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THE STRUGGLE OF FARM WORKERS IN ITALY

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INTRODUCTION



“Is it really fair that in Italy, workers get only titbits while the large monopolies keep expanding their profits and wealth? Is it fair that workers’ wages don’t even pay for their own basic needs and those of their families, including their little ones? Is that fair? We need to talk about it because that’s what trade unions are for.”

Giuseppe Di Vittorio,
farm worker and trade-union activist

This brochure was written in 2019, before COVID-19 came to dominate the headlines. Does that mean it is no longer relevant though?

This publication describes working conditions in agriculture, as well as exploitation and its structural causes. It sets out the living conditions of the people whose hands pick the crops that end up in our mouths – people who often have no access to running water so that they can wash their hands that have been made dirty by their work and frequently do not have a roof over their heads so that they can rest after spending hours in the hot sun; people who, nevertheless, refuse to let themselves be discouraged by organising their own shantytowns and marching together on long country roads in order to protest inside and in front of government buildings.

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COVID-19 has changed little on this outer fringe of society. In some cases, pitiful working conditions have become even more dangerous, the existing health situation could well become catastrophic, and inhuman living conditions have now become life-threatening. In short, nothing is ever so bad that it cannot get worse. However, this brochure shows with stunning clarity that issues that have increased in relevance during the pandemic – the threat to health posed by lack of protective equipment in the workplace or the risks to social and physical health in inadequate housing conditions – have long been at the centre of farm workers’ struggles to improve their living conditions. It is therefore rather surprising that abuses in the agricultural sector that have been going on for many years are only now increasingly finding their way into the public debate. Reporting on “systemically relevant work” is also raising the public visibility of the agricultural sector. Farms are becoming “COVID-19 hotspots”. From asparagus farms to slaughterhouses, there is looming danger: the virus is spreading fast, supply chains are being interrupted, and food is being left to rot. The debate about the ins and outs of a globalised food industry in which hard labour is outsourced to migrants almost devoid of any

legal protection or to dummy companies that circumvent existing labour protection laws rather than improve working conditions is gaining momentum.

6 With the pandemic and its enormous impact on all areas of life, farm workers have become a focus of political debate in Italy, most recently when Coldiretti, an association of farmers, reported that it might not be possible to bring in the spring harvest, so important for Italy's food production industry, due to a shortage of labour in the fields. For weeks, there was a public debate about sending the unemployed or even retired people into the fields, as well as massive advertising in favour of setting up so-called "green corridors" for seasonal workers. Germany and France had already opened such corridors to fly in labour from Eastern Europe to work on farms. The country's far right demanded that work be given first to Italians, while, in contrast, left-wing liberals made a universalistic appeal for work permits to be issued to undocumented migrants – for the harvest season only, of course. The migration laws, which in practice thrust countless people into invisibility, remained in force. Nothing was done to make the terrible and consistently – so not just during a pandemic – deadly living conditions more bearable. Only permits were issued, allowing their bearers to work in the fields despite the ban on leaving migrant centres. With tears in her eyes, Italian Agriculture Minister Teresa Bellanova welcomed the "legalisation" of migrants, i.e. the temporary work permits, as an opportunity for these "invisible people" to be accepted into the official labour market for a few months at least. Not a word about better wages and working conditions, not a word about protective measures during the pandemic, or about decent housing. Instead, the migrants' "legalisation" was limited to the period when their labour was economically useful. Seldom has the dark logic of the ruling class been so obvious. Despite the curfew, protests against this inhumane policy grew. There were rallies and solidarity initiatives in both Northern and Southern Italy, and on one occasion, striking farm workers left fruit and vegetables in the fields for a day; their core demands were better working conditions, decent accommodation and increased wages. Those at the bottom of the ladder demanded a redistribution of the wealth generated by their work; enormous wealth that is subsumed by the distribution monopolies.

The Italians call this modern system for the distribution of foodstuffs *grande distribuzione organizzata* (GDO),¹ i.e. organised large-scale trade. Although they do not deliberately link up with organised crime, the fact that *mafiosi* have a hand

1 See glossary.

in this system is an open secret. The Mafia's habit of ensuring "job placements" through the *caporalato*² system is notorious. The term GDO encapsulates one of the food sector's central problems – a problem which extends well beyond Italy: the market power of large food companies and supermarket chains, which push prices down as part of globalised competition, and how this pressure is passed on to the weakest link in the chain, the often unprotected day labourers in the fields. The chain of exploitation runs from top to bottom, and that of value creation from bottom to top.

In March 2020, despite the lockdown, GDO profits in Italy increased by 35%, suggesting that the lockdown did not affect the ongoing exploitation at both ends of the production chain: supermarket workers worked longer, under increased pressure and often without adequate protection from COVID19, while farm workers continued to labour for abysmal pay in pitiful conditions.

There are good and important initiatives to take the edge off this merciless competition, such as certification, which guarantees certain standards regarding the use of chemicals or ensures humane working conditions. However, the constant pressure of competition reduces workers' share of the profits to the bare minimum in order to increase profit margins. The underlying conditions for this, and more generally an agriculture integrated into EU and world markets, are shaped by free-trade ideology, which generally ensures that rules and standards are eliminated. Using rhetorical sleight of hand, the result is presented as a "level playing field", a term borrowed from sport and intended to suggest fair competition. A cursory glance might suggest that the playing field is indeed level, but on closer inspection some players are barefoot and hungry while others are well fed and well equipped. It takes more than yet another worn-out trainer on the pitch to achieve fair conditions: the modern retail system of our integrated world market requires a thorough overhaul.

However, the fact that a problem is acknowledged does not mean that it is solved. This means that the relevant players must take action, not that others speak on their behalf. The dialectic of crisis dynamics also provides some room for manoeuvre here: on the one hand, the pandemic has increased inequality, and on the other, the issues of land, agriculture and, above all, farm labour have again come into view. A window of opportunity for social and political action in the agri-

2 See glossary.

cultural sector – and especially with regard to the social struggles of farm workers – has opened up, and not just in Italy.

Trade union self-organisation is at the heart of the approach of the agricultural workers' section of grassroots trade union USB, whose work this brochure reports on. The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung has supported USB's endeavours to organise workers in the fields and ghettos through educational measures and publications. This brochure, written by one of these trade union activists, can hopefully serve as a source of inspiration and guide for action elsewhere. The issues raised in the epigraph by Giuseppe di Vittorio are more relevant than ever, and only the unionisation of farm workers will provide solutions. Despite and because of COVID-19, this is a highly topical issue.

Florian Horn and Federico Tomasone
Brussels, May 2020

THE AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SECTOR IN ITALY



In recent decades, there has been constant change in the organisation of production in the agriculture sector. Technology and innovation have led to the decline of manual labour in agriculture. This has been made possible not only by intensive mechanisation and the massive use of agrochemicals, but also by the mechanisation of cultivation and management techniques for natural resources such as seeds, soil, landscape and water.

This development has been driven by a constant quest for increased productivity and profits. The investment processes in the agriculture sector – supported by economic policies and the institutions and instruments of international economic and trade policy – have led to the consolidation of transnational agricultural groups which exercise oligopolistic and near-absolute power throughout the sector, from production to distribution on the markets. This development is consistent with the neoliberal process in which agriculture is being restructured worldwide, which has led to a reduction in the number of farms and an increase in their size. The largest farms operate across borders and are committed to the goal of constantly reducing production costs in order to increase profits at the expense of human and social rights and, by exercising pressure on wages, maximise agricultural income, natural resources and means of production.

ORGANISED RETAIL TRADE



A variety of production models can be found in Italy, ranging from large industrial groups to medium-sized companies and often small family-run businesses. A study of the industrial agricultural model shows that it is based on a system known as *grande distribuzione organizzata* (GDO).³ This is driven by the large supermarkets, which operate on the principle that everything must be available at all times. To stock up on products, they use so-called 'double-down auctions'.⁴ However, the extremely low prices at these auctions come at the expense of workers and of product quality, as each link in the supply chain must be able to hold its own against the previous link, all the way down to the day labourers, who are the last link in the chain. Moreover, in the final analysis, businesses which are not party to such auctions end up also feeling the economic pain. This applies especially to small and family-run farms, which face enormous pressure from the low prices of large producers. Although there are big differences between the production costs of the various co-existing production models, there is only one market on which produce can be traded. As a result, on the one hand, farmers are unable to sell their products at a fair price and earn a decent income from their activity, and, on the other, day labourers, who are exploited under illegal contracts, have no social protection and are forced to live in degrading conditions.

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This, as many judicial investigations into the overseas import-export activities of Italian agricultural and food products have shown, is where the Mafia comes in. Counterfeit products, logistics, wholesale and retail, fruit and vegetable markets, the various links in the supply chain... – organised crime has its fingers in each and every pie. In fact, it is particularly obvious in view of the fact that almost 50% of the assets seized from Mafia organisations are agricultural properties.⁵ This interdependence between legal and illegal systems, as well as the constant changes in the players in an ever larger and more complex agri-food system, generates a lack

3 Organised retail trade, in Italian *grande distribuzione organizzata* or GDO (see glossary). The body of the text generally refers to "large retail chains" or "supermarkets".

4 Double-down auctions are online auctions to which double discounts are applied, and are used by a number of distribution chains to stock up on various products. First, the buyers of large retail chains seek offers from suppliers of agricultural produce. The lowest of the received bids serves as a basis for a second auction, during which some producers withdraw, as this price would not even cover their production costs. Then at the second auction, the extremely low offers from the major agricultural groups are awarded the contract. In summer 2019, draft legislation intended to prevent double-down auctions was agreed.

5 Giangrande, A. (2017). *Caporalato Ipocrisia e Speculazione*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Italy, p. 306

of transparency in labour relations and market connections, which enables large sums of money to be easily injected into and taken out of the system.

So far, the authorities have concentrated almost exclusively on combating *caporalato*,⁶ which is regarded as solely responsible for the exploitation of day labourers. However, this approach is not consistently applied and is therefore ineffective, as the bodies responsible for monitoring and combating crime are understaffed, with only 1.7% of farms being inspected, around half of which were not complying with regulations.

Finally, any serious review of the exploitation of farm workers must take into account the role of investment and trade policies at national and supranational levels, which promote intensive production models with highly negative economic, social and environmental impacts, and which also frequently trigger migration processes. It is well known that in some African countries, land grabs are leading to the impoverishment and displacement of the rural population, while intensive food production has caused the desertification of farmland due to CO2 emissions. This is true of Mali, Senegal and much of West Africa, as well as the Sahel. Many of the farm workers in Italy's agricultural ghettos actually come from these areas.

6 See glossary.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY



With an annual turnover of €132 billion, the agri-food sector is the second largest in Italy's manufacturing industry, and accounts for 8% of Italy's gross domestic product (GDP).⁷ Italy is the fourth largest agricultural producer in the European Union. In 2017, exports of agricultural and food products made in Italy accounted for over €41 billion.⁸ Almost two thirds of Italy's agri-food exports (equivalent to €2.76 billion) go to EU Member States, while the United States is the main purchaser of Italian food products and the third biggest purchaser of products certified as being made in Italy, after Germany and France and ahead of the United Kingdom.⁹ With some 2.5 million tonnes, Italy is the third largest producer of citrus fruits in the Mediterranean region, and ranks 12th in the world.¹⁰ Italy is also one of the world's leading growers of processing tomatoes, alongside the United States and China.¹¹

According to data from the Italian Court of Auditors, the total value of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)¹² subsidies for the period 2014 to 2020 was €41.5 billion, to which another €10.5 billion of national funding must be added, so that each year an average of €7.4 billion flows into the agricultural sector¹³ – funding for an economic sector which is at the mercy of its large monopolies and, to ensure ever-increasing profits, employs low-cost, flexible, precarious and legally unprotected workers. This is happening in all farming sectors, and in fact socially vulnerable and defenceless workers are being deployed throughout Europe.

7 Italian Trade Agency (2017). *L'agroalimentare in Italia – Produzione ed Export*. Available at: www.ice.it/sites/default/files/inline-files/NOTA_AGROALIMENTARE_E_VINI_2017.pdf (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

8 Unaitalia (2018). *Nel 2017 l'export made in Italy agroalimentare supera i 41 miliardi di euro*. Available at: www.unaitalia.com/nel-2017-l-export-made-in-italy-agroalimentare-supera-i-41-miliardi-di-euro (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

9 *ibid.*

10 Italiafruit News (2018). *Produzione, superfici e scambi: tutti i numeri degli agrumi italiani*. Available at: www.italiafruit.net/DettaglioNews/42705/la-categoria-del-mese/produzione-superfici-e-scambi-tutti-i-numeri-degli-agrumi-italiani (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

11 Finizia, A. (2017). *I numeri della filiera del pomodoro da industria. Istituto di servizi per il mercato agricolo alimentare*. Rome.

12 See glossary.

13 *Presenza* (2018). *Lavoro agricolo, USB ha presentato nella terra di Di Vittorio la piattaforma e il codice etico*. Available at: www.presenza.com/it/2018/09/lavoro-agricolo-usb-ha-presentato-nella-terra-di-di-vittorio-la-piattaforma-e-il-codice-etico (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

From orange and tomato picking in the South to fruit farming in the North, agricultural work in Italy is seasonal, precarious and on-call, and in most cases performed by immigrant workers.

A look at the CAP as a whole reveals that 20% of its beneficiaries receive 85.7% of the total funds, while the remaining 80% have to make do with a meagre 14.3%. In fact, in Trentino, Liguria, Tuscany and Lazio, 20% of beneficiaries receive almost 90% of CAP funding.¹⁴ Product quality, the work actually performed and working conditions are not taken into account when the subsidies are allocated, nor is respect for the trade union rights of farm workers, who are mainly employed in the harvesting, processing and transport of agricultural produce.

ITALY'S LABOUR- MARKET POLICY



The agricultural produce that ends up on our table from supermarket shelves and market stalls does not tell the story of the lives of the countless men and women who toil in the fields and greenhouses of Italy in conditions and at a pace that are often reminiscent of modern slavery. In this production chain, thousands of “invisible” workers, many of them migrants, are isolated by Italian law¹⁵ and easily blackmailed due to the indifference of the European Union and its inability to agree on harmonisation processes for the effective protection of workers. Legal uncertainty, geographical and social exclusion and low wages make them easy prey to exploit in an economic system that requires increasingly cheap, replaceable and blackmailable labour. This is the reality of life for farm workers, who form part of an extensive pool of impoverished and precarious workers in Italy, whose everyday lives are marked by exploitation and appalling living conditions.

The impoverishment of the labour force is the result of policies that are completely at odds with the principles of responsible farming, i.e. agricultural production based on the environmentally friendly use of resources and working conditions that enable farm workers and even farmers and producers – who are often forced to get involved in exploitation themselves in order to satisfy the greed of the large retail chains, the processing industry and the logistics sector – to live in dignity. We are talking about millions of men and women – over 3.5 million according to the latest data – who, regardless of geographical origin, are habitually under pressure to perform and exploited, and also exposed to fatal accidents. This is a sector in which various forms of illegal employment are practised, sometimes even under the guise of employment agencies.

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15 Examples are the Bossi-Fini Law, the Minniti-Orlando Law adopted by the centre-left Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*) government led by Paolo Gentiloni and the two security decrees adopted by the coalition government bringing together the populist Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*) and the far-right Northern League (*Lega Nord*). More details can be found in the glossary.

These so-called temporary employment agencies are the result of Italian labour-market policy and legislation. Their task is to “mediate” between supply by employers and demand by workers. The specific activity of temporary employment agencies is to select staff and offer work; in this way, they replace the employer, who does not have to take full responsibility or hire workers. The increasing spread of private temporary employment agencies in Italy has effectively choked off the public job centres, the *Centri per l’impiego* (CPI), in the areas of placement and re-employment. The latter have been under pressure for years due to gradual erosion by multiple labour-market reforms, and labour-market deregulation.

THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF DAY LABOURERS



All these factors (the diktats of the large retail chains, the inappropriate use of CAP funds, the exploitation of workers, inadequate contracts, migration policy, the climate crisis, etc.) mean that the agricultural sector, despite the billions of euros it generates in turnover, is increasingly characterised by vulnerability and insecurity and is frequently affected by industrial accidents.

Agricultural workers are one of the most vulnerable groups in this supply chain and are most affected by occupational and social exclusion. In the most serious cases, these men and women, often migrants, suffer what amounts to imprisonment in ghettos. These individuals, from all parts of the world, are deprived of adequate pay, social-security rights, and job security, being exploited in conditions tantamount to slavery, without trade-union rights or social security, and are forced to submit to the rules of *caporalato*. “Grey labour” is extremely widespread.

Often, there is a formal contract or a letter of intent to hire, but there are no pay slips and no appropriate reporting of working days or compliance with the working conditions required by law. The usefulness of the official data on this subject is limited, as their inadequacy means that they provide only a partial view of the reality. According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), illegal employment in agriculture has been increasing steadily over the last 10 years and has now reached 23%. That is almost double the average for other sectors of the economy, where illegal employment is estimated to stand at around 12%.¹⁶ The lack of proper employment contracts leads to a number of inconveniences and outright violations of the law.

For example, without such a contract, it is impossible to rent accommodation or obtain a registration certificate – something that is necessary for a worker to receive basic benefits. Wages are usually below the minimum wage set by collective agreements, and the rules on working hours, weekly rest and breaks are also widely flouted.

16 Istat [Italian National Institute of Statistics] (2015). *L'andamento dell'economia agricola*. Available at: www.istat.it/files//2015/06/andamento-economia-agricola.pdf (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

Furthermore, safety measures are not taken and protective equipment to safeguard against inhalation of pesticides is not supplied. This led to 20 cases of poisoning by plant-protection products in vineyards near Bari in August 2019.¹⁷

On average, people work 10 hours a day for €20 to €30 – half the minimum wage. Deaths from heatstroke are not uncommon in summer.

Of course, these labourers work on a piecework basis, so that they are not paid for many hours or even days of work, and workers are largely powerless in the face of such sharp practices. One extreme example occurred in Lazio, where a farmer threatened workers with a rifle to force them to work even harder.¹⁸ In Bari, in the Apulia region, the police discovered two farm workers who were being housed in a cattle shed, given water intended for animals to wash in and drink, and paid a wage of only 70 euro cents per hour.¹⁹

At the end of their working day, most day labourers return to tent cities, dilapidated buildings or old farmhouses, where they usually live without running water, sanitary facilities, waste collection or electricity, far from villages and therefore from healthcare facilities. Many live there all year round and contract respiratory illnesses as a result. Such accommodation is also symbolic of the segregation and social exclusion suffered by day labourers, which has become permanent over the years.

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17 Sgaramella, V. (2019). *Intossicati nelle vigne di Turi, 20 braccianti al pronto soccorso*. Available at: www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/home/1165350/intossicati-nelle-vigne-di-turi-20-braccianti-in-prognosi-riservata.html (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

18 Il Fatto Quotidiano (2019). *Terracina, sparava verso i braccianti per farli lavorare: arrestato imprenditore agricolo*. Available at: www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/10/12/terraccina-sparava-verso-i-braccianti-per-farli-lavorare-di-piu-arrestato-agricoltore-35enne/5511934 (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

19 Corriere del Mezzogiorno (2019). *Bari, arrestati due imprenditori sfruttavano i pastori con una paga di settanta centesimi all'ora*. Available at: corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/19_agosto_22/bari-arrestati-due-imprenditori-sfruttavano-pastori-una-paga-settanta-centesimi-all-ora-eac6c2b8-c4b9-11e9-83d4-caab47e83a11.shtml?refresh_ce-cp (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

Fires often break out in farm-worker accommodation: a woman died recently in Metaponto (Matera Province, in the Basilicata region).²⁰ The fire had broken out in a factory building where many harvest workers were living.

The authorities' response to these abuses has been to set up camps run by cooperatives²¹ or public bodies. However, there are not enough places in these camps and their infrastructure is only slightly better than that of the tent cities that inevitably form nearby. It appears to be beyond the imagination of the authorities to supply accommodation which is not geographically and socially remote from local residents. As it is, this situation actually fuels social tensions on the ground, rather than promoting a process of integration that brings together people who live in the same area and have the same problems, regardless of their geographical origin.

The situation is particularly serious in the Sicilian province of Ragusa, where about 1,000 farm workers live in dreadful conditions far from public infrastructure, leaving whole families completely at the mercy of *caporali* or employers, and indeed cases of child labour and sexual exploitation have been reported there.²²

Another problem is the failure to comply with safety measures in the workplace and on the way to and from work, which has led to several fatal incidents in recent years. In Andria, in the Apulia region, agricultural worker Paola Clemente died of exhaustion in a vineyard.²³ There was a particularly serious road accident in August 2018 near Foggia, also in the Apulia region, in which 12 day labourers

20 La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno (2019). *Metaponto, incendio in capannone di braccianti, muore migrante nigeriana*. Available at: www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/matera/1163970/metaponto-incendio-in-capannone-di-braccianti-muore-migrante-nigeriana.html (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

21 See glossary.

22 NoveTV (2019). *Acate – Operazione “Greenhouse”. Sfruttamento della prostituzione minorile e violenza sessuale. Ragazzina di 13 anni costretta ad avere rapporti sessuali anche con anziani*. Available at: www.novetv.com/acate-operazione-greenhouse-sfruttamento-della-prostituzione-minorile-violenza-sessuale-ragazzina-13-anni-costretta-ad-rapporti-sessuali-anche-anziani (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

23 Norscia, A. (2019). *Lavoro nero nei campi, dopo il caso di Paola Clemente parte il processo a Trani*. La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno. Available at: www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/bat/1206125/lavoro-nero-nei-campi-dopo-il-caso-di-paola-clemente-parte-il-processo-a-trani.html (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

PRIMA GLI



SFRUTTATI



died on their way back from work.²⁴ In October 2019, an agricultural worker from Guinea lost his life in Asti (Piedmont), when he fell from a trailer while working in a vineyard.²⁵ In September of the same year, four people died in a cheese factory in the province of Pavia, Lombardy.²⁶

In addition to these recent fatal workplace accidents, the death of male farm worker Soumaila Sacko in Calabria in June 2018 has caused especial horror and broad public debate. Sacko, a trade unionist with *Unione Sindacale di Base* (USB), was shot dead near the tent city of San Ferdinando, a few kilometres from Rosarno, while looking for sheet metal and construction materials to build a hut for his fellow workers.²⁷

This murder is just one of a continuing series of attacks on farm workers by the local population. Local media repeatedly report attacks on farm workers, whether with air rifles, chains, sticks or knives, or deliberate assaults on cyclists on their way to work.

24 Pernice, L. (2018). *Foggia, 12 braccianti stranieri morti in un incidente stradale*. Corriere della Sera/Corriere del Mezzogiorno. Available at: [corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/18_agosto_06/incidente-stradale-foggiano-morti-cinque-braccianti-migranti-d123eda2-997e-11e8-95ac-2705e43e45a9.shtml](https://www.corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/18_agosto_06/incidente-stradale-foggiano-morti-cinque-braccianti-migranti-d123eda2-997e-11e8-95ac-2705e43e45a9.shtml) (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

25 Unione Sindacale di Base (2019). *È Ibrahim, 23 anni, l'ultimo morto sul lavoro nella filiera agricola. USB: fare luce sui fatti di Mongardino (Asti)*. Available at: www.usb.it/leggi-notizia/e-ibrahim-23-anni-lultimo-morto-sul-lavoro-nella-filiera-agricola-usb-fare-luce-sui-fatti-di-mongardino-asti.html (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

26 Pernice, L. (2018). *Foggia, 12 braccianti stranieri morti in un incidente stradale*. Corriere della Sera/Corriere del Mezzogiorno. Available at: [corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/18_agosto_06/incidente-stradale-foggiano-morti-cinque-braccianti-migranti-d123eda2-997e-11e8-95ac-2705e43e45a9.shtml](https://www.corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/cronaca/18_agosto_06/incidente-stradale-foggiano-morti-cinque-braccianti-migranti-d123eda2-997e-11e8-95ac-2705e43e45a9.shtml) (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

27 Polchi, V. (2018). *Un dossier sulle aggressioni razziste: «Scusate se non siamo affogati»*. La Repubblica. Available at: www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/26/news/aggressioni_razziste-210045816 (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

In July 2019, in the province of Foggia, also in Apulia, nine foreign farm workers were injured by stones thrown in their faces in four separate incidents.²⁸

During her visit to Italy in October 2018, United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery Urmila Bhoola emphasised that “Italy has ratified all the core international human rights instruments relating to the rights of workers except for the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Also, ratification of Protocol 29 to the ILO’s Forced Labour Convention is still outstanding.”²⁹ This is yet another legal vacuum in terms of worker protection, allowing exploitation, illegal employment and forced labour to run riot.

28 La Repubblica (2019). *Foggia, sassaiola contro immigrati che andavano al lavoro in bici: 3 feriti. E’ il secondo agguato*. Available at: bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/07/23/news/foggia_lancio_di_pietre_migranti-231822232 (23 March 2020).

29 Bhoola, U. (2018). *End of mission statement*. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23708 (23 March 2020).

ACTIONS TAKEN BY UNIONE SINDACALE DI BASE (USB)



In situations such as those just described, USB has always argued that unionisation of the (mostly) migrant workers is key to combating a system based on exploitation and ghettoisation. USB's trade-union actions are, therefore, always aimed at making workers aware of their trade-union and social rights. In most cases, people who camp near their workplaces are unaware of their rights as workers, as well as of their basic rights, and in such a situation they are unlikely to demand them.

This lack of awareness is another reason why profits continue to be made in the supply chain at workers' expense. For this reason, USB takes an approach in which raising awareness of workers' rights is accompanied by practical action on the part of the union, which organises on a local basis and endeavours to increase solidarity between workers.

The path that USB has chosen to tread is a treacherous one. For a start, farm work is short-term and seasonal in nature, and a substantial number of the farm workers and residents of tent cities are not the same from one year to the next. The huge social and linguistic diversity of the workers also complicates grassroots trade-union work.

However, the union has persevered and in recent years has been making progress. From the Gioia Tauro plain in Calabria to Foggia in Apulia and on to Saluzzo in Piedmont, educational/training initiatives, meetings, demonstrations and round tables (*tavoli istituzionali*) have been organised, and workers themselves have become spokespersons. The following paragraphs give a brief outline of USB's work in these areas.

ON THE GIOIA TAURO PLAIN



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Temporary accommodation and social and geographical exclusion are the determining factors in the daily lives of the day labourers on the Gioia Tauro plain, where the citrus-fruit harvest attracts workers from the Sahel and West Africa. Most of them are people who have been turned away from reception centres after having their applications for asylum rejected, as well as workers waiting for their residence permits to be renewed.

Many of those who have lost their residence permits because they are not able to work normally, live in tent cities. This hand-to-mouth existence and the legally murky situation surrounding it contribute significantly to the precariousness of their lives and makes them vulnerable to blackmail.

Due to the authorities' lack of interest in the living conditions of day labourers, the housing shortage on the Gioia Tauro plain has deteriorated over the years. Many informal settlements have developed between the municipalities of Rosarno and San Ferdinando. The inadequate camps set up by the Ministry of the Interior soon deteriorated and turned into new tent cities. About 3,000 people live here without basic services. It is one of the most difficult working environments in the country, marked as it is by extreme precariousness and illegality.

Here, everything is provisional: the accommodation, which is regularly vacated; the lives of the day labourers, who remain constantly on the knife edge between the renewal of their residence permits and the rejection of their asylum applications.

In this situation, it became apparent that a trade-union presence was needed. Initial meetings were organised and steps were taken towards the formation of a representative body for farm workers who were campaigning for the renewal of residence permits, registration certificates, regularisation and trade-union rights. On 20 March 2017, a meeting was held in the village of San Ferdinando, where a trade union was formed to represent the interests of farm workers. Thanks to the determination of the workers, results have already been achieved in terms of assistance with registration in the population register, the issuance of identity cards, the renewal of residence permits and applications for subsidiary protection. The first information and advisory centres have now been set up for these procedures.

A few months later, on 2 July, a devastating fire raged through the tent city, once again highlighting the problems caused by the concentrated accommodation of the workers.³⁰ USB's demand for open housing that enabled the workers to live in dignity was ignored, resulting in further fires in San Ferdinando and further deaths.³¹

30 Unione Sindacale di Base (2017). Confederazione Provinciale USB Reggio Calabria. *Braccianti: ennesimo incendio nella tendopoli a San Ferdinando. USB: garantire accoglienza a tutti i braccianti*. Available at: lavoroprivato.usb.it/leggi-notizia/braccianti-ennesimo-incendio-nella-tendopoli-a-san-ferdinando-usb-garantire-accoglienza-a-tutti-i-braccianti-1.html (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

31 Morosi, S. (2019). *Migranti, incendio nella tendopoli di San Ferdinando: un morto. Salvini: «Faremo lo sgombero»*. Corriere della Sera. Available at: www.corriere.it/cronache/19_febbraio_16/migranti-incendio-ghetto-tendopoli-san-ferdinando-morto-3c73efea-3195-11e9-a4dd-63e8165b4075.shtml (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

In 2017, for the first time, the farm workers' union took part in the May Day [Labour Day] demonstrations in both Foggia and Reggio Calabria. It was a day of struggle, and also a day of remembrance of the men and women who had lost their lives working in the fields and greenhouses: Paola Clemente, Mamadou Konate, Nouhou Doumbia, Mohamed Zacaria, Sekine Traore and many others. An initial attempt was also made to form an alliance for healthy food between farmers, day labourers and consumers.

Yet another agricultural worker, a woman, died in early 2018. Becky Moses arrived at the San Fernandino camp after her application for asylum was rejected and lost her life there in a fire only three days later at the age of 26.³² Shortly afterwards, a protest march from the camp to the town hall of San Ferdinando was held to demonstrate against the authorities' failure to keep their promises, and to demand justice for the dead. As a result, the people whose barracks had burned down were entered in the population register, and a round table on the housing emergency was organised.

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One day in 2018, 3 June 2018, was a particularly dark day in the history of the ghetto. Soumaila Sacko, a trade-union activist who worked for USB, was shot in the head while searching for abandoned construction materials with which to build a hut for his fellow workers. Initially, the Prefecture of Reggio Calabria suspected that he had been attempting theft. Much determination was, and still is, required to clarify the real cause of the incident. A strike was called immediately, while initiatives and expressions of solidarity organised by USB took place throughout Italy.

On 4 June, a protest march from the tent city to San Ferdinando took place, in which participants denounced the murder of Soumaila Sacko and the inhumane conditions under which the day labourers on the Gioia Tauro plain were forced to work. A protest was also organised soon afterwards in the capital of the Calabria region. In addition, USB is a plaintiff in the Soumaila Sacko murder trial, and a fundraiser was organised to make it possible for Soumaila's body to be buried in Mali.

32 Candito, A. (2018). *Rosarno, incendio nella tendopoli dei migranti: una donna morta, due ferite e diversi ustionati*. Available at: www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/01/27/news/rosarno_incendio_nella_tendopoli_dei_migranti_un_morto_molti_ustionati-187379302 (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

In December 2018, the organisations *Rete Iside Onlus* and USB, along with the *Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung* and *Crocevia Internazionale*, launched an intensive course for 10 farm workers.³³

Their aim was not only to train the participants in legal and social issues, but also to make them fully aware of their social position and, finally, transfer their newly acquired skills to other day labourers living and working in San Ferdinando. An informal network was also set up to facilitate grassroots activism.

On 16 February 2019, another fire broke out in the camp, and a 29-year-old Senegalese man, Moussa Ba, died in the flames. Soon afterwards, the camp was evacuated and a new camp was opened – neither of which could be expected to improve the appalling conditions in the ghetto.³⁴ And, sure enough, only a little while after that, yet another labourer died in a fire in the “new” tent city approved by the State and the local authorities.³⁵

33 Brief descriptions of the organisations named are provided on pages 53 and 54.

34 Candito, A. (2019). *Incendio in nuova tendopoli San Ferdinando: muore un migrante senegalese*. La Repubblica. Available at: www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/03/22/news/incendio_in_nuova_tendopoli_s_ferdinando_muore_un_migrante-222210953 (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

35 La Repubblica (2019). *San Ferdinando, dove si continua a morire bruciati anche nella «tendopoli istituzionale»*. Available at: www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2019/03/23/news/san_ferdinando-222306016 (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

IN FOGGIA PROVINCE



34

In July 2019, intimidation, stone-throwing and even attempts to run down farm workers with cars temporarily refocused the spotlight on Capitanata, in Foggia Province.³⁶ With many millions of tonnes, this part of Italy is the country's foremost tomato-processing area.³⁷ Here too, exploitation and illegal work are routine. In all, each year 6,000 to 7,000 day labourers, many of them from West Africa, are employed and are housed in large, overpopulated ghettos or dilapidated farm-houses.

The agricultural workers live in isolation and unprotected, at the mercy of the *caporali*, their employer and organised crime. There is virtually no workplace security. In tomato processing, illegality is rampant – which is ironic considering that tomatoes are a totemic part of Italian cuisine.

36 Facchini, M. (2019). *Foggia, ancora aggressioni contro i braccianti migranti: "Colpiti a sassate mentre vanno al lavoro in bicicletta"*. The Post International. Available at: www.tpi.it/cronaca/foggia-migranti-aggredditi-sassate-20190724378306 (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

37 Foggia Reporter (2019). *Foggia capitale del pomodoro grazie alla Princes*. Available at: foggiareporter.it/foggia-capitale-del-pomodoro-princes.html (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

On 2 November 2017, two day labourers, Mahamadou Konaté and Nouhou Doumbouya, died in Foggia Province, in a fire that was probably started deliberately.³⁸

In the wake of this event, the day labourers of San Severo and USB organised a meeting followed by a protest march through Foggia. In this context the farm workers began to organise locally under the aegis of USB. Difficulties lay ahead: after the fire, the men and women who had lived in the shanty town were evacuated; those who could, spent the night in cars, but most of them –men and women – slept in the fields, in the open air.

The representation of farm workers via USB gained considerable momentum. Once the workers had developed a strong awareness of their rights, they started to set themselves deadlines and goals. The women working on the farms had a fundamental and valuable role to play in this process, and their perspective plays an important role in the ongoing disputes and the positions developed on this basis. A delegation of these women was formed to deal with gender-specific issues relating to their work and material living conditions. Some of its representatives took part in the national demonstration *Non Una di Meno* (“Not One Woman Less”) in November 2018 against violence directed at women.

In July 2018, the day labourers, thousands of whom had not had access to clean water for months, went on strike and demonstrated in front of the seat of the Regional Council of Apulia. Following a meeting with the Regional Assessor for Labour and the Assessor for Agriculture, the ghetto’s water supply was restored. A round table was also set up to ensure compliance with employment contracts, the right to housing and registration in the population register.

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However, in September of that year, the Apulia region once more turned off the workers’ water, making the health and hygiene situation in the Rignano ghetto untenable. The reaction of the farm workers’ representatives was not long in coming: Foggia Cathedral was occupied in October.

The diocesan bishop of the archdiocese of Foggia-Bovino then declared his solidarity with the agricultural workers, and thanks to his intervention, the ghetto

38 Ansa (2017). *Two killed in blaze at migrant ‘ghetto’*. Available at: www.ansa.it/english/news/general_news/2017/03/03/two-killed-in-blaze-at-migrant-ghetto-3_83f7ae62-a040-4bbe-ab04-4f0fb5095666.html (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

was again regularly supplied with fresh water.³⁹ In the same period, USB, along with the *Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung*, *Rete Iside Onlus* and the *Centro Internazionale Crocevia* in Torretta Antonacci, set up a training course for farm workers, which came to be attended by many people.

This high level of interest in the course showed the strength of the demand for training among farm workers. After all, knowledge of the law is a necessary prerequisite for awareness of the exploitative conditions under which so many people work here.

39 Belizzi, T. (2017). *Foggia, la protesta dei migranti in cattedrale: "Viviamo nei campi in condizioni disumane"*. La Repubblica. Available at: bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/10/10/news/foggia_200_braccianti_extracomunitari_in_cattedrale_protesta_silenziosa_contro_la_regione_puglia-177853609 (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

TORRETTA ANTONACCI – FOGGIA’S GHETTO

The farm-worker settlement of Torretta Antonacci is about half an hour’s drive from the provincial capital of Foggia. If you take the dirt road to the settlement, you pass a sign bearing the words “Località TORRETTA ANTONACCI”. This was erected by trade-union activists to give the place – previously known only as the “Big Ghetto” – a name and provide its residents with some visibility.

Torretta Antonacci was what the area had been called when legendary trade-union leader Giuseppe Di Vittorio slaved away there under the scorching sun and organised the local farm workers, long before this nameless shanty-town slum was built. Today, several thousand people live there in makeshift shelters without running water, electricity or sanitation. In early December 2019, a fire started in Torretta Antonacci, destroying most of the corrugated-iron huts.



In early August 2018, a total of 16 farm workers died in two road accidents after a working day in the tomato fields. Transport is normally organised by the *caporali*. These deaths were followed by a strike and a “Red Cap March” – a nod to how, like many farm workers, the victims had worn red baseball caps for visibility and as protection from the heat.⁴⁰ A large number of demonstrators took part, and there was a great deal of press and public attention, thereby turning the spotlight on the usually hushed-up issue of farm-worker exploitation.

On 22 September 2018, a national farming convention entitled “*Agricoltura – Eticoltura*” (“Farming – Ethical Farming”) was held in Foggia. A platform was presented there for strengthening the trade-union, contractual and social rights of farm workers and a code of conduct was proposed. This code of conduct was dedicated to the memory of murdered USB activist Soumaila Sacko, and was aimed at all those who work in the production and distribution of agricultural produce, from day labourers to large retailers. Farm workers who, regardless of their geographical origin, had in common similar living and working conditions came to this event from across Italy.

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Foggia remained at the heart of USB’s activities in the agricultural supply chain in 2019. On 16 July, workers occupied St Nicholas’s Basilica (*Basilica di San Nicola*) in Bari and demanded the implementation of the agreement signed in July 2017 with the Apulia Region, which for all intents and purposes existed only on paper. With a view to ending their invisibility, they demanded legal employment contracts, procedures for documents to be issued, safe transport, the right to housing, health protection and the acknowledgement of their human dignity, as well as the issuing of residence permits.

A commemorative march was organised on 4 August 2019 to mark the anniversary of the tragic road accidents of August 2018. In December of that year, Torretta Antonacci, the Great Ghetto of Foggia, caught fire. In all, 100 huts were destroyed in the flames, and 400 workers lost the roof over their heads in the midst of the Apulian winter.⁴¹

40 Corriere della Sera (2018). *A Foggia la marcia dei «berretti rossi» dopo la strage dei braccianti*. Available at: www.corriere.it/cronache/18_agosto_08/a-foggia-marcia-berretti-rossi-la-strage-braccianti-9653633c-9aec-11e8-935d-1b6371349412.shtml (in Italian) (23 March 2020).

41 Mira, A. M. (2019). *Foggia. Incendio devasta il «gran ghetto», coperte e viveri per i migranti senza casa*. Avvenire. Available at: www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/foggia-incendio-devasta-ghetto-migranti (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

IN SALUZZO, PIEDMONT



39

Another instance of precarious seasonal employment of workers deprived of their rights is to be found in Saluzzo (Cuneo Province, Northern Italy). In this area, peaches, blueberries and apples are major cash crops. According to the Coldiretti farming association, the turnover in the Piedmont region is around €500 million a year, 60% of which is generated in the province of Cuneo.⁴² As in the rest of the country, these profits are in no way reflected in the lives of those whose work makes them possible.

Each year, during the fruit harvest, thousands of farm workers, complete with field cookers and mattresses, camp in the open air in a square in Saluzzo because they have no proper accommodation. These workers are either looking for work or have a contract with the many farms in the area, which may be dozens of kilometres away.

42 TargatoCn (2019). *La frutticoltura della provincia di Cuneo vista da Coldiretti, Confagricoltura e Cia-Agricoltori Italiani*. Available at: www.targatocn.it/2019/07/19/sommario/agricoltura/leggi-notizia/argomenti/agricoltura/articolo/la-frutticoltura-della-provincia-di-cuneo-vista-da-coldiretti-confagricoltura-e-cia-agricoltori-ita.html (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT WORKING CONDITIONS IN SALUZZO, PIEDMONT

In summer 2019, USB tried out a new approach to organising its courses. As day labourers in Piedmont are highly dispersed and often difficult to reach, the union decided to rent a mobile home, the *Camper dei diritti* ("Camper of Rights"), to disseminate information and supply training. As many workers are paid below the contractual minimum, the workshops dealt with labour law and collective agreements.

Issues relating to rights of residence and poor accommodation were also addressed. Special attention was paid to training multipliers and preparing them for their role in their communities.



Again, working days are often not included in wage calculations, wage levels are below the minimum wage, and overtime is often not paid at all. “Grey work” is very common. Officially, the gross wage rate is a little over €6 per hour for eight hours a day – yet there are reports that people are working considerably longer days.

Piano Accoglienza Stagionali (PAS), the reception programme for seasonal workers, which has been supporting about 1,000 people for several years, is considered to be a benchmark for the management of day labourers.

Since 2018, the Piedmont Region, the Monviso Solidale group, Caritas, the trade union confederations CIGL and CISL, banking foundations and companies have been supplying a former army barracks which includes dormitories with bunk beds as well as a few outdoor cooking facilities and chemical toilets, and whose entrance and exit are closely guarded. All users must pay a fee of €20. The total cost of this facility is approximately €400,000.

Those who cannot use the barracks, because they do not yet have a contract, camp outside, or, as in 2019, live in an old factory building. Only around 100 people are supplied with local accommodation at smaller facilities in the neighbouring municipalities. The logic behind this situation is the same as in the Gioia Tauro area or around Foggia: farm workers are not expected to integrate with the rest of the population, but are made to live at a distance. At best, they are accommodated in these camps, where only their most basic needs are met.

The situation in the region is further exacerbated by the many people who, since the Salvini Decree, have run the risk of slipping into illegality or whose humanitarian protection has expired. Moreover, under the Bossi-Fini Law, applicants must have an employment contract if they want to obtain a residence permit. As a result, *caporalato* is also one of the scourges of Saluzzo. In May 2019, two employers and an intermediary were arrested.⁴³

43 Boratto, L. (2019). *Tre arresti per caporalato nel Saluzzese: migranti della frutta pagati meno di 5 euro all'ora*. La Stampa. Available at: www.lastampa.it/cuneo/2019/05/23/news/tre-arresti-per-caporalato-nel-saluzzese-migranti-della-frutta-pagati-meno-di-5-euro-all-ora-1.33703798 (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

USB has recently begun work in Saluzzo. Assemblies and meetings were organised in preparation for the first demonstration of farm workers in the region, which was held in Cuneo on 21 July 2018.⁴⁴ They demanded respect for trade-union rights and decent housing for all workers, especially those who have to camp outdoors in Saluzzo.

In June 2019, the “Camper of Rights” was launched at the initiative of the farm workers’ representatives of USB Piedmont, with the support of the *Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung*. This is a mobile information vehicle which provides farm workers with information, advice and assistance regarding the recognition of their trade-union and social rights.

44 Borgetto, M. (2018). “Chiediamo diritti, lavoro e casa”. La Stampa. Available at: www.lastampa.it/cuneo/2018/07/21/news/chiediamo-diritti-lavoro-e-casa-1.34033278 (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

CONCLUDING REMARKS - POLITICAL CLAIMS AND DEMANDS



In few areas is the gradual disenfranchisement of workers in recent years as apparent as in the agriculture sector. Foreign workers, who have no legal protection or social networks, and live in ghettos segregated from the rest of society, are particularly defenceless. It is essential that they be able to unionise and become players themselves if they are to be able to claim their universal rights.

It was this lack of rights (pay, trade unions, social security, housing and safe working conditions), which exists in practice and is prevalent in Italy from north to south and east to west, that led the farm workers section of USB to initiate an organised campaign of social and trade-union literacy, with training courses for workers in the agricultural supply chain. Its primary goal is to restore human dignity as well as trade-union and social rights throughout the supply chain, from the fields to the players in charge of logistics, and end consumers. USB has set up local delegations for farm workers as subdivisions of the national delegation; focal points have been set up to raise awareness of rights and meet the needs of the workforce, and trade-union representatives have been trained.

The large retail chains and transnational companies must be forced into transparency, i.e. to provide information about their suppliers and the number of stages in the supply chain. This would enable consumers to make informed choices based on the origin of produce and respect for the rights of the workers in the supply chain – a supply chain which, it should be added, also often receives public aid.

Administratively speaking, it is wrong and counterproductive that in some regions the Ministry of the Interior, rather than the Ministry of Labour, is responsible for the management of migrant farm workers. Nor should the granting of residence permits be contingent on an employment contract, and reception measures for migrants and refugees – who make up a substantial proportion of day labourers – must be designed in such a way as to guarantee respect for their rights and their ability to make independent life choices. The promotion of trade-union organisation and collective mobilisation throughout rural areas, to bring together farm workers and producers at national and transnational levels, will be the aim of an action strategy for the agriculture sector. That is why USB has requested that the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Agriculture be involved in the management of the agricultural-labour measures.

With this in mind, USB took part in the first meeting, in Rome, of the Round Table on Combating *Caporalato* and Exploitation in Agriculture on 16 October 2019. The creation of this round table was called for by USB in the wake of the murder of

Soumaila Sacko and the many deaths of day labourers, with a view to discussing the many serious issues affecting farm labourers. The six basic points for effectively combating *caporalato* and for promoting the rights and human dignity of female and male workers were read out in the presence of the Ministers of Agriculture and Labour, who had been sworn in on 5 September 2019.⁴⁵

On 8 November 2019, Minister for Southern Italy and Territorial Cohesion Giuseppe Provenzano met USB workers' representatives for Foggia and visited the Torretta Antonacci ghetto.⁴⁶ Once more, the need to put an end to the legal and social invisibility of day labourers by providing housing, registering them in the population register and legalising their residence permits came to the fore. Conversely, the inhabitants of the ghetto were able to witness, for the first time, a government representative seeing for himself the huge difficulties faced by farm workers in Southern Italy. The Minister again emphasised his full commitment to removing the obstacles that prevented the workers from living in dignity, such as the security decrees promulgated a few months earlier by the previous government.

This institutional approach goes hand in hand with the union's presence in rural areas and its demand "equal pay for equal work". USB intends to make people aware that their food is not just a matter of taste, but is also affected by the economic impact of the capitalist system. For this reason, an alliance between farmers, producers, workers and consumers is required: to ensure that food is fit to eat, to combat all forms of exploitation, and to ensure respect for the rights of farm workers.

In areas where people are exploited, the contradiction between billions of euros in profits and the appalling conditions in which workers live and work can be exposed. The whole agricultural and food system and the measures regulating farm work need to be redesigned so that a fair balance is struck between food producers, consumers and workers.

Changing production methods is a priority, as various social, economic and cultural aspects are involved which are essential to the survival of Italy's agricultural sector and of rural areas, increasingly threatened as they are by depopulation, ageing and soil erosion. Public awareness, especially among young people, of the dangers

45 USB's Charter of Human Dignity and Rights can be found in the Annex on page 50.

46 D'Agostino, R. (2019). *Il Ministro del Sud Provenzano visita il Gran Ghetto*. Foggia Today. Available at: www.foggiatoday.it/cronaca/visita-ministro-giuseppe-provenzano-gran-ghetto.html (in Italian) (Accessed: 23 March 2020).

of climate change and of the massive pollution of our planet's water, air and soil should drive the international community to completely rethink current production methods in order to improve the sustainability of the agricultural system while respecting natural cycles, and to work towards the gradual abandonment of chemicals in farming and stockbreeding. Such change needs to be brought about by the main players in food production, farmers, farm workers and consumers. A strong awareness of the dangers behind the industrial processes of agricultural production is required to restore the farming system as a whole to harmonious and sustainable production which respects the environment, consumers and workers alike. The latter are the backbone of the whole system, and only by realising their importance and involving them directly in trade-union work will it be possible to change agricultural processes for the benefit of all.

ANNEX



This is the full text of the Charter of Human Dignity and Rights given to Giuseppe Provenzano, Minister for Southern Italy and Territorial Cohesion, at the time of his visit to Torretta Antonacci:

To Mr Giuseppe Provenzano,
Minister for Southern Italy and Territorial Cohesion

First of all, we would like to thank you on behalf of USB (*Unione Sindacale di Base*), which operates at local, national and international levels, for your visit to this province, where Giuseppe Di Vittorio was born and where many struggles took place for bread and oil. We hope and pray that ultimately a joint document of intent will be drawn up, to provide the thousands of workers in other areas of Southern Italy with information and advice.

The Agricultural Labour Section of USB is committed to organising day labourers, regardless of their geographical origin and the colour of their skin, into trade unions, so that they can demand “equal pay for equal work” throughout the agricultural supply chain.

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In Southern Italy, which is currently afflicted by structural inequalities, social deprivation and massive emigration, farm workers are experiencing various forms of social and work-related insecurity and exploitation, whereas at national level the agricultural and food sector is generating an annual turnover of €134 billion.

Despite this turnover and the EU’s funding of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), nothing is being done to help end the dependency of these people, especially here in the South.

Such dependency mainly affects men and women who are socially “invisible” and therefore vulnerable to all kinds of social exploitation and blackmail at work. The time has now come to restore to these “invisible” day labourers the human dignity and rights that have been denied them by unscrupulous employers in recent decades.

These employers have taken advantage of cumbersome laws and never-ending bureaucracy that do not enable farm workers to regularise their situation, to blackmail them rather than comply with the contractual and economic rules that exist to protect workers.

Add to this the effects of regulations such as the Bossi-Fini Law and the recent security decrees, and the result is pervasive illegality – a situation characterised by precarious and inadequate living conditions which can barely be called dignified.

For all these reasons, we have without delay set in motion a process to **restore dignity to workers by unionising them and to enable them to reclaim their trade-union and social rights.**

This applies to the entire agricultural supply chain, in a holistic approach that begins with the seed sector and continues all the way through cultivation, harvesting, post-harvest processing, further processing, transport, marketing, distribution and sale.

Our commitment has led us to the **first operational stage: the development of a new strategy to combat *caporalato* and exploitation in agriculture.**

On this occasion, we shall now read out in your presence some of the main demands of our platform:

CHARTER OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND RIGHTS

PROVISION OF HOUSING AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A GUARANTEE FUND

The establishment of structural processes for the supply of housing in rural and urban areas to seasonal or permanent workers, regardless of geographical origin and not related to any form of charity, by means of the creation of a **national guarantee fund**.

REGISTRATION IN THE POPULATION REGISTER

Municipalities urgently need to be involved to facilitate the registration of workers with residence permits in the population register, if necessary by taking appropriate decisions at the municipal level.

A MEASURE TO LEGALISE “INVISIBLE” WORKERS

Tens of thousands of “invisible” day labourers, often foreigners or refugees, work in the agri-food chain as a whole – which begins with the seed market and continues through cultivation, harvesting, post-harvest processing, further processing, transport, marketing and distribution to finally sale on the shelves of organised retail outlets – living in segregated accommodation and vulnerable to blackmail as a result of Italy’s legislation or security decrees (the Bossi-Fini Law, the Minniti-Orlando Law and the two Salvini decrees). **The regularisation of these men and women by granting them a residence permit would be a civilised act of justice** which would restore the rule of law and social justice.

Foggia, 9 November 2019

The representatives of the Agricultural Labour Section of the USB trade union

GLOSSARY



BOSSI-FINI LAW

The Bossi-Fini Law is an Italian immigration law adopted when Silvio Berlusconi was Prime Minister. Its provisions include a stipulation that to be granted residence permits, applicants must prove that they have a job.

Other legislation adopted by various subsequent governments, such as the Minniti-Orlando Law adopted by the centre-left Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*) government led by Paolo Gentiloni and the Salvini decree, are also highly controversial, as they aggravate the problem of illegal exploitation by linking residence permits to a job.

CAP

The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) governs the use of funds from the EU budget in the agricultural sector. It is one of the largest items in the EU's budget.

The CAP is criticised by many small farmers' organisations, environmental organisations and trade unions, as the lion's share of the funds it allocates goes to large farms.

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CAPORALATO

Caporalato is the illegal recruitment of workers by intermediaries (*caporali*). The workers are usually hired on a daily basis and pay fees, for example for transport to work, and therefore receive a wage which is usually well below the applicable minimum wage.

In the Italian fruit and vegetable sector, this practice is widespread. Various legislative initiatives have been taken to put a stop to this mafia-like system, but one problem is lack of supervision.

COOPERATIVES

Cooperative Sociali are a specific type of cooperative whose purpose is to provide charitable services.

This type of cooperative is very common in Italy, where the public authorities are outsourcing an increasing proportion of social, health, education and youth services to social cooperatives. In Italy, cooperatives often tackle the issues of asylum and support for migrants.

ORGANISED LARGE-SCALE TRADE GRANDE DISTRIBUZIONE ORGANIZZATA (GDO)

GDO includes both large supermarket chains, i.e. large retailers such as Carrefour, and distribution chains between retailers, such as Coop (i.e. organised distribution). This concentration has generated huge market power.

Brief descriptions of the organisations involved.



RETE ISIDE ONLUS

The non-profit organisation *Rete ISIDE Onlus*, established in 2008, supports people in precarious work and life situations. Within the organisation, workers, students and retired people are committed to social, trade-union and cultural participation.

One main focus is on health and safety in the workplace, achieved by means of social-inclusion practices, access to information and support for mutualism.



UNIONE SINDACALE DI BASE (USB)

USB was established by over 600 delegates in Rome in May 2010 as a federation of independent trade unions. It has a confederal structure and is represented at national, regional and provincial levels in both the private and the public sectors.

USB is a proactive trade union whose goal is to improve the working and living conditions of millions of workers in a way that goes beyond defensive damage-reduction strategies. It is a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

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CROCEVIA INTERNAZIONALE

The *Centro Internazionale Crocevia* is a non-governmental organisation established in 1958. For over 60 years, it has worked with local communities and social movements on all continents, in the fields of education/training, communication and agriculture, with a particular focus on smallholders, biodiversity, food sovereignty and the right to fair and sustainable development.

Crocevia supports the international farmers' and indigenous movements coordinated in the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty at the FAO and other United Nations agencies based in Rome (FAO, IFAD, WFP) in their advocacy work.

ROSA- LUXEMBURG- STIFTUNG

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung is an internationally operating, left-wing non-profit organisation providing civic education. It is affiliated with Germany's 'Die Linke' (Left Party). Active since 1990, the foundation has been committed to the analysis of social and political processes and developments worldwide. The Stiftung works in the context of the growing multiple crises facing our current political and economic system. In cooperation with other progressive organisations around the globe, the Stiftung focuses on democratic and social participation, the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, and alternative economic and social development. The Stiftung's international activities aim to provide civic education by means of academic analyses, public programmes, and projects conducted together with partner institutions. The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung works towards a more just world and a system based on international solidarity.

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The agricultural produce that ends up on our table from supermarket shelves and market stalls does not tell the story of the lives of the countless men and women who toil in the fields and greenhouses of Italy in conditions and at a pace that are often reminiscent of modern slavery.

In this production chain, thousands of “invisible” workers, many of them migrants, are isolated by Italian law and easily blackmailed due to the indifference of the European Union and its inability to agree on harmonisation processes for the effective protection of workers.

Legal uncertainty, geographical and social exclusion and low wages make them easy prey to exploit in an economic system that requires increasingly cheap, replaceable and blackmailable labour.

This is the reality of life for farm workers, who form part of an extensive pool of impoverished and precarious workers in Italy, whose everyday lives are marked by exploitation and appalling living conditions.