



FEDERAZIONE NAZIONALE LAVORATORI AGROINDUSTRIA

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Agriculture and migrant workers in Italy UPDATE

So far the agricultural sector is not experiencing any significant downturn in production, insofar as the output planned for this period of the year takes place mainly in greenhouses and there is no decrease in demand.

There is concern instead related to the approaching season of the “large harvests”, with difficulties around recruiting the workforce, mainly due to the return to their own countries of foreign EU workers and their inability to enter or re-enter our country (especially as regards Romanians and Bulgarians). The business associations exaggerate the problem in order to exploit the situation and request extraordinary measures such as the liberalisation of the use of vouchers. On this point, we have already taken a position of clear opposition!

For non-EU foreign workers, who are usually in employment, there has been no sharp drop in their employment.

In the national context resulting from the Covid-19 emergency, the migrants in the countryside merit particular attention and, especially, those who live in ghettos and informal rural camps.

The return home of Eastern European agricultural workers and the objective impossibility of new arrivals from these countries, is leading to a shortage of agricultural labour in some areas of the country and particularly in the North/North East. Estimates suggest that several tens of thousands of workers will be missing for the forthcoming harvests.

On the other hand, there are substantial pools of migrant agricultural workers, particularly in the South, often without resident’s permits.

Our Placido Rizzotto Observatory estimates that between 160 and 180 thousand migrants live in the so-called ghettos and informal rural housing (while the three-year plan against exploitation and illegal hiring, developed last year, estimated about 130 thousand). This numerical difference can be partly explained by their exclusion from reception systems, following the adoption and entry into force of the Security Decree (Salvini) which did away with resident’s permits for humanitarian reasons, and their replacement with other types of resident’s permits which are difficult to obtain.

In the ghettos and informal rural camps, migrants continue to work in the countryside despite Covid-19, without personal protective equipment.

Because of the Covid-19 emergency, illegal hiring and exploitation are being seen in forms that are more aggressive than usual, due to the inactivity of the

Territorial Labour Inspectorate. To overcome this problem, a regularisation measure will have to be envisaged.

On a strictly healthcare level, it should be noted that the registration of many migrants with the health service is hindered in various areas, partly due to the different regional regulations on access to healthcare and the related exemptions from paying for treatment.

The use of the STP code (Temporarily Present Foreigner) for asylum seekers and those entitled to international protection is a widespread practice, and overlaps with the frequent limitation of access to some dedicated clinics, where they exist. Hence the necessity to provide from the outset for the monitoring of these large segments of population and provide diagnosis and care in the event of infection, in order to circumscribe the spread of the virus.

For all these reasons, about ten days ago now, FLAI launched a campaign to denounce the situation in the media and through our press releases. The campaign has grown and, along with Terra Onlus, we have decided to send a letter-appeal to the President of the Republic Mattarella, to the Prime Minister Conte and the ministers concerned in order that they might intervene in an extraordinary way.

This letter-appeal is an open one because it was published in a number of important Italian newspapers: a full page in Avvenire, Il Fatto Quotidiano and Il Manifesto.

FLAI is the lead signatory and support is growing by the hour. Important associations and organisations as well as individuals have joined in the appeal. The proposal is to make use of the powers attributed to the prefects, pursuant to the Prime Ministerial Decree of 9 March, to requisition buildings and structures to be allocated to provide dignified housing for migrants. In addition we have requested an urgent measure to legalise all the immigrants living in ghettos in order for them to start to find regular employment.

Today, 3rd of April the 3 General Secretary of the Italian Confederations, have sent a letter to the Prime Minister Conte for explaining that we deeply contrast the use of "VOUCHERS" in Agriculture.

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