of this in cash and undeclared. Consequently, female workers are not eligible for many welfare benefits, as many such benefits, such as agricultural unemployment and maternity leave, require more than 51 regular yearly work days for eligibility, a requirement that these women often cannot demonstrate having met. And so, when they lose their jobs, or if they become pregnant, they find themselves with no welfare safeguards, and even more exposed to blackmail and vulnerability (in terms of money, housing, healthcare, relationships, families).



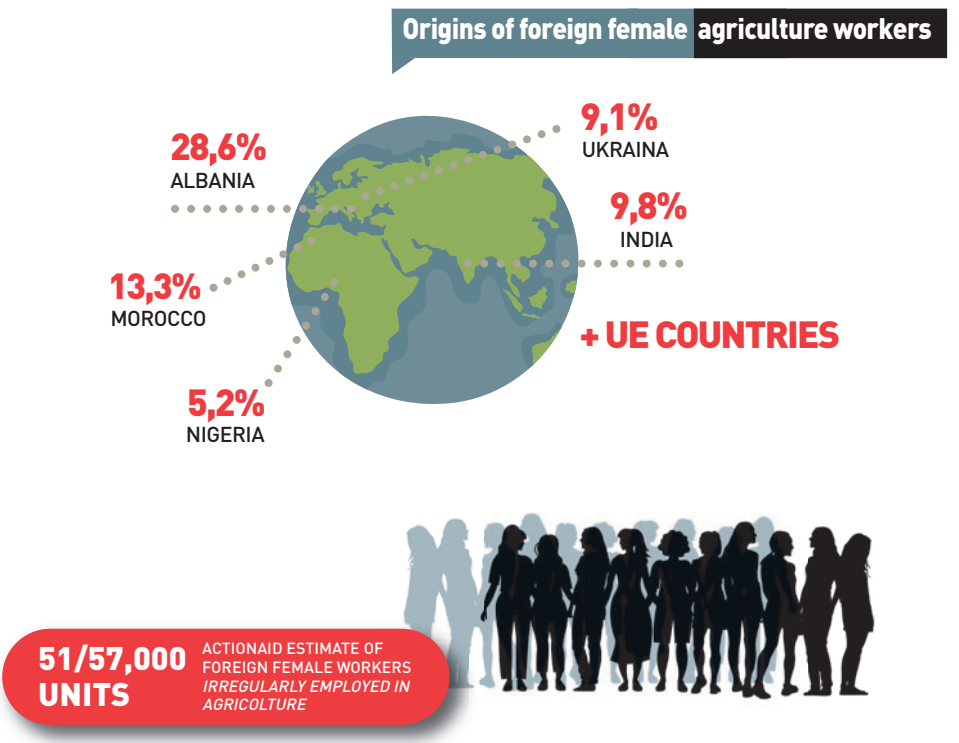
The numbers, undeclared work, and necessary interventions

The presence of regularly employed foreign women in the agri-food sector, in addition to being lower than in other sectors, is widely under-estimated, as it cannot include the whole undeclared work situation. A study conducted a few years ago by CREA and ActionAid Italia on female agricultural labourers in Puglia estimated that the actual number could be three times higher than the official number[4].
INPS archives register, in Italy, 225,799 non-EC female agricultural labourers at the end of 2023, 11.2% of all non-European Community employees who during the year performed at least one day of work in any sector. In agriculture, extra-EC foreigners (men and women) represent 22.8% of manual labour, against an average of 11.6% of all employees in every sector. Furthermore, where, on average, wages paid to extra-EC workers are lower than 30.7% of those paid to the totality of employees (16,385 euro per year vs 23,643), in the agriculture sector, the numbers plummet for both groups: 9,388 euro per year for non-EC workers and 8,983 for the totality of workers (+4.5% for the first group, probably because they work for more hours or more days per year).
And women? INPS data show that the vast majority of foreigners employed in agricultural is men (81.3% in 2023) who, despite the extremely low wages, receive salaries that are 18.3% higher than women. The women are 42,119 in number, 18.7% of non-EC agricultural workers, and receive an annual salary of 8,173 euro. Therefore, women represent a minority among foreign agricultural workers, and are paid the least.



4 *Grazia Moschetti, Grazia Valentino,* ***"L'impiego delle straniere in agricoltura: i dati Inps e i risultati di un'indagine diretta in Puglia, nelle aree di Cerignola (FG) e Ginosa (TA)"****, in CREA, edited by di Maria Carmela Macrì,* ***Il contributo dei lavoratori stranieri all'agricoltura italiana****, 2019, pp. 45-68.*

Their countries of origin in part differ from those of the men: of the latter, the most numerous are Indians (16.8% of all males), Moroccans (15.7%), Albanians (11.2%), followed by Pakistanis, Senegalese and Tunisians; instead, among women, in first place we find the Albanians (28.6%), followed by Moroccans (13.3%), Indians (9.8%), Ukrainians (9.1%) and Nigerians (5.2%). Moreover, the INPS archives only disaggregate non-EC nationalities, but many women originate from EU countries (especially Romania and Bulgaria), thanks to the freedom of movement they are privy to as EU citizens, and to the seasonality of agricultural work, which allows them to work for a few months and then return home. Alongside the official numbers is all the undeclared work: ActionAid estimates that the number of irregularly employed foreign female workers in agriculture may fluctuate between 51,000 and 57,000 units[5].



5 *Actionaid, Cambia Terra.* ***Dall'invisibilità al protagonismo delle donne in agricoltura,*** *2022, p. 17.*

It has however been well established that in the Italian countryside, from the south to the north, migrant women are subjected to widespread and pervasive forms of exploitation, blackmail, abuse, and the violation of the most basic human rights. Hence, it is essential that the policies and services support the emergence and visibility of such cases, and provide access to social and healthcare safeguards. Law enforcement bodies, associations, third sector, unions, are all called to take action to reach agricultural work places and the women employed there, with adequately trained female personnel, so that even the most isolated women are given the concrete opportunity for freedom, and work alternatives that favour personal autonomy. The instrument of criminal law, albeit essential, is not enough. There is a need for coherent and coordinated interventions on multiple levels: labour policies, social policies, migratory policies, agricultural policies, gender policies; but also, mobile units that can bring information and support directly where the women are working, transportation networks in rural areas, nearby social services and healthcare, assistance for the care and education of their children, and everything else that is necessary to improve the working, social and family conditions of migrant female agricultural workers.
On a closer analysis, these workers are emblematic of women in migration. Their working and living conditions reveal the fluidity of the boundary between productive and reproductive work: they work for collective reproduction and the reproduction of their families, but the all-encompassing working conditions deprive them of any significant social and family relations, of economic autonomy, of time for their children, of a life that is dignified and gratifying. Precisely because, within the female existence, the time for work and personal life is not separated and ends up coinciding, only policies and services that focus on both work and the social sphere and on gender difference can truly support full and equal rights.

The invisible presence. Foreign women inside and outside informal settlements

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Invisible in migratory processes

The flow of immigrants towards our country has been marked since its origins by the significant and systematic presence of women. A mixed and extremely diverse segment in terms of countries of origin, motivational factors, duration of stay, legal status, formal education, cultural and religious affiliation. A kaleidoscope of individual paths and histories hides behind the expression "feminisation of migration", in which the stories of women who arrived autonomously decades ago and are now Italian citizens are intertwined with those of women leading migratory chains, of women who come to Italy for family reunification or to request international protection, not to mention women in mixed marriages and second generation young women. Over the years, women have represented a significant component of the foreign population, and still today, female foreigners present in Italy constitute more than half of migrant citizens residing in the country. But despite the evidence that the female component in migratory processes and in the flow of immigrants entering the country is substantial, and testifies to a gender specificity that distinguishes it from male migratory routes, it is still today understated and suffers from a failed acknowledgement, both in terms of historical, social and legal sciences, and in politics and the media, always concentrated prevalently on male immigrants. The lack of a gender-oriented approach has prevented, on the one hand, taking a closer look at the active role of migrant women, who have participated in our social lives for years, altering the appearance of our cities and shaping welfare systems, and on the other hand delving into female migratory paths, that differ from male paths in terms of development, process, way of being and of acting and of interacting with their family of origin, their cultural group, and the context into which they arrive.

Invisible in the labour market integration processes

Migrant women are a multifaceted phenomenon, that has a structural impact on both a subjective level, and on a social, economic and cultural level, but that also suffers from scarce attention, also due to the processes regarding inclusion in the work force.

Despite a 42% occupation rate, in line with that of Italian women, there is a distinct segmentation of the work market, and the employment of foreign females in in less qualified sectors is greater than even foreign workers. Their occupation is concentrated mainly in certain specific sectors and tasks, in that more than half of them works in one of 3 professions: domestic help, caregiver, cleaner in offices and stores. But nowadays, women can also be found in the restaurant and hotel sector, in industry, particularly in the assembly sector and in the textile industry, as well as in the agri-food sector. Despite the higher incidence of men among foreign workers in the agricultural sector, the channelling of citizens from third countries to the agricultural sector involves not only foreign male but also foreign female workers in a specific and peculiar manner.

Data relative to the workforce show that in addition to having significantly lower probability of employment with respect to native women and male immigrants, migrant women nonetheless have a much higher probability of employment than the rest of the population precisely in work that requires a low level of competencies. Due to failed recognition of educational qualifications and to the presence of social conditions and factors that affect occupation and placement in qualified roles, the majority of foreign women in fact continues to occupy lower and less qualified work positions within the workforce.

The "methods" of participation in the labour market appear to have a significant impact on life trajectories as well as on living conditions and quality of life. Based on the types of occupation, the profile outlined by ISTAT portrays 42% of foreign women as characterised by economic and occupational fragility (occupational vulnerability), as compared to 27% of Italian women and 29% of foreign men. Finding oneself at a disadvantage with respect to the labour market (unemployed, inactive, non-standard worker, with low wages, etc.), is often associated with severe economic hardship and determines the poverty in which many foreign families and women find themselves.

Although in recent years, thanks to the impulse provided by feminist studies, international literature has trained a spotlight on the existence of a gender difference in terms of migratory trajectories and the outcomes of migratory processes themselves (often conditioned by the triple class, gender and ethnical oppression/invisibility), unfortunately in terms of research and empirical studies conducted on a national level, very little has as yet been dedicated to detailed studies aimed at identifying the strategies through which migrant women organise their lives, build their trajectory, practice forms of participation and resistance, and plan their futures. And studies and contributions that attempt to analyse the integration processes and methods of foreign women, as related to the presence or absence of regulatory measures, regulations and policies aimed at supporting and promoting economic, work and social integration are even more residual.

There is no legal framework within the Italian (and not only Italian) legal system on the matter of gender migratory policies, and the legislative body seems to have paid little attention to providing instruments aimed at adopting appropriate political and institutional initiatives in all sectors of public life, to intervene on the precariousness in which foreign women find themselves, and aimed at eliminating the multiple discriminations to which they are subject.

Invisible in informal settlements

The presence of a severely vulnerable workforce, often employed irregularly and trapped in undeclared work relationships, are only some of the forms of exploitation of foreign workers that characterise the Italian labour market. Workers at times in precarious and marginal dwellings, forced into a condition of semi-slavery, to the detriment not only of their rights, but also of their dignity and their safety. Especially in recent years, the national strategy for the prevention of and fight against occupational exploitation in agriculture, combined with interventions and activities promoted territorially by Unions, public institutions and private endeavours have created greater attention towards this multi-dimensional phenomenon. Also thanks to the important work carried out by the Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto, as regards the agricultural sector, we now have a consolidated wealth of studies and research, but nonetheless, the endemic lack of official data and of studies on the informal economy make it impossible to know the quantitative aspects relating to the presence of women in the agri-food sector. Analysing the literature on exploited labour produced in the last decade, the first striking evidence is that the majority of studies, research and theoretical contributions concentrates its focus on the male population, or maintains "neutral" tones, almost as if the female component were completely residual, irrelevant or marginal. Despite this opacity, the phenomenon of the exploitation of foreign women, as exposed by recent research that has contributed to shedding light on the traits and outlines of work and living conditions[1], is instead widespread, pervasive and underestimated. The most relevant characteristic of female involvement is the greater exposure of women to being vulnerable. In particular, in agricultural work, the exploitation is inextricably linked to being the weaker party in relational dynamics with the employer, the gangmaster and other workers, as well as to the conditions themselves. Another specific aspect of female exploitation is the characteristic of being permanently blackmailable, which easily encroaches from the work sphere into the sexual, to keep them in a state of subjugation[2]. If they have migrated by themselves, they suffer the pressure of supporting their children and family members in the country of origin; if they have brought their children with them, they are faced with the difficulty of reconciliating taking care of their children with long and exhausting work hours, with no support services (or without being able to access them).
Still today, social invisibility is absolute for women who live in the informal settlements scattered across the entire national territory, where thousands of male and female workers employed in the agri-food sector live in an either stable or transitory manner. Also in relation to this situation, collective perception associates informal settlements

1 *M.G. Giammarinaro, L. Palumbo,* ***Le condizioni di lavoro e di vita delle lavoratrici agricole tra sfruttamento, violenza, diritti negati e forme di agency, in Agromafie e Caporalato.*** *VI Rapporto, Futura Editrice, 2022; L. Palumbo e A. Sciurba,* ***The vulnerability to exploitation of women migrant workers in agriculture in the EU: the need for a Human Rights and Gender basedapproach****, studio commissionato dal Dipartimento per I Diritti dei Cittadini e Affari Costituzionali del Parlamento Europeo, May 2018; L. Palumbo,* ***Sfruttamento lavorativo e vulnerabilità in un'ottica di genere. Le condizioni di vita e di lavoro delle lavoratrici migranti nelle terre del Ragusano****, L'altro Diritto, 6, 2022..*
2 *M.G. Giammarinaro, L. Palumbo,* ***op. cit. supra****.*

with men, seasonal labourers, foreign workers who work in the surrounding countryside, while in terms of the narrative or of public debate, the presence of women in these contexts remains unspoken. Invisible also to the eyes of researchers, seeing as the complexity of the living and working conditions of women within informal settlements, or the differences they bear, or the construction of their vulnerability, or the multiple exploitations, rarely emerge from published papers. Just like "a gender-based approach" is lacking in the analysis of the subjugation and power dynamics that are performed on their bodies and on their lives, on their expectations and desires, in a continuous manner from "the inside" and from "theoutside"[3].

Through the first *national inquiry on the dwelling conditions of migrants occupied in the agri-food sector* promoted by Anci and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, and conducted by Cittalia[4], an attempt has been made to broaden knowledge of the phenomenon, in order to acquire data useful for orienting the policies and interventions encompassed in the three-year Plan against labour exploitation in agriculture and illegal labour recruitment. Of all Italian municipalities, 3,851 responded to the survey (48.7% of the total) and the presence of foreign workers employed in the agricultural sector was observed in 608 of these. In the majority of cases (78.8%) it was found that the workers live in *private housing* and that temporary or fixed housing structures set up by public or private entities and/or informal settlements were present in less than 22% of the municipalities. As regards the *temporary or fixed housing structures set up by public or private entities*, where it is estimated about 7 thousand migrant agricultural workers live, it was observed that in the majority of cases they are stable/permanent structures located in urban areas and managed by the Third Sector, while the *informal settlements* that were found, where it is estimated more than 10,000 people live in extremely precarious living conditions, are a whole other matter.

The are 150 informal settlements found on the national territory, present in 38 municipalities of 11 Regions: Puglia, Sicily, Calabria, Campania, Piedmont, Lazio, Veneto, Abruzzo, Liguria, Marche, Tuscany. A reality that impacts some territories significantly (8 of the 38 municipalities in the Foggia area) where the larger settlements are found – with more than one thousand inhabitants, such as the one in Borgo Mezzanone in Manfredonia (4 thousand dwellers) and the Ghetto of Rignano in San Severo (2 thousand dwellers). But that represents an undeniable concern in other, less well known localities as well, in that, according to the estimates reported by the responding municipalities, 77 settlements count less than 100 inhabitants, 15 settlements have a number of inhabitants equal to or greater than 100, and of these, as already mentioned, 2 settlements count over 2 thousand inhabitants.

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3 *E. S. Rizzi,* ***Le donne straniere negli insediamenti informali tra discriminazioni intersezionali, grave sfruttamento e violenza****, in A. Brambilla, P. Degani, M. Paggi, N. Zorzella (a cura),* ***Donne straniere, diritti umani, questioni di genere. Riflessioni su legislazione e prassi****, CLEUP, Padova, 2022.*

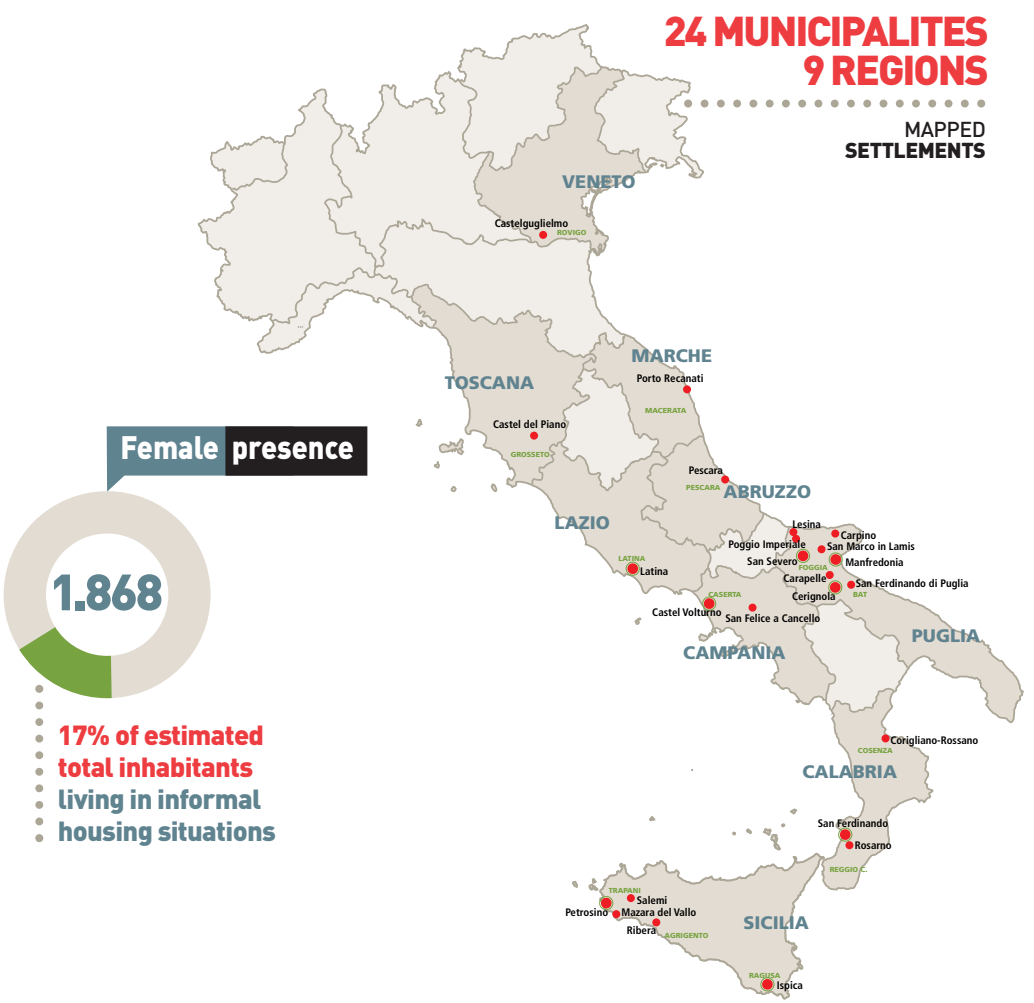
4 *The inquiry conducted within the scope of the activities provided for under the "InCaS" project by ANCI in collaboration with Cittalia and funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies through the National Fund for Migratory Policies. The published report entitled* ***"Le condizioni abitative dei migranti che lavorano nel settore agroalimentare"*** *can be downloaded from the link https://www.cittalia.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Rapporto-INCAS-compressed.pdf.*

The presence of women was reported in 4 of the 10 settlements mapped and, specifically, there are 1,868 women (out of about 11,000 persons) – that is 17% of the overall estimated persons present – who find themselves living in informal housing situations across 24 municipalities and the relative 9 regions. As shown in the infographics below, the most significant number of women is reported in the settlements of the municipalities of Manfredonia, San Severo and Cerignola in the region of Puglia, similar to that reported in the municipalities of Ispica and Petrosino in Sicily; and of San Ferdinando in Calabria, Castelvolturno (Campania) and Latina (Lazio). A significant incidence of women, 50% and over, in relation to the estimated overall number of inhabitants, was recorded in the informal settlements present in the municipalities of Castelguglielmo (Rovigo), San Ferdinando (Reggio Calabria), Latina, Carapelle (Foggia), and Mazara del Vallo (Trapani).
As regards the "type of housing", in the majority of cases the settlements are constituted by abandoned houses/homesteads, shacks built with waste materials, squatted buildings or containers.

TAB 6 **Female presence within informal housing situations across 24 Municipalities (9 Regions)**

Region	Province	Municipality	Population	N. of women
Abruzzo	Pescara	Pescara	class 6 (→100.000 inhabitants)	18
Calabria	Cosenza	Corigliano-Rossano	class 5 (50.001-100.000 inhabitants)	12
Calabria	Reggio Calabria	Rosarno	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	2
Calabria	Reggio Calabria	San Ferdinando	class 1 (1-5.000 inhabitants)	175
Campania	Caserta	Castel Volturno	class 4 (20.001-50.000 inhabitants)	47
Campania	Caserta	San Felice a Cancello	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	9
Lazio	Latina	Latina	class 6 (→100.000 inhabitants)	84
Marche	Macerata	Porto Recanati	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	15
Puglia	Barletta-Andria-Trani	San Ferdinando di Puglia	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	6
Puglia	Foggia	Carapelle	class 2 (5.001-10.000 inhabitants)	5
Puglia	Foggia	Carpino	class 1 (1-5.000 inhabitants)	10
Puglia	Foggia	Cerignola	class 5 (50.001-100.000 inhabitants)	72
Puglia	Foggia	Lesina	class 2 (5.001-10.000 inhabitants)	3
Puglia	Foggia	Manfredonia	class 5 (50.001-100.000 inhabitants)	800
Puglia	Foggia	Poggio Imperiale	class 1 (1-5.000 inhabitants)	7
Puglia	Foggia	San Marco in Lamis	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	21
Puglia	Foggia	San Severo	class 4 (20.001-50.000 inhabitants)	160
Sicily	Agrigento	Ribera	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	3
Sicily	Ragusa	Ispica	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	314
Sicily	Trapani	Mazara del Vallo	class 5 (50.001-100.000 inhabitants)	10
Sicily	Trapani	Petrosino	class 2 (5.001-10.000 inhabitants)	59
Sicily	Trapani	Salemi	class 3 (10.001-20.000 inhabitants)	6
Tuscany	Grosseto	Castel del Piano	class 1 (1-5.000 inhabitants)	5
Veneto	Rovigo	Castelguglielmo	class 1 (1-5.000 inhabitants)	25
Overall total				**1.868**

For the most part these are stable settlements, not seasonal, present for years in prevalently rural areas, far away from public transport services and characterised by the absence of essential services, just like there are scarce healthcare services and, more generally speaking, any services aimed at favouring the integration of immigrants, are practically absent.
The study that was conducted, albeit within the limits of a prevalently quantitative analysis, provided an insight into a multi-shaped reality, and confirmed the hypothesis that informal settlements and ghettoisation phenomena are not exclusively housing issues, but also aggravate the labour, economic and social conditions of thousands of men and women, simultaneously impoverishing entire areas. Finally, the data reported in this brief delving into the presence of women in the settlements, call on us all to promote and conduct qualitative in-depth studies on their living and working conditions, by analysing the intersectionality of abuse and discrimination that revolve around gender, race and class.



Exploitation, stigma and violence against female agricultural workers,what are the psychological consequences?

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"It takes two to speak the truth:
one to speak and another to hear"

Henry David Thoreau

Introduction

The Istanbul Convention (2011) defines violence against women as: "a manifestation of historically unequal gender and power relations, that have led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men, and have hindered their full emancipation".
Gender violence is, therefore, a manifestation of the power imbalance between sexes. Insofar as female exploitation is concerned, the dynamics of this imbalance are dual: not only is there a profound asymmetry inherent in the relationship between exploited worker and exploiter, but the threats, blackmail and violence are exerted towards women with dynamics that overlap those of gender violence, precisely because the exploiter not only inflicts violence on female workers insofar as they are workers, but also insofar as they are women.
The phenomenon of violence and exploitation, and the stigma that affects women in agriculture, in particular in the southern regions of Italy, such as Puglia, Ba-silicata and Calabria, represents a grave form of social and psychological trauma and a serious social and humanitarian emergency, that affects both Italian and foreign workers. Women labourers are often forced to work in inhuman conditions:

- **exhausting work hours:** they work up to 12 hours a day, for 28 days a month, at heavy physical activities such as the harvesting and processing of vegetables in cold and humid work environments;
- **wage exploitation:** women earn less than men;
- **sexual violence and blackmail:** many female workers are subjected to sexual harassment and blackmail by the gangmasters and employers, who threaten to withhold pay or to fire anyone rejecting their sexual advances.
- **Isolation and precarious living conditions:** female workers often live in makeshift housing, without adequate toilet facilities.

Social stigma associated to gender violence and labour exploitation creates a dual victimisation of women:

- **isolation and fear:** many are afraid to report the abuse for fear of losing their job or of being shut out of the community.
- **Psychological trauma:** experiencing violence and exploitation can lead to depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders.
- **Institutional invisibility:** female workers often have no access to psychological and legal services, due to language barriers, because they are without papers, or for fear of being deported.

A wound to the soul

By psychological trauma we mean a "wound to the soul", like something that breaks one's usual way of life and view of the world, and has a negative impact on the person who experiences it.

There are various types of potentially traumatic experiences that any person might face during their lifetime. There are "small traumas" or "t", that is, those subjectively disturbing experiences that are characterised by a not overly intense perception of danger. In this category, we might find events such as a humiliating episode, or harsh interactions with significant persons during childhood. Alongside such small traumas are "T" traumas, that is, any event that can lead to death or threatens one's own physical integrity or that of loved ones.

In this category are all large-scale or major events, such as natural disasters, abuses, accidents.

Being the victim of a traumatic event has consequences that may have not only an emotional impact, but that can also leave a mark on the body of the survivor of the event. Scientific research has shown that people who have lived through major traumas in their lives also bear the marks at a cerebral level, showing, for example, a reduced volume of both the hippocampus and the amygdala.

Can being exploited on the job be considered a "traumatic event"? Some women may continue to suffer even long after the episode itself. Often, even once they have escaped the exploitation system, they continue to feel the same anguish, which prevents them from living a gratifying life both in terms of work and of relationships. In such cases, the past is present.

This combination of symptoms, that can begin to take the shape of a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, is characterised by continuously "re-living" the trauma event, continuing to feel all the emotions and sensations, and to have all the negative thoughts of that moment.

Often, these women workers, who find themselves in conditions of exploitation, develop a psychological safety barrier to keep from having a breakdown. The reactions are:

- **derealisation** – one feels as if in a movie, things happen as if in slow motion, one's senses are sharpened, to allow rapidly assessing the dangers of the situation, searching for escape routes or other solutions, as if living under a glass dome or inside a nightmare;

- **physical reactions** – tachycardia and nausea, hot or cold, or the fear of being left alone, the need to have somebody close by, for support and concrete help.

The lives of these women are pervaded with intrusive thoughts that have an involuntary onset, and they relive the images of what has happened to them, especially during moments of relaxation, for example just before falling asleep, creating distress. These conditions can lead the women to desperation, giving them the sensation that they can picture no future. In many of the cases analysed, it emerged that women who are victims of abuse feel guilty because they felt impotent, unable to report both their condition and that of their women co-workers. This sense of guilt, over time, leads them to become impatient with their lives, and to shut themselves off from their emotions.

Transmitted trauma

A woman who is the victim of sexual abuse or exploitation, without an adequate support system, may transmit her own trauma to the next generations. This phenomenon is known as *transgenerational trauma*.
Transgenerational trauma associated to abuse and labour exploitation against women is a complex phenomenon that involves psychological, cultural and biological aspects. This type of trauma damages not only the direct victims, but can also influence subsequent generations, perpetuating a cycle of suffering and inequality. Transgenerational trauma is the psychological, behavioural and sometimes biological effect of traumatic events experienced by one generation, and transmitted to the next generations, even if the latter did not directly experience the original traumatic events. A possible unconscious trauma transmission can occur when mothers who are victims of exploitation have difficulties with attachment, emotional management and the care of their children. The children of these women workers may grow up in conditions of economic precariousness, with no access to food, medical care, education or safe housing. In some cases, even the children become subject to exploitation: child labour, trafficking, forced begging, or they become involved in criminal circles. Lacking protection and care for these women, their children run the risk of inheriting difficult and traumatic living conditions.
An additional level of transgenerational trauma occurs through a condition that is defined as the "narrative", that is to say, the acquisition of the trauma through the retelling or the silences which, inevitably, build an identity. This happens because an individual's identity is not only a collection of facts, but is, rather, a coherent story that is connected to emotions, decisions and transformations that have given a sense to life itself. If this narrative is made of omissions, feelings of guilt, suffering, precariousness and abuses, inevitably, this transmits an ongoing trauma that, in the future, will determine a sense of dismay and suffering. This condition is aggravated in those areas where female labourers are exploited in the fields, in a structured manner, with a widespread and hovering sense of impunity.
In many cultures, women are used to tolerating abuse, and consider it an integral

part of relationships. This normalising of violence contributes to perpetuating the cycle of abuse across generations. Moreover, structural inequalities, such as poverty, the lack of access to education and gender discrimination, hinder the capacity these women have to recognise and report abuse, thus continuing the cycle of abuse and exploitation.
In addition to the psychological effects, victims may manifest physical symptoms, such as:
- **chronic pain:** headaches, muscle or pelvic pains.
- **gastrointestinal disorders:** irritable bowel syndrome or nausea.
- **gynaecological issues:** menstrual cycle disorders, or sexually transmitted diseases.

These somatic symptoms often do not have an apparent medical cause, but are tied to the psychological response to the trauma.

Stigma: a complex challenge

The lack of effective laws and adequate protection policies contributes to maintaining the *status quo*. Difficult access to justice, the fear of retaliation, and social stigmatising keep victims from reporting the violence.
Moreover, the *"rape culture"* and victim blaming are phenomena that further hinder legality. Women are often accused of *"having asked for it"*, especially if they belong to vulnerable social categories, such as migrant workers.
Male chauvinism and toxic masculinity are attitudes that promote aggressiveness, control and dominance over others, in particular over women. This type of behaviour is often viewed as a sign of strength and virility, but it actually reflects hidden insecurities and a difficulty in expressing emotions.
Through the media, education, and cultural norms, society often reinforces these stereotypes, creating an environment in which abuse and exploitation are tolerated, or even justified.
In order to promote legality and the respect of human rights, these obstacles must be dealt with by educating society, raising awareness, promoting a culture of equality and respect from a young age, and guarantying effective laws and protection policies, offering psychological aid services made accessible to all women.

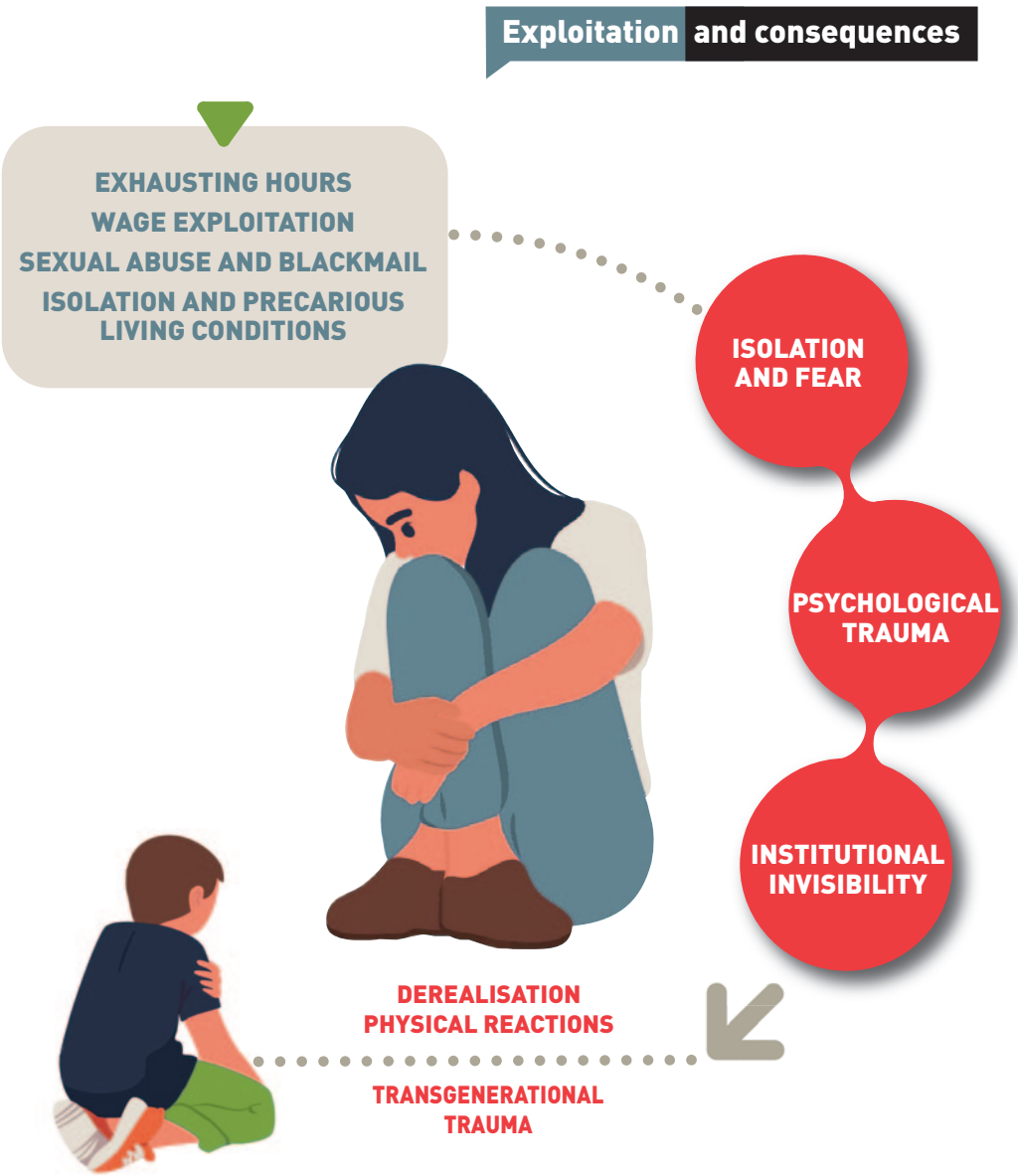
A hypothesis for intervention

The intervention strategy to interrupt the cycle of transgenerational trauma can be that of adopting an integrated approach.
It is essential to offer the victims adequate psychological support, to help them process the trauma and prevent long-term effects. Effective therapeutic approaches include:
- **Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** helps to identify and modify dysfunctional thoughts and behaviours.

- **EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing):** a specific technique to treat PTSD.
- **Group therapy:** offers a safe space to share experiences and receive reciprocal support.

The connection between exploitation, abuse, and transgenerational trauma, in the field of agriculture, is deeply rooted in the social, economic, and psychological dynamics of rural farming communities. It is essential to deal with this issue through effective policies and greater psychological support for the workers, and to raise awareness regarding human rights, in order to break the cycle of exploitation and abuse that affects not only those directly involved, but also future generations. One way to break this link is f*emale empowerment* intended as a collective process in which the women, also by becoming role models themselves, support one another reciprocally to overcome traumas and difficulties, creating a community of social resistance that challenges patriarchal and oppressive social structures.
Being an example can mean becoming a model of *resilience* and *empowerment.* When a women who has experienced abuses and exploitation manages to overcome the difficulties and find a way to reclaim her dignity and rights, she becomes a symbol of hope for others. Demonstrating that it is possible, even in extremely difficult situations, to change one's destiny, can inspire other women to do the same. This personal *empowerment* process is not limited to the individual, but can also become contagious on an emotional and practical level within the entire community.
Another way of setting an example is through *solidarity among women.* Creating a support network, in which experiences are shared and success stories become a testimonial for strength, is a tangible way to encourage breaking free of the cycle of abuse and exploitation. Women who have successfully freed themselves from exploitation can become *mentors* for others, teaching them about the legal processes, how to organise themselves in groups, or simply how to face daily difficulties.
Being a role model can also mean becoming *spokespersons* and activists for other women, bringing the problem of exploitation and abuse to light. If a woman who has been exploited can take the floor and raise her voice against the injustices to which she has been subjected, she becomes a living testimony to the dynamics of oppression and exploitation. This can help break the wall of silence that often surrounds agricultural labour conditions, where fear and embarrassment keep many from officially reporting the conditions. Despite the potential impact of becoming an example, there are real *barriers* that could obstacle this possibility, such as *fear of retaliation, lack of resources and social and cultural norms.*
Women who have been abused or exploited in the agricultural sector could fear further retaliation on the part of their employers, of the authorities, or of their same communities. In many cases, the threats and violence can prevent them from raising their voices, even if they wish to do so.
In many rural areas, especially in patriarchal situations, women may have resistance from inside their very communities or families. Being and "example" may not always be seen as a positive thing, but instead as a threat to traditional structures.
Being an example can certainly play a fundamental role in breaking out of exploitation,

but it must be accompanied by a collective support network and by structural policies that allow women to truly emancipate themselves. The combination of stories of individual resilience and social, legal and economic changes, can create an environment in which women can truly find the strength to break free of exploitation and create a more dignified future for themselves and for future generations.



Work-life balance for migrant women employed in agriculture

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The territories of the five Southern Regions involved in the Su.Pr.Eme Italia and Più Su.Pr.Eme[1] projects are territories characterised by a complex and deeply rooted reality, where the lack of infrastructures and essential services makes talking of a work-life balance for migrant women workers contradictory and paradoxical, as they often find themselves in precarious conditions, or with irregular stay permits. In these territories, the lack of available housing for immigrant populations, that are both habitable and liveable, of public transport that guarantees travel to and from work, and of welfare and social security structures, is not only a deficiency, but also a structural element that defines the day-to-day life of all the male and female inhabitants of the area, and that has a detrimental and prejudicial effect on the lives of the more vulnerable sub-populations, such as women migrant workers. In some cases, it is precisely in those contexts where agricultural work given to immigrant manual labour is most widespread, that the provision of these services, where present, often takes on an informal, if not even illegal, shape, creating a system of dependence and exploitation against which women are not only not immune, but are also the more probably prey. The Su.Pr.Eme. Italia program, while representing a commendable initiative for the social and workforce inclusion of migrants, did not fully, or only in specific territories, deal with the crucial issue of the services and measures dedicated to supporting immigrant women employed in agriculture, neglecting the potential role thereof as a bridge towards services for men.

Immigrant women employed in agriculture often find themselves having to manage exhausting work hours, the seasonality of harvests that dictate intense work rates at specific times during the year, and family responsibilities, which include taking care of the children and of the home.

** The author participated in the programs Su.Pr.Eme Italia and Più Su.Pr.Eme, as project manager of the NOVA Consortium for the Region of Campania.*

1 *The two interventions are a part of the Three Year Plan to fight against labour exploitation in agriculture and illegal labour recruitment (2020-2022), approved within the scope of the specific Tavolo Caporalato initiative on illegal recruitment promoted by the General Directorate of Immigration of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The Su.Pr.Eme.Italia program was funded within the scope of the AMIF – Emergency Funds of the European Commission– DG Migration and Home Affairs. The P.I.U. Su.Pr.Eme program was co-funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, General Directorate of Immigration and of Integration Policies and by the European Union, National Operational Program on Inclusion EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND 2014-2020. Su.Pr.Eme Italia and PIU Su.Pr.Eme are two distinct but complementary programs, financed through European and Italian national funds, with the main objective of preventing and contrasting labour exploitation, particularly in the agricultural sector, and of promoting the social and workforce integration of immigrants in the five regions of southern Italy (Sicily, Calabria, Campania, Puglia and Basilicata). The recent evolution has witnessed the launch of Su.Pr.Eme. 2, that continues and reinforces the actions undertaken by the preceding programs.*

The lack of adequate support services, such as local nursery schools that are accessible in terms of costs and hours, efficient public transport connecting rural areas to urban centres where other services may be available, and the scarcity of initiatives in support of parenthood and caregiving, increase the difficulty of achieving a work-life balance, and aggravate their conditions of subordination.
Literature by now abounds, that identifies migrant women as victims of **multiple discriminations**, based on gender, ethnic origin and socio-economic conditions, which add up and are mutually reinforcing, making their social and workforce inclusion even more difficult. The seasonal, and often unpredictable nature of agricultural work entails long and variable work hours, with peaks of activity during those periods that are associated to the production stages. This flexibility demanded by employers often translates into **unpredictable work days** for women, making it difficult to plan family life and benefit from services. The low wages and widespread use of contracts that are precarious, where not actually irregular, limit access to the **economic resources necessary to pay for caregiving services**, so that the burden of these tasks and responsibility often falls on the women. In addition to these issues, there is often **social and geographical isolation**: many agricultural concerns are located in isolated rural areas that are poorly connected, with limited availability of public transport. This geographical isolation becomes an accomplice in creating social isolation and forms of dependence, for immigrant women workers, who struggle to create support networks and access essential services, perhaps instead falling into dynamics of exploitation. To these factors one may also add **linguistic and cultural difficulties**, barriers that are an obstacle to accessing information regarding available services and to full participation in the social and community life.
The Su.Pr.Eme. Italia program represented a step forward in offering legal consulting, social and healthcare and cultural mediation services for immigrants. However, the **generalised absence of a specific focus on the needs of women working in agriculture**, a part from some localised pilot experiences, has left a significant vacuum. The 2013/2021 programming, that included the SU.Pr.Eme. Italia program, has shown that the unique nature of agricultural work in the context of the Five Southern Regions necessarily requires targeted interventions that are able to integrate an intersectional perspective in the programming, and that can take into account the specific needs of these workers in the implementation stages.
It should be noted that basic elements, often overlooked due to their simplicity, are of crucial importance in intercepting the specific needs of women and in promoting their greater involvement in, and access to, services. The presence of female professional cultural mediation figures within the structures, along with flexible opening hours for use of the services, in line with parenting needs, constitute basic interventions that are however of primary effectiveness. Equally, the presence of multidisciplinary teams in informal contexts, such as places of community socialisation, religious sites, or spaces of female aggregation, can be an extremely effective proximity strategy. Such measures, albeit in their apparent simplicity and cost-effectiveness, generate significant benefits, not only facilitating access to services by women, but also adding value to their potential role as intermediaries and facilitators in connecting the services themselves and their partners.

The "Activity report" written by the manager of a Social Centre in the Campania region for the Su.Pr.Eme. Italia program, is particularly eloquent:

> *B. approaches the helpdesk, intrigued by the flow of people she comes across while taking her child for a walk. That day, the helpdesk was managed by the Moroccan mediator, with whom B. became friends. Intrigued by our work, she gathered information regarding the services offered by the helpdesk, and after a few days she returned with her husband. (...) B.'s husband, wary at first, after having found help searching for a new home in the city, returned with other compatriots.*
> *B. is now taking an Italian language course with other women. The course is held in the mornings, so the women can return home in time to greet their husbands. One of our operators entertains the children behind the Centre, where there is a garden. Initially, we did not provide this activity, but now, not only are there many women, but they often convince their husbands to take advantage of our services.*

A particularly important aspect, and one that is underestimated within the scope of interventions on the severity of labour exploitation, is the potential role immigrant women may play as vehicles to make the men also use the services, confirming their capacity to represent points of reference and drivers for social change. If adequately informed and supported, women could become key figures in orienting their own family members and communities towards the use of the services made available. Nonetheless, the lack of an integrated approach that takes this potential into consideration, and that provides for specific actions to actively involve them in this role of facilitators, limits the overall efficacy of the inclusion policies.
Another report highlights the difficulty in finding work situations that are compatible with the desire for a pregnancy and to have a family, and the opportunity for an alternative that supports the creation of virtuous paths outside of the dynamics of subordination and exploitation, and that promotes individual ambitions and skills.

> *N.M. comes to the helpdesk in Bellizzi, which she learned about by word of mouth among friends who heard about the Su.Pre.Me program from their husbands after the meeting that the team from the Centre held at the Mosque. She tells us her story, of her arrival in Italy, how she had always worked in a restaurant, but how when she decided to have a child she momentarily quit, and when she wanted to go back to work she realised that the work hours were not compatible with taking care of her family, and despite her great desire to be autonomous, she chose to stay at home.*
> *She comes to the helpdesk with this request for help: to find a job that allows her to take care of her children, with a secret wish to open her own business, an artisan shop to sell products from Morocco.*

N.M. immediately appears strong-willed, she speaks Italian, and we immediately ask her to attend the first workshop for skills. She does so showing great interest, and her desire for self-realisation and her need to improve her language skills, specifically as related to her work environment, emerges. (...) N.M. begins to develop the conviction, with the support of our whole team, that her dream is not impossible; we share very intimate moments, during which many situations in which she was the victim of labour exploitation come to light, along with the solitude she felt when she decided to leave her job. N.M. becomes the spokesperson for the project among many of her friends, who come to the helpdesk and participate actively in the activities offered.
At this time, N.M. has been selected to participate in the "course for self-employment" (...) and is able to reconcile her family life with her instruction. We are supporting her during the entire process, and have provided her with a bus pass, to facilitate both her attendance in the courses and participation in activities across the territory, without the expense weighing on the fragile family balance; we are also supporting her in the search for a more dignified housing solution for her family.

A shift in perspective is required to bridge these gaps, one that places the focus on the specific requirements of immigrant women working in agriculture. Within the contexts mentioned, it is essential to invest in services that provide care for small aged children and that are flexible and accessible, in public transport that provides efficient connections to rural areas, and in initiatives that support parenthood and caregiving, that take into account the peculiarity of the work of all women, including immigrant women employed in the agricultural sector. Parallelly, at least within the scope of combatting exploitation and illicit labour recruitment, we can also implement low-cost but high-efficiency measures: reinforcing the presence of cultural mediators and social workers with specific competencies; organising low threshold services in strategic places, with opening hours that are compatible with caregiving responsibilities.
Furthermore, it is indispensable to acknowledge and enhance the potential role of women as agents of change within their own communities. Specific female empowerment programs, that provide information, competencies and instruments to access services and to also support one's own family members, could well represent an effective strategy to broaden the range and impact of policies against exploitation and illicit labour recruitment.
In conclusion, although the theme of a work-life balance for immigrant women employed (often even irregularly) in agriculture may seem an oxymoron, the experience of the last program conducted points to a simple and effective way forwards, provided that the new program integrates, within its own dialogue, a gender perspective, and that it is capable of monitoring and assessing the impact of the actions that are implemented.

Invisible women

Maria Rosa Impalà

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They had just escaped from the place where they were kept under control, four Bulgarian citizens – two women and two men. Forced to work the fields without a contract, without pay, without freedom. They were scared. They kept receiving threatening calls on their mobile phones. They knew that their exploiters were looking for them. One of them was a 28 year old woman. She had arrived in Italy just a few months earlier, leaving behind a 9 year old son. In Germany, where she used to live with her partner, *they were able to survive doing odd jobs. Then came the offer: "Come to Italy, there is work in an onion processing plant, 9 euro an hour, 1200 euro a month, rent for 100 euro*". However, on arrival, the reality of the situation soon revealed itself to be a nightmare: there was no processing plant, no hourly wages, no decent housing. They slept in an old, abandoned tourist structure, with no electricity or ventilation, with twenty other people shacked up on dirty floors and worn out blankets. Every day they were loaded into vans and brought out to the fields, even an hour away, to harvest vegetables. In two months of exhausting work, the woman had been paid only 90 euro. No contract. No safeguards. Only threats. When they asked to be paid, one of the other workers was beaten by the gangmaster before their very eyes. For her, it was even more humiliating: the mediator that brought her to Calabria suggested she "concede" herself sexually to the gangmaster to receive the pay promised her. She refused. And she decided to escape that situation, along with other fellow nationals. Some acquaintances suggested they contact the anti-human trafficking department, and after having reached them in the train station in Lamezia Terme, the agents immediately moved them away from the area and brought them to a safe place. They spoke different languages: Turkish, Bulgarian, German. Mediation was essential to establish a trusting relationship. The timely intervention reassured the victims and convinced them to file an official report. The next day, all the persons involved formalised their statements before the Carabinieri *[t/n Italian National Police Force]*.

European community exploitation: the Bulgarian case

Stories of European Community women are added to those of women coming from third counties. These are often women forced into labour exploitation circles after having been subjected to other forms of exploitation, women leaving reception centres who were not able to find a stable, regular occupation.
So, Bulgarian citizens, both male and female, also come to Italy with the hope of finding

dignified employment, only to find themselves trapped in a system of illegal labour recruitment, violence and exploitation. Over the years, various situations have been intercepted by the In.C.I.P.I.T. Project, in the Plains of both Lamezia Terme, and Gioia Tauro. *"Men and women workers who come to Italy arrive mostly from marginalised areas, in your case, these areas are Nova Zagora, Stara Zagora* (the latter one of the 4 municipalities of the district of Sliven, ed)*, where Roma and Turkish communities live in conditions of extreme poverty"*, explains an operator of a Bulgarian anti-human trafficking organisation. *"These are often people with a low education level, and with no professional qualifications: and precisely these characteristics make them easy to recruit."* Both men and women leave contexts marked by poverty and high unemployment rates. But for the women, this economic vulnerability is compounded by a cultural vulnerability: many of them come from strongly patriarchal systems, where gender violence is widely tolerated, if not considered normal. This double marginalisation exposes them to abuse even more. Add to this, specific factors that impact women primarily. The Bulgarian operator continues to explain: *"In many of the communities of origin, girls leave school very early on, often to take care of younger siblings, taking on caregiving responsibilities at a very young age. Early marriage is a widespread reality: it is not rare for adolescent girls to be given in marriage at 15 or 16 years of age, based on traditional practices that are still deeply rooted. Furthermore, many of them are vulnerable to sexual trafficking, through a variety of mechanisms: they are lured by so-called 'lover boys', sold for arranged marriages, or tricked with the promise of a career abroad. Often, the exploitation is not limited to working in the fields: many are subjected to systematic sexual abuse, and are sometimes forcefully involved in illegal activities, in a web of oppression that annihilates any possibility of self-determination".*

A double chain: work and invisibility

As regards the recruitment of women for work in the agricultural sector in Calabria, the mechanism is simple: an acquaintance or intermediary offers them a job abroad, generally one with decent wages that includes housing. Similarly to human trafficking from other countries, the complex personal or family situations of the individuals targeted in Bulgaria by human traffickers make the perspective of improving one's personal situation particularly alluring. Add to this factor that, as already mentioned, many of the women met in the region of Calabria, as well as the exploiters who have recruited them and brought them to Italy, are of Roma ethnicity, a cultural context in which the rules of the patriarchy are still very predominant, the power relationship between men and women is heavily biased, and the mechanisms of the feminisation of poverty, arising from the lack of access to services and resources (in terms of schooling, healthcare, work ...), are accentuated.
However, when they arrive here, the women, some of them no longer very young, find themselves trapped in a system of economic dependency, linguistic isolation and emotional blackmail. In the cases that were intercepted, the exploitation was managed in a structured manner: the exploiters controlled the housing, transport, board, telephone phone credit, and even the sale of blankets and clothing. Everything was

recorded in an agenda. And everything was docked from a salary that was never paid. Unlike for men, the forms of exploitation that women are subjected to are often intersectional. It's not only underpaid work. It's also a system that burdens women with invisible, unpaid and unacknowledged tasks, promoting a patriarchal culture that still has deep roots, even within the very same migrant communities. Women are subjected to a double sort of exploitation: they work in the fields, but are also used to cook, clean and take care of the men in the group. All without any kind of recognition or retribution. In fact, an operator of the In.C.I.P.I.T project explains: *"The women who we intercepted worked not only in the fields: they cooked, cleaned and took care of everyone else. If they fall ill, nobody cares for them. If they become pregnant, they must have secret abortions, with serious risks to their health"*. Indeed, the cases of clandestine voluntary terminations of a pregnancy are not rare, often associated to the fear of losing their jobs, or pressure from the group, or simply the difficulty of gaining access to institutional social and health services. If there are children, the situation becomes even more complicated. In some contexts the school drop-out rate is high: older children are often forced to give up going to school to take care of younger siblings while the parents work in the fields or at other odd jobs. In other cases, adolescent children become victims of labour exploitation themselves. So, the country of destination replicates the same pattern of exclusion and precocious responsibility that characterises the conditions of the countries of origin, where work and poverty destroy the right to childhood.

Failure and return

When the system fails – and this happens often – the only alternative left is to return to one's homeland. On this matter, an operator from In.C.I.P.I.T. reports: *"We have observed truly dramatic conditions among citizens of the European Community. We have intercepted women who have found themselves in inhumane circumstances, crowded together with other labourers in homesteads, treated worse than one would treat animals. Unfortunately, the conditions of European Community women are more elusive: freedom of movement policies allow them to travel without particular hindrances within the European Community, so, once tricked and exploited, instead of turning to law enforcement agencies, which they either do not trust very much due to bad experiences in their countries of origin, or fear because they are afraid of repercussions against family members by the traffickers in their countries of origin, they prefer to return to their homelands autonomously. They are invisible and more difficult to intercept"*. But when they return home, they find themselves back where they started: unemployed, marginalised, often with children to support, and with a new social stigma for not having 'been successful' abroad. And from the reports of the anti-human trafficking agencies in Bulgaria, they return home bearing the signs of their exploitation: *"These women, already at a disadvantage at their origin, are often affected by post-traumatic stress, depression, gynaecological diseases and social out-casting. And, often, nobody notices."* In fact, even the Bulgarian anti-human trafficking system has difficulties intercepting the victims who return home. Victims who, in many cases, attempt to migrate again, in the hopes that, this time, things will be different.

Conclusion: freedom of movement is not enough

This is the paradox of being citizens of the European Union: EU citizens are free to move and work in any member State, but in case of crimes of serious exploitation, they are not protected by any assistance program other than the social protection offered by the Italian anti-human trafficking organisation.
To fight against the labour exploitation of EU citizens – particularly women – there is the need for a system that recognises vulnerability within the European Union itself. *"We need instruments that include EU citizens in the anti-exploitation safeguards"*, states one of the operators we interviewed. Freedom of movement is not enough, if it is not accompanied by real protection, specific funds and integration processes also for vulnerable European Union citizens. *"And cooperation between Countries of origin and Countries of destination is necessary, at every level. If we do not accompany these women even after they return home, we will have lost them twice."*



The fight of the jasmine pickers

Valeria Cappucci
"Donatella Turtura" Historical Archives – FLAI CGIL

In 1960s Italy, a profound social, economic and cultural transformation took place. This was the decade of the *economic miracle*, of industrial modernisation, of growing urbanisation, of social wellbeing, and of the beginning of the consumer society. Nevertheless, these changes did not affect the entire national territory in a homogenous manner, and that development took place exasperating the contradictions between paid work and profit, and exacerbating the imbalance between urban and rural areas, between industry and agriculture, between North and South.
It is within this very inhomogeneous context that massive domestic migration took place: millions of men, especially youths, left the rural towns and moved to the cities in the North, or emigrated abroad, in search of better living conditions. Hence, a prevalently male exodus leaves a vacuum in agriculture, which is filled by women. As a result, there is the so-called *feminisation* of agriculture: a dynamic that sees the presence and the role of women in the agricultural sector rise significantly.
Thus, initially, the feminisation of agriculture is not a choice, but rather the structural consequence of demographic and economic transformations. Women, often the wives, mothers or daughters of the emigrants, found themselves managing the daily agricultural tasks, upkeeping the house and taking care of the elderly and children, thus taking on a central role in the economic and social survival of rural families.
This phenomenon is underlined in some passages taken from a document assessing female work in agriculture, published in a special edition of the Union journal Rassegna Sindacale of 1962: if Italian agriculture undergoes *feminisation* it is due to the fact that male labour abandons the agricultural sector for more advanced production sectors, and is replaced by a female workforce, and this *does not and cannot mean anything other than a new condition of inferiority and subordination of female agricultural workers on a social level.*
And, in fact, in one decade, the number of women employed in agriculture increases by about 100 thousand units; however that increased numeric weight is not accompanied by an adequate contractual recognition, nor by stable employment. The women worked as seasonal farm hands, occasional pickers, or small cultivators, and were rarely registered officially as workers. An army of precarious workers who were denied any form of social security and welfare protection. So stability could not but become one of the issues and objectives of labour demands put forth by the Federbraccianti *[t/n Italian Federation of Agricultural Labourers and Employees]* in those years, also accompanied by the fight for equal pay and for the recognition of qualifications. All issues on which the Union inevitably clashes against resistance and intransigence on the part of employers.
Among the many categories of precarious workers in the agricultural sector are the jasmine pickers, employed harvesting jasmine flowers mostly in Sicily and Calabria.

Their story is little known, but it contains important episodes of labour demands, fight and resistance, albeit less celebrated on a national level as compared to, for example, those of the women rice weeders.
Indeed, women rice weeders entered the national collective imagination thanks to films, songs, paintings, photographs and documentaries that recount their work, their lives and their battles. Instead, the jasmine pickers did not receive similar representatives and the memory of their battles has often been left relegated to storytelling or local accounts.
It is a minor but powerful story, made of exhausting, exploited work, but also of the fight for dignity and just wages.
Picking of jasmine flowers – used primarily to extract the essence used to produce perfumes – was seasonal work, heavy and poorly paid. The pickers worked in the fields for many hours, receiving in return meagre pay, calculated on a piece-work basis, that is, based on the amount picked, often exploited, with no advocacy and no rights.
They would wake up at night – recounts the historian Francesco Di Bartolo in the volume *"Lavoro, salario, diritti" – to be able to begin picking and pruning jasmine when the blooms were still heavy with dew, they would move forwards through the rows of bushes, bent over to pick the blooms and place them into their apron bag. The little girls would follow behind, sleepy, their hands raw, picking the remaining gems from the bushes.*
The picking season went from June to September, and picking would begin between midnight and three in the morning, before the blooms opened, when the fragrance of the blooms was the most intense. It was exhausting, insalubrious work, which only agrarian employers could refer to as *gentle and delicate*: they would work barefoot so as to not damage the plantations, their backs bent and their feet immersed in the mud.



Photo from the "Donatella Turtura" historical archives – FLAI CGIL

Almost all of them developed rheumatisms and many were exposed to diseases such as hook worm disease, caused by parasites present in the soil that would penetrate from the soles of their feet, causing terrible cases of anaemia. Perhaps too much fatigue, suffering, and exploitation to warrant the creation of a perfume.
The social and Union battles in which the jasmine pickers were involved developed between the 1940s and the 1970s, especially in Sicily and in Calabria.
In August 1946, in Milazzo, the jasmine pickers, often war widows and drained by the inhuman work, had the courage to strike for nine days, demanding adequate pay, healthcare and better working conditions. In a short time, these women obtained wages equal to 55 Italian lire for a kilogram of flowers which, after subsequent strikes, was increased again until it reached 90 Italian lire/kg in 1948. In the 5 September 1957 edition of the national newspaper *L'Unità*, on the women's pages, there is an excerpt on the fight *for bread and for a future* that took place that same year during the month of August: I*n the countrysides like in the cities, there are those who have had to add to their daily difficulties and to the scorching heat that has spared no one, the burden and difficulty of an at times harsh social battle. For some, basking in the August sun may have been lovely, but at the same time the jasmine pickers in Calabria — often 10 or 11 year old girls — picked flower blossoms under that same sun, bent over, with piece-work wages that remunerated them with 150 lire for a morning's worth of work, and accorded their employers a profit of 514 lire per worker, per morning. And the jasmine pickers did not only pick those petals, bent over, morning after morning, they also fought — and are still fighting — to make sure that those 150 lire become something more, become an amount that in the Italy of today is not tantamount to being swindled. In August, the jasmine pickers banded together, organising rallies, marches and meetings, and today, negotiations for a new contract are underway.*
The protests intensified in the 1960s. In 1962, after a five-day strike, the jasmine pickers in Reggio Calabria secured a new contract that provided for a daily wage increase of 200 lire and, for piece-work, they obtained 260 lire per kilogram of petals. Furthermore, they were able to negotiate a fixed daily allowance of 120 lire. The objective of the jasmine pickers was not only to secure higher wages, but also to escape an exploitative situation, and go from being piece-workers to being salaried workers. In July 1966, in Reggio Calabria, the battle continues. Neither the threats from their employers, nor the Prefecture *[t/n local government authorities]* are able to break the labour resistance of the pickers, who strike for twelve days non-stop in front of the distilleries, blocking the trucks to prevent delivery of the flowers. Jasmine flower processing has a return profit of millions of lire, supplying the French perfume industry with 80% of their needs, but the jasmine pickers continue to receive poverty-level wages: 395 lire per kilogram of picked flowers, against about ten million in terms of profit per hectare of jasmine plants. Fighting alongside the workers also students, labourers and other categories of workers. Union unity, as testified by the brochures and press releases stored in the historical archives of the FLAI, breaks down and the Federbraccianti is excluded from the negotiations leading to the undersigning of a scam-agreement later rejected by the totality of the strikers. After more days of strikes and appeals, even from local authorities, to come to an agreement, the pickers obtain a 17% contract increase and, for the first time, employers accept the presence

of a delegation of three women (one per union), in every company, tasked with settling company controversies. This extraordinary battle thus assumes even greater value and becomes an example for workers in other sectors as well.
Like the jasmine flowers that bloom every night, so the strikes and battles are renewed with every harvest. In 1967, one year later, employers attempt to deduct 50 lire per kilogram, and the protest re-ignites. The efforts and fights of these workers is thus recounted in an article by Gianfranco Bianchi published in the paper *L'Unità* on 29 August of that year: *It takes at least eight thousand blooms to make one kilo of jasmine: eight thousand gestures, picking only open blooms, picking from the plant without removing even just one small leaf or twig, and placing it in the basket that each picker has with her. Eight thousand gestures, paid 450 lire. Or rather, this year, the employers want to pay only 400 lire.*
And it is so that every summer for the jasmine pickers is a summer of battles. *Even the smallest conquest has cost us days and days of battle, nothing has been given to us for nothing. Every summer we start over...* declares a jasmine picker interviewed by Bianchi.
From the mid '70s on, the cultivation and picking of jasmine is gradually abandoned, crushed by competition from North Africa and by the use of synthetic fragrances that are more economical than natural essential oils.
The story of the jasmine pickers leaves us an important, albeit little known, historical legacy. Their fights are intertwined with those of the rice weeders, the olive pickers and the tobacco workers, crucial moments of female protagonism in the world of Italian agricultural labour, and in particular in the battle of women against exploitation. These women fought a hard and courageous battle, without bending to intimidations and threats, and contributed to the writing of some engaging pages of resistance, pride and dignity.

The jasmine pickers' fight for a salary

year **1946** ▶ **55 lire** PER KG OF FLOWERS

year **1948** ▶ **90 lire** PER KG OF FLOWERS

year **1962** ▶ **260 lire** PER KG OF FLOWERS

year **1966** ▶ **395 lire** PER KG OF FLOWERS

year **1967** ▶ **450 lire** PER KG OF FLOWERS



Even the smallest conquest has cost us days and days of battle, nothing has been given to us for nothing. And every summer we start over ...


Diritti in
CAMPO

From safeguarding to protagonism

Giovanni Mininni
Secretary-General National FLAI CGIL

It was our desire that this edition of the *Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto* open with the dramatic story of Paola Clemente and close succinctly retracing the union controversies of the jasmine pickers in the Sixties. This was not a random decision: it is a red string that connects individual lives and destinies to a collective commitment, that same red string that ties the memory of pain and injustice to the strength of the battles and of hope. Paola, who died of exhaustion in a vineyard in Andria, has gifted us, through the life that was taken from her, with the brutal image of a system that considers the bodies of women as expendable, invisible, interchangeable manual labour. The jasmine pickers, through their courageous and determined fight, instead remind us that, even in the most difficult situations, exploitation is not a destiny, but a condition that can be reported and overcome, through organisation, solidarity, and collective action.

Between these two extremes – the pain of Paola Clemente and the strength of the jasmine pickers – is the deeper meaning of this *Quaderno* and, with it, the commitment of Flai CGIL. Indeed, describing the conditions of women in agriculture is not only an exercise in sociological analysis, but a political and Union act: it means exposing a reality that others want hidden, breaking the silence that surrounds women workers, giving a name and a face to those who live and work in farm produce fields, hothouses, and warehouses.

For women, as we have seen, exploitation is often multiplied: lower wages, fragmented contracts, conditions that are even more precarious, physical and psychological abuse, all intertwined with social and family subordination. In particular, the contributions from the female authors show how the worse conditions affect migrant women most of all. But all women live in a condition of multi-exploitation: insofar as workers, insofar as women, and even more so if foreigners. They are required to work harder and earn less; they are forced to bear the weight of reconciling the impossible, between gruelling work shifts and family responsibilities; they are denied a voice, often forced to silently submit to violence and humiliation.

Unions have a duty not only to protect them, but also to make them protagonists, because without their strength there can be no collective redemption. The traditional forms of Union action are not sufficient to face this reality. Where work is fragmented, seasonal, irregular, there are no plants with gates to be monitored or notice-boards to post announcements. A way of doing Union work must be enacted, that is capable of approaching people where they live and work. And so we have rediscovered and im-

plemented the old *Federbraccianti* method of the *"street union"*. Which today, in fact, means being present in the ghettos, in informal settlements, at the street corners where daily recruiting takes place and, obviously, also in the fields. It means mobile helpdesks, union campers, counselling points across the territory. It means attempting to interact in the languages of the migrant women and men workers. A *street union* means providing information regarding contracts, rights, social services. But most of all, it means organising the workers, both women and men, building up trust amongst them, breaking through the isolation, letting them know they are not alone. Women working in agriculture may find these forms of solidarity as a first space where they will be heard and, as sometimes they live closed in isolated houses, with no autonomy, or are forced to find refuge in rundown settlements, they are subjected not only to exploitation in the fields but also to being controlled by the gangmasters.

The *street union* is a political act, because it aims to organise people where the work is dusted across the territory, as often happens in agriculture. It is the demonstration that rights do not come from above, but are acquired from the bottom up, by bringing people together, in concrete solidarity, in the capacity to show them what the system does not do. The commitment of the FLAI does not stop at reporting. It translates into concrete proposals, disputes, complaints and mobilisations with legislative and contractual outcomes. And here, the name of Paola Clemente once more emerges in all its force. The clamour and indignation aroused by that incident proved decisive in the passing of law n. 199 /2016 against the scourges of undeclared work and exploitation of workers in agriculture. That law is Paola's legacy, the sign that change can be born from pain.

Nevertheless, the law by itself is not enough. The networks of illegal labour recruitment adapt, change shape, move. The victims are still afraid to come forward officially, because often they do not find alternative jobs and lives. The measures for migrant reception are insufficient, social services are too fragile, and women remain the most exposed to blackmail. For these reasons, we ask for more stringent controls, for the creation of integrated policies that tackle work, home, transport and welfare as a whole. One cannot fight against exploitation without offering concrete solutions to its elemental difficulties. We must break the connection between agriculture and exploitation. This means building a productive model founded on the quality of labour, on social sustainability, on the respect of human rights. It means ensuring that the price of agricultural produce is never paid by the fatigue and with the bodies of the female and male labourers.

To do so, a collective effort is required. The Union alone is not enough: it requires that public institutions invest in controls, in services, in reception policies; it requires that businesses assume social responsibility for their production processes; it requires citizens that are aware, that demand transparency and justice, even in the purchase of agri-food products.

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