



# **STAKEHOLDERS ANALYSES ROMANIA NEEDS'ASSESSMENT**

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# EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ROMANIAN WOMEN WORKING IN AGRICULTURE IN ITALY

## INTRODUCTION

### **Research context and limitations**

The current qualitative research was developed in the context of the BRIGHT project, with the aim of identifying and better understanding the experiences of Romanian women working in agriculture in Italy in the past 10 years.

The research was intended to be an exploration of individual experiences and, in the context of the limited number of interviewees, its' results cannot be generalized; however, the results can be useful in highlighting certain trends, especially when being read in correlation with other research reports, both qualitative and quantitative. Assessing these particular, contextual experiences of the women involved in the research process supports the project team to further develop training and learning instruments, aimed at increasing the capacity of local actors (resource persons) to provide significant knowledge to women searching for work in agriculture in Italy or to women preparing to leave for Italy for employment in agriculture.

The women interviewed were identified through the support of a various network of resources, from local non-profit organizations providing different types of community services to different professionals active at the local level: social assistants, teachers, local authority representatives etc. From a total number of 21 contacts gathered, we were able to reach and interview 12 women from five different regions of Romania: North-East, West, Center, South-East and South-West. Although we did receive contacts from women currently working in Italy in

agriculture, we have decided not to use those, as there was no time available to elaborate these experiences and the lack of distance from the present could have put the women in uncomfortable or risky situations.

The answers of the respondents were noted down by hand by the interviewer after the interviewees were explained the main points related to the protection of their personal identification data, how the information they are providing will be used and how their experiences may contribute to helping other women to leave better prepared. The conditions in which the interviews were being taken were not always the ideal ones: one woman was, for instance, picking up mushrooms in the forest while responding to the questions, another one was on her way to the village store; in many cases the interviewees were not alone when responding, being either in the presence of their young and adult children or, in at least four of the cases, in the presence of their husband who ended up becoming a part of the interview as well (answering the questions from their perspective, since the couple actually worked together in Italy in agriculture). However, even given these research limitations, many of the answers proved to be very valuable for the research. In some of the cases, there was obvious suspicion about the interviewing process, manifesting in a rush to declare the conditions were good and that there were no problems in their situation. There is a reluctance to talk about their potentially negative experiences, especially in the case of women with recurrent working experiences, specifically women who currently reside in Romania, but who are planning to return to Italy to work in agriculture, for the same employer.

There were very different availabilities among the participants in terms of going in-depth with their answers; several interviews were very rich in information, lasting between 55 and 57 minutes, while in two of the cases the interviews were brief, only lasting for 16 minutes.

## Profiles of the women participating in the interviews

Age	Region of residency	Civil status	Children	Education	Workplace prior to working in Italy
52	North-East	Married	2 adult children	Vocational school	Yes

35	North-East	Married	1 minor child	Vocational school	No
49	South-West	Married	1 adult child	High school	No
46	South-West	Married	2 adult children	High school	Yes
34	South-West	Married	2 minor children	High-school and post-high school studies	No
45	Center	Married	1 adult and 1 minor child	10 grades	Yes
53	South-West	Married	3 adult children	10 grades	Yes
44	South-East	Single	1 adult child	10 grades	Yes
34	North-East	Married	1 adult child	10 gradeas	No
33	West	Married	2 minor children	High school	Yes
40	North-East	Married	1 adult and 1 minor child	8 grades	Yes
41	North-East	Married	1 adult child	High school	Yes

## MOTIVATION AND PREPARATION

### The decision to leave

When asked about their motivation to leave, most women refer to the economic hardship they encountered in Romania, related to their extremely limited access



to secure and well-remunerated jobs, that would allow for a decent living; for many of them the decision to leave was also in connection to a debt that they had to pay back, in all cases with interest (usually a bank loan), to their precarious living conditions and to the needs of their children that they felt they could not meet while accessing a regular job in their home-town or home-village. Usually the decision was rushed by a critical event: losing a home, losing a job, debt pressure, a family member becoming sick and needing help etc.

*“My husband had already left to work in Italy, it was really hard to have enough money, and actually he left so he can save up for a debt, we could no longer pay the money back from what we were making in Romania...so I also followed him, because there we could make more money”*

*“I left because I did not have a home...I actually don't even have it now...”*

*“I left because I was recently divorced, I had a big bank loan and I had to pay it back monthly and I could not do it anymore from my income, my name was on that bank contract and, even if I took it with my ex, after the divorced he stopped paying...”*

*“We needed to go, our income in Romania was not enough, we had a baby boy, the banks were harassing us already, both myself and my husband lost our jobs, we really had no other choice”*

*“It was a very dark period for us, we didn't have a house anymore, we were living with my aunt, we wanted to have our own home so much...and we succeeded, although it was very hard for us”*

*“I wanted to leave for a long time...but my husband did not agree, so when my husband lost his job I was able to convince him this is an option...but it was very hard to leave him alone, back home...if you want to be abroad, you need to have absolutely nothing back home holding you back”*

*“I left because of what I did not have back home...my husband was sick and could no longer work, but we had so many bills to pay every month”*

*“We wanted to save money to buy our own house without borrowing money from the bank”*

*“There were very little money and you could not find a job, my sister left and then she asked me to come as well, she found work for me”*

## **The identification of a job opportunity**

In the case of all interviewees, learning about the job opportunity happened in the context of a close, personal relationship (family, friends, neighbours, former co-workers etc.). This actually added an additional boost of confidence, since the women respondents knew where they were going, knew someone who did that job previously and had awareness of some of the working conditions. Even in those cases when their travel and job search were intermediated by a specialized recruitment agency, they still found out about that firm through a personal contact, a neighbour.

*“My husband was already there and he said I should come, too...so I said OK, let’s go for a month or two...I went and ended up staying for 12 years...and I actually also brought people there, my brother, my sister-in-law, my cousin...it was very hard, but the employer was OK and that helped”*

*“I went to Brasov for a vocational training to become a cook and there was someone there who was going to Italy for work very often...and he said there are people there who offer you a place to live and work, so I went...”*

*“A neighbour came and told me there is this opportunity, it all happened so fast...she first told me about it on a Sunday evening and on Friday the next week I was already there...”*

*“A woman in my village told me, she told me there is this recruitment agency that sends people to Italy for work, so I went...she told me they are using working agreements and you work legally and it is OK”*

*“My cousin was there and she knew that I no longer had a home, so she told me to come: OK, it is hard work, but it pays 5 EUR/hour, so you should come anyway...”*

*“A woman in my village was gathering women and telling them about this job...”*

*“Most of my relatives were already working there”*

*“My husband was already there, because his brother who was also there convinced him to go, and then my husband told me to come as well”*

## **Knowledge of language and pre-existing working agreement at first departure**

In difficult circumstances, the decision to leave, especially when proposed by someone known to the woman, is very easily made, almost with no preparation

time. When they first left, none of the women knew the language, and for some of them that was anxiety provoking.

*“I could not understand the language at first and I was crying and crying because of that...”*

Some of the women, especially those spending a considerable amount of time in Italy, started speaking Italian after a while, but in the case of others the knowledge remained very limited.

*“I had no clue of Italian, but now I can understand quite well”*

*“I did not know the language, but there I only worked with other Romanians, so we were all speaking Romanian among ourselves, there was no need to learn Italian”*

*“I was always with Romanians, from Motru and from Calarasi, so I never spoke Italian there”*

The women finding out about the job opportunity from other family members did not specifically inquire about the existence of a contract when they left, especially because the level of trust in the people they were either leaving with or going to was very high. In the case of women leaving with the support of a recruitment agency, there was usually a contract, closed in Romania, but in many cases it changed into a new one upon their arrival to Italy. In some cases, the working agreement was closed between the parties after a prolonged testing period.

*“I was told how much I will get per hour, but I worked without a contract initially, for a while”*

*“Since I left through this recruitment agency and they are very serious, when I left I had a working agreement and when I arrived there they made sure I also had a bank card and a health insurance card”.*

*“I went with this recruitment agency and I had a working agreement, they asked me when I want to leave, for how long do I want to work there, and everything was clearly included in the working agreement, payment as well. Everything was clear from the beginning and I left knowing I will make three times the money I made in Romania”*

*“They closed my working agreement there, it was always for a short period of time, and if they renewed it you could stay longer, and if not, you had to leave”.*

In the case of one woman, a working agreement was never made during her working in Italy.

*“I never had a working agreement while I was there...they made one for my husband, but not for me”.*

Different other aspects related to the working agreements will be discussed again in the following sections of this report.

## **Contacts with local institutions/authorities in Romania prior to departure**

Concerning a potential contact with an institution in Romania prior to the departure, (the type of institution that would offer women any type of support in order to leave better prepared, to gather information about potential abuse and/or exploitation, about rights and about possible emergency returning) all the responses from the women interviewed were negative.

None of them actually considered or consider local institutions in Romania to be reliable sources of information and resources for women who are planning to leave to Italy for a job in agriculture. They do not connect in any way the institutions and/or local authorities with a source of support. Especially given the fact that most of them used their personal circle to gain access to work in agriculture in Italy, none of them made use of any institutional path of gathering information. This is an important conclusion, to further explore, both at the level of the potential mandate of local institutions and their role in supporting Romanian citizens to leave as well-prepared as possible, as well as at the level of communicating the existence of these resources inside the local communities.

## **WORK EXPERIENCES IN ITALY**

## Locations and types of work performed in Italy

The women interviewed usually have experience of working in agriculture in various countries (Italy, Spain, UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands etc.) and, when assessing their specific working experience in Italy, many times they respond that they did work in different regions of Italy (Lazio, Campania, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Puglia, Sicilia, Toscana, Piemonte), stabilizing in one where they found the working conditions to be the best. However, there are also women who only worked for one employer, in a specific region, even for long periods of times (over 10 years). The possibility of returning back home to visit was experienced differently, on one side it was influenced by the employer, who would sometimes ever pressure them to stay and work with no vacation for a very long time, but also by their capacity to stay away from the children left back home.

*“When I went there for the first time, I knew I was going for one week and I ended up staying for 12 years. I imagined I would come back on vacation, but for the first two years it was impossible to come back. So I stayed there for two full years, I did not see my family, my child. There was a lot of work. Then I came back for vacation and then I would come back sometimes in the winter, when there was less work overthere”*

*“I could not stay more than 3 months, because I had my baby back home, so I would go and work there for 3 months, then I would come back home and stay with my child for 2-3 months, then go back to work and so on. And when I was there I was exhausted from the day’s work and at night I was crying and crying for hours, because I missed my child so much”.*

*“I was there for 10 years, and I could only come back to Romania during the winter, for Christmas, this was your only possibility, there was a lot of work to be done and you could not leave. Or you could, but you lost your job”*

In terms of the type of work performed in agriculture, the women mentioned being involved in all phases of the agricultural work (on the field, in the greenhouses, in the storehouses, in the farmers’ market etc.), such as follows:

- Treating/preparing the ground
- Planting the seeds
- Tending to the plants
- Gathering and harvesting the crops
- Selecting and packaging the produce
- Working in a storehouse

- Working in the markets, selling the products (parsley, cabbage, arugula, pumpkins, lettuce, onions, tomatoes, strawberries, peppers, eggplant, sage, zucchini, apples, pears, peaches, grapes, cucumbers etc.)

The work was often hard, but in some cases it was experienced as overwhelming and exhausting and also not performed in a secure environment, due to the lack of respect, the employer had for workers' rights.

*"We were working down on our knees, here I was and my husband 10 meters away"*

*"I remember it was very hard to work picking zucchini or cucumbers, you destroy your elbows, your knees, your back"*

*"It was very hard in the summer, in the heat, to spend 12-14 hours a day on your knees"*

*"In the beginning, it seemed easy, but it wasn't. It was very complicated to learn to control your body and keep it for many hours in a certain position, it was very hard to get used to a certain weight to carry"*

Several such examples are provided, especially by women who have been back in Romania for at least a year and who do not want to go back to work for the same employer. This distancing is an obvious factor influencing the women's availability to discuss the negative experiences they might have had. On the opposite, when the relationship with the same employer is seen as one that could be reactivated in the future, they are less willing to discuss the negative parts of their work and the levels of prudence are obviously higher during the discussion.

Many of the women interviewed spoke about the fact that the what kept them going was the motivation of creating a better future for their children, children whom they see as developing completely differently, having a different type of life, through their own sacrifice and support.

*"It was hard, yes, at 8 in the morning you went inside the greenhouse and there were already 30 degrees in there. It is hard and it is hot, but if you want to progress, if you want your child to have a better life than you do, you stay there, you do it. In the beginning I thought I would not make it, I would not be able to last there, but I did"*

In some cases, they spoke about the fact that they did not feel safe using the machines that were required for the work. One woman even mentioned her husband being asked by the employer to use a certain type of car and drive it on its premises, in spite of the fact that he did not have a driving licence, and he did



not know how to drive. However, he was forced to accept this and had to learn how to drive on the job, in the beginning exposing himself to risks.

*“I really did not feel safe running those machineries, driving them, you feel like there are a lot of risks if you are not that experienced and you may end up on a slope, downhill, very fast”*

## **Working agreements and pay**

Most of the women interviewed had working agreements while in Italy; however, those did not properly reflect their real working hours. Including less working hours in the working agreement seems to be a wide-spread practice, that they know about, not only from their direct experience, but also from the experience of others.

*“With this recruitment agency I went with, everything was clear. I knew exactly what I was going to do there and the pay, 5 or 6 EUR per hour, depending on the type of work, I was well-paid and respected in Bolzano. And my salary also changed, it increased, because if your employer likes how you work, you speak the language, you can even use and drive different machinery, then they add more money. I was also given a bonus of 150 EUR at some point, and after I gave birth he gave me a gift of baby products”*

*“We worked with a contract, yes, but only half the hours I was making were actually included. Nobody includes the real number of hours in agriculture in Italy. Because they do not want to pay a lot of tax to the state. Before we decided to return back home we were paid 6 EUR/hour and in order for us to stay longer, they would not make us pay for the rent anymore, for water, for gas, but I couldn't stay there anymore, not with my health”*

*“We left our first employer because my husband got into an argument with him, he had a lot of unpaid extra hours, he was fired because he asked to be paid for his work. It was actually the same with me. I was working in the storehouse, waiting for the pick-up truck. I would spend 14 hours a day there, but usually the pick-up truck was delayed, so I would end up getting paid for only 7 hours out of the 14, but it wasn't my fault for the delay and I had to spend all that time there waiting anyway”*

*“You had 151 days a year included in your contract, but you actually worked for 365 days a year. You had to work Sundays, too, and OK, you could say no, but if you said no they didn't allow you to come back to work until the following Thursday, as a way of punishing you”*



Some women share experiences of improper working conditions as well, mentioning they were never given proper working equipment for certain weather conditions and they were asked to work outside even when working outside was a health hazard.

*“We sued the employer. The trial is currently on. Because my husband never received payment for his overtime. And the working conditions were awful. I was kept outside for hours, in the pouring rain, in the hailstorm. Women went in hypothermic shock on the field. We called a lawyer, because it was not fair and then he fired us both. We had a baby that was born there, so we had to pay for the woman who was taking care of the baby while we were working. And I was so upset, I went to his offices and asked: why did you fire me? Because you did not pay our overtime? I also have many expenses. So we were suddenly both jobless and my husband worked one day here, one day there with some friends, it was in the middle of summer and nobody was hiring. I found another job in the fall. I was picking lettuce. I have back pain so bad I can barely stand up on some days”*

*“So they kept you there for 7 regular hours and then for 7 other extraordinary hours. And you spend all your day there and part of the night and you wanted to, because for you those 5 EUR mattered. When it was hot, they did not allow you to go for water. You had 10 minutes break every 4 hours and you could not go to the toilet in between. When you had your period and needed to take more breaks, they would scream at you and you would run from one greenhouse to another to pick up the strawberries and it was hard work and very poor conditions. You worked in the pouring rain. You worked in the hailstorm. You used a flashlight at night to watch the arugola, you could not see where you stepped. And when I was cutting rosemary sticks, in the evening I could no longer hold the spoon in my hand, it was hurting so bad. They gave us trash bags to cover ourselves in the rain and that was it. I worked so much, I endured so much. Maybe because I am so used to this working, I worked since I was a child, the older child with two younger brothers”*

The level of pay differs based on the region, the working hours, the working conditions, the type of work the women had to perform. However, a recurring story is the one of the high difference between what is included in the working agreement in terms of working days and working hours and what is happening in reality.

*“They were paying by the hour. Well, it did not really matter what was written in your papers, there is said you worked 5 to 10 days a month, but actually you worked a lot more. That was black money they were giving us for the work not*



*included in the contract. We were paid 5.5 EUR/hour and this is why we actually left, because we asked them so many times to increase it a little bit, to make it 6 EUR/hour, but the employer did not want to give us this 0.5 EUR/hour raise, so we left. The money was enough for us, but this is only because we worked 7 days a week, Saturdays and Sundays as well, about 11-12 hours a day”*

*“My employer was not OK, not OK at all...he would not pay you what you deserved until you signed...you needed to sign that you worked for 10 days, not for 20 days, as it was for real in fact, and then he counted and paid you, but you had to accept what he was actually wanted to pay you. And he never provided a long-term working agreement, he was closing a “small” working agreement, so that you wouldn’t have proof if you wanted to make a complaint to the authorities. This is how most employers do it in fact. In the summer we would start working at 6.30 in the morning and we would finish whenever he said we were done, probably around 9 in the evening. He couldn’t care less about you. If you had a problem, he would get mad, if you had a phone call that you needed to take, he would get mad, even if...if you work so many hours a day, for sure there could be a phone call, because you spend all day there. But he would get mad. Sometimes when it was raining badly, he would say OK, we stop working, and send you home. And then ask you to come back in right away. You had to be always available, all the time. And he was constantly swearing”*

*“I was only making 4,3 EUR/hour and it never changed during all those years, it always stayed the same”*

*“I started with 4 EUR, then it went up to 5 EUR, then to 6 EUR and when I left I was making 7 EUR/hour”*

## **Working hours, overtime and burnout**

As also stated in the previous section, the real working time is very long and not properly reflected in any working agreement. When they talk about their regular day of work in Italy, women talk about a time that has no nuances, it is somehow a faceless and emotionless time, described as more procedural and detached than actually lived. The day of work is described as a monolith that is silently consuming their energy, their relationships and their inner life. Most employers do not include the real number of hours worked in the working agreements; for many of the women interviewed the regular day of work went up to 14 hours.

*“So many hours we had to work everyday! The papers didn’t mention the length of our work, of course, we worked about 14-15 hours a day”*

*“The working hours? As much as we wanted. There was no limit. We spent at least 12 hours a day in the field, because we wanted to make as much money as possible”*

*“We used to start working at 6.30 in the morning, so I would get up at 5.30. Sometimes we would work very long ours; I am saying sometimes but I actually mean very often. They would take us to the field, we would start at 6.30 and finish working even at 2 in the morning, the next day. There was extremely little time to rest”*

*“I was actually making 850 EUR in two weeks of work, being paid 5 EUR/hour. In a month I would send 1000 EUR back home and the rest I would keep for rent, transportation, food and emergencies”*

There was an emergency of working more, taking any opportunity to make more money, which in some cases had dramatic consequences in terms of their mental and physical health. What the women describe is a double exploitation, by themselves and by their employers, ignoring their physical rythmes and needs, leading themselves to burnout and depression and creating life-long health limitations.

*“During the weekend, on my day off, to make a little bit of extra money I would go to the farmers’ market to sell the products. And my husband did the same, on his time off work he would go to work in an olive mill. They trusted me a lot, there were weekends when I would come back with 7000 EUR from the sales. They has complete trust in me”*

*“We were supposed to take a break during the day, but we really wanted to just keep on working – we came here to make money, we told them. So they were allowing us to work for as long as we wanted”*

*“Money. This is why we came. To make money. So it can be easy or it can be hard, does it matter? We cannot stop anyway. We need to make money”*

During their free time, which was already limited, many of the women chose or are strongly encouraged (sometimes even highly pressured or forced) to do overtime at the same employer, for extra money (which was not paid more than the regular hours and which was not legally registered) or at other employers, either in the same field (agriculture) or in other fields (cleaning private houses or doing different other domestic chores, such as ironing, cooking etc.).



*“When I was finishing with my regular job, I went to plant tomatoes for a few hours, I needed the extra money. For this job, there was no contract”*

In some instances, it was obvious that the self-exploitation was encouraged by a positive behaviour on behalf of the employers, perceived as nice and caring or as validating; these situations did not allow women to feel angry or to see that in the fact that they work 7 days a week, many times for 14 hours a day, there is a problem in terms of respecting their rights and that this could easily lead to major negative consequences. When the employer was perceived as good and friendly, he was also almost impossible to refuse or to leave.

*“He had all his trust put in me, he was asking how I am, he never controlled me, he saw how correct I was and really appreciated this. Now he wants me to go back. He calls from Italy and says he needs us, me and my husband, to go back. But I cannot do it anymore. And my husband would not agree anyway, because I had been so very sick. From all those many years of hard work, I became very sick, I was no longer eating, I lost interest in absolutely everything, I lost 20 kg in 3 months, I was so depressed. I needed 2 years to recover. And yes, he was nice to me, he never forced me to do anything, but I never stopped, I worked and worked, I was taking care of 15 greenhouses on my own, for 6 months, and you are on your knees all day long, and the quality mattered, the employer was very interested in the quality, so was I. My husband also has health issues from picking zucchini”*

*“She took me to the dentist, the employer, I had a bad infection, and they prescribed me antibiotics. And she paid for it, she said that she is very happy with the way I work, so I should consider the medicine to be a gift from her”*

## **Living conditions and transportation**

The experiences of the women participating in the interviews are very different and cannot be generalized. Some of them were positive, especially in the case of couples who ended up renting their own home and paying for it in order to have better accommodation and privacy. In some other cases, the conditions were quite bad and this added to the general hardship.

*“We lived in the employer’s home in Bolzano and didn’t paid rent. We were 3 women sharing the same room. Although initially they were supposed to take us to the field free of charge, they ended up charging us, so we had to pay for transportation. And in the South we lived in containers and I remember Italians making fun of us: here are the ones living in trash cans! We were cold sometimes*

*and the beds were on top of each other and we were 14 women sharing the same room”*

*“For three years we slept in a kitchen with my husband. When we moved in the employer’s house, he initially charged us rent, but then he really wanted us to stay so he gave up the rent, because we were very good workers”*

*“While I was working there, I lived in a capannone”*

*“In the contract it said that they would pay for our transportation, but it was not true. They always charged us for that”*

*“We lived in a new building, I was sharing the room with 6 other women”*

*“When we started we lived in a trailer, because we didn’t have money for rent. We didn’t have a kitchen, so you could not cook. We were moving around by bike, but it was hard, so we ended up buying a motorcycle, then a car”*

*“Initially we stayed in a slum and it was very difficult, then we stayed with another family and after many years of working there, the employer built a small wooden house for us and he was charging rent”*

*“Our living conditions were very good. There were houses especially built for us and for many of us the conditions were better than back home, you had a bathroom, a kitchen, everything you needed. And transportation was covered with a minibus drove by us, the women, and we could even take it and drive during the weekend, to go shopping”*

## **Other negative experiences**

The experiences that women encountered sometimes also have to do with different types of abuse on behalf of their employers.

*“Yes, in Italy the employers would definitely treat you badly sometimes. And I mean they would scream at you, yell at you. Also sometimes they would not take no for an answer, for example they wanted something for you, as a woman, and if you didn’t give them what they wanted, if you did not accept it, they would treat you really bad after that. For example we once went to pick peaches and they started to pick on us, to pull our clothes, and we were really scared, but what could you do...we ended up searching for another job, we didn’t want to go back to that place anymore, we didn’t feel safe...”*

*“I know this girl, she was really young and she worked for this employer who took advantage of her, he raped her, than he said he would marry her, and when she*

*wanted to leave he put a gun against her head. You need to always remember to keep your distance from them, never to get too close”*

## **Experiences and perceptions of The South**

Although not all the women interviewed had work experiences in the South, the South is very vivid in their mind, though the stories heard from other workers. In the case of those experiencing the work in both the South and the North of Italy, the North is definitely seen as a much better and more secure place to be in, while the South seems to be linked with experiences of abuse and of very little workers’ rights.

*“In Bolzano it wasn’t so bad, you worked on a schedule, you could rest, you could take a break to refresh. But the pure-blood Italians, the ones in the South, they did not allow you to rest, they wanted you to work without a break, Bolzano was so much better, they would not make you run all the time”*

*“In the North they are more like Austrian and they have a high respect for Romanians, they treat you well. But in the South the Italians had no understanding for you as a human being, I had to work 17 hours a day, and not once”*

*“I had an Italian boss and it was work, work, work, all the time, they would not even give you a lunch break, you had to keep on working. And who had something to say against this practice was free to go”*

The South, especially Sicily, is also considered to be a place you should not end up in, especially as a woman. There are many stories of sexual abuse happening in Sicily that the women interviewed had access to, even first hand, from people they know. Many of them consider Sicily as a place to be avoided if you want to go and work in Italy in agriculture: you may be sexually exploited, shot, not paid, subjected to different dangerous situations with no easy way out.

*“If you go without a contract, there is a high chance that you are not getting paid and that you also lose your worker’s rights, some Romanians even end up trapped and fooled, I have also known cases in Sicily with Romanian girls who are locked up and raped by their employers, I was really scared about the perspective of ending up in Sicily. We were at some point working with two Italian men from Catania and they were saying that us, Romanian girls ending up in Sicily, we become prostitutes, maybe you are not from the beginning, but you will become one there, this is how they see you, and you end up living a lot of humiliation. And if you are not submissive enough they shoot you, I know a case about a husband*



*and wife and the husband really could do nothing to protect his wife there, he was just as helpless as she was”*

*“And there is another case that I know to be true; there are Romanians going there to work without a contract, very naïve girls, girls who are living abroad for the first time in their lives and they are far from what they know, it is hard to adjust and they become very depressed. And then they end up being put on drugs, they end up in their employer’s house, they become addicts. There was this girl I worked with...there was a huge Mafia behind her, she worked in this restaurant, but behind the restaurant there was actually a brothel, they brought Romanian girls there, drunk or drugged, and they would leave them with clients, in the rooms. And this girl barely escaped, actually there was a 70-years old Italian who fell in love with her and helped her escape. You want to escape, but from a point on you really can no longer escape on your own”*

*“I know that in Sicily the girls are abused, raped”*

*“In Sicily women are abused, the get pregnant, the employers enter their rooms at night, they are forced to sleep with them, they get pregnant and they are not allowed to have an abortion”*

*“I know people who worked in Sicily, and they told me never in their lives did they see something like that...I would be terrified to live there, and I do not know if anyone could protect you there, they apply the law of the street there”*

*“In Sicily I heard of an employer who sent out the Romanian man to work on the field and he kept the Romanian woman, his wife, in the house, for himself, and when the husband found out he started an argument and got shot”*

*“I do not understand Romanians stil going back to work in Sicily...there are so many bad experiences, you are not given the money for your work, why do you go there?”*

*“I worked in Sicily, but not in agriculture, I was taking care of an elderly person, it was a nightmare, she was mentally ill, she would wake up at night and wake me up too, she would never let me sleep, it was horrible, a very, very bad period for me”*

Not only Sicily is perceived as an area of potential danger for Romanians. One of the interviewees talks about her perceptions of how unsafe Italy can be, especially from the point of view of a woman.

*“Italy has become an unsafe country for Romanians, especially for Romanian women”*

*“Sometimes in Italy they are directly exploited by Romanian men, under the supervision of Italians. And I feel so sad for these girls ending up in the traps of these “dogs”, they were taken out in the field so them seemed to be working in agriculture, so nothing would look suspicious, but they were actually mostly sexually exploited and they were completely finished as a person”*

*“Romanians are many times threatened, it is not easy. I saw with my own eyes when I went to a construction site a man down on the earth, his head cracked, he died there. No helmet, no protection. Romanians are treated like slaves. Yes, you make 2000 EUR per month, but would you, an Italian, work for this money in these conditions? Would you, an Italian, accept to live like this?”*

*“And now, they are talking about these people infected with the coronavirus in the meat processing factories and slaughterhouses. Well, of course, do you know how they live? Do you know that they sleep 13-14 people in the same room? Everyone has an opinion, criticizing them sometimes, but have you been there? Have you seen what I have seen with my own eyes? Many women clean toilets and do all kinds of works for a little bit of money. There are a lot of people in need”*

## **Treatment in relationship with workers of other nationalities**

Though mostly surrendered by other Romanian workers, the women respondents also worked with other nationalities: Italian (in the majority of cases the employer and the employer’s help), Polish, Albanian, Indian, Bangladeshi, Moroccan, Senegalese etc. There are different types of experiences: both positive and negative ones. The positive experiences were those where the workers, no matter their nationality, were treated the same way, without significant discrepancies or where Romanians were appreciated by their employers for working the most.

*“We were well treated because actually we worked the most. And with the Italian workers, women in their 50s and 60s, we had good relationships”*

There are also neutral experiences, when the respondents did not have significant contact with other nationalities or with Italian workers. One aspect that arised in several interviewes was the level of exploitation in the case of Indian workers.

*“Italians don’t really work a lot in agriculture, they don’t want to do this job anymore, sometimes maybe old women who need some additional working time*



*before retiring, but otherwise the Italians really don't want to work in agriculture anymore, so we didn't really have a lot of contact with them"*

*"The Italian employer was not racist, but his wife was; she kept saying to us that she would never accept to be cheated by a Romanian. But we ignored her, because her husband was a good man. But if you compare Romanian and Italian employees then yes, the Italian ones will be treated better. And they really like the Indian workers, because they are most submissive and they accept everything and never talk back"*

*"I think they treated us the same as they treated Italian workers, but Italian workers in agriculture were really rare. The Indians, however, were really exploited, they were kept in containers and they said they paid 10.000 EUR to get here, in Europe, and they were the ones who lived in those containers on the field. They stayed there all the time, so they basically worked all the time, if the employer wanted something at night or if something needed to be done at night, they would do it. Just because they were living in those containers for free"*

The most experiences, however, were negative, especially due to what the women participating in interviews perceived as a labelling and stereotyping of Romanians, especially Romanian women.

*"The Italians were very respectful with each other, but very disrespectful with the Romanian workers. For them, Romanian men are sick in the head (male alla testa) and the Romanian women are whores. The Italian employers used to use a lot of bad language referring to Romanians, they were swearing at the Romanian and Polish workers all the time. Wherever they go, Romanians are no longer respected, not today, not tomorrow, never, they called us thieves and beggars even if we were working there"*

*"In the beginning, the Italian women working there were treating us poorly, because they said we were coming and taking their jobs. But I didn't feel treated worse by my employer"*

## **CASE STUDY STRATEGIES AND KNOWLEDGE OF PROTECTION AND RIGHTS**

In order to have a good understanding of what the level of knowledge concerning their rights was, as well as the knowledge with regard to Italian institutions and organizations they could ask for support from in a difficult situation, we have asked specific questions and also created three case studies. These case studies were presented to the women respondents as such and they were asked to think about what this woman could do to solve her problem.

Concerning the knowledge about their rights and about institutions and organizations that could help them (especially in crisis situations), many of them were not able to mention any. They had very little contact with institutions, except for the hospital when giving birth and other rare work-related procedures. They were mostly not aware of the existence of non-profit organizations promoting the rights of Romanian women working in agriculture in Italy.

*“I don’t know any institutions. But I went to the hospital when I gave birth and there I felt really well-treated, probably better than in Romania”*

*“When I left and went back to Romania I understood there were some activities at the employers’ association”*

*“I only had contact with the hospital, when I gave birth. I was ensured and it all went well”*

*“I didn’t go to any institutions. I did some work-related procedures in an office at some point, but that institution was definitely in contact with my employer”*

*“There were no organizations protecting the rights of Romanian workers that I knew of, I think these organizations became active only recently”*

*“I read somewhere there might be some organizations, but I did not need any help”*

*“We were all the time in the field, in the middle of nowhere, even if you had a problem, you had no contact with an institution or organization and anyway you had no idea where to go”*

One thing that was evident when discussing the three cases below was the high levels of empathy of the women interviewed with the three women in the case studies. For many of the respondents, there was even a level of confusion with regard to the cases being hypothetical and they treated it as if they were actual cases, happening right now, in reality. They were especially touched by the stories most probably because they could attach faces and identities to all three of them; this could signify the fact that they did have awareness of such situations women are being placed in when they go abroad for work.

## Case study 1 – Adela

Adela is 34 years old, a mother of 2 young children. She left with her husband to Italy for work and the children stayed back home, being cared for by her husband's parents. Though when they move to Italy her relationship with her husband is very good, he does not adjust to the new country, he starts to drink a lot and he turns very violent. After the occurrence of the last act of violence, Adela needs to be hospitalized for three days. What can she do to make sure this situation stops? Where could she ask for support?

### Strategies suggested

In the opinion of most respondents, Adela should call the police (carabinieri), because they do intervene in such cases and that could bring an exit from the situation of violence she is in. However, the carabinieri are not always perceived as the final solution to cases of violence; one of the respondents believes that the woman should have the family back home mediate the situation.

*„Police is the answer. One evening, a Romanian was beating his wife and a Lithuanian came and opened the door, confronted him, called the police and three police cars arrived. And the employer came too and they too the Romanian and held him for 3 days for investigations. And you know what? If something like this happens, either one or the other needs to go back to Romania. You cannot live like this”*

*„It is really easy to have an opinion when you are not the one living in this situation. But still my opinion is this: when you are being beaten, you have two options, divorce and carabinieri. I do not think that you should accept the violence these days”*

*„The hospital would anyway ask the carabinieri to investigate the situation, if you need to be admitted in the hospital. I had problems with my blood pressure, it increased very much because of the heat and they asked me if I am forced to work too much and in improper conditions etc.”*

*„If they do not get along anymore, she should ask for support from her family back home. Nobody intervenes from you there. I mean, there are several families living together and if they see something like this, they do not want to get involved because they do not want to start a conflict. It is very complicated to intervene when you share the same living space. The carabinieri come and go and the conflict only stops for a brief time”*

Some other voices point out that the employer and the Embassy could also further support the woman in exiting the violent situation.

*„I would talk directly to the employer, because they could further inform carabinieri, then I would also let the Embassy know; I saw a girl in this situation and trust me, it is not only alcohol, there are several factors; when you go there for work you stay with many people, many times even sharing the same living space. And men become involved with other women there, and when their wife says something about it, they call her crazy, ugly, stupid and dirty and they also beat her”*

Besides the institutions previously mentioned, two women seem to also be aware of other types of support a woman subjected to violence could access: the special phonelines for violence and private organization that are created by churches.

*„She should call carabinieri. The local police where she lives. He might cause her troubles again, but also the carabinieri are not soft, they are actually very severe. Also, I believe there are some priests and some churches that may help, for example Caritas; there are also Romanian priests who are very helpful and they would know what to do. Finally, she should try and get a restraining order against him”*

*„Carabinieri. Plus in Italy there are some phone numbers from centers dealing with violence and you can call them and ask what you should do”*

## **Case study 2 – Sorina**

Sorina is 24 years old and for the past 4 years she worked in Italy, in agriculture. Her work is supervised by Nunzio, a 44-years old Italian man, recently divorced. He tells Sorina she can achieve much more, that she is very smart and he could make her his right hand. But that he feels alone and he would also like to have a relationship with her. Sorina tells him that she is not interested, but Nunzio does not stop and he constantly harasses her. What could Sorina do to stop this situation? Where could she ask for support?

### **Strategies suggested**

Most women consider that such a situation could only be solved by leaving that job and seeking to work somewhere else. They do not see any other potential way of solving such a context and they also consider that, by staying, a woman could also aggravate the situation.

*„He will always harass her while she is there. She should leave, as soon as she can, while she still can. Because time goes on and she will not be able to leave anymore. These men tend to become extremely obsessive...and you draw the conclusion from what I am saying..,”*



*„She should resign immediately”*

*„Don't work there anymore. I don't know what institution could help. Just stop working there, because you may end up even having sexual relations with that man and he still harasses you, even after that”*

Some do see carabinieri as a potential help and they suggest a woman in this situation should file a complaint. But even in these cases they do not fully trust that this would actually help, because they sometimes perceive the police working on behalf of the employers and not taking such complaints seriously.

*„I don't know, but I believe the police should be able to help. If you are there alone you have no protections; this is why we were lucky where I worked, because we did have protection”*

*„Call the carabinieri. She should file a complaint against him and since he is Italian, he knows that this type of behaviour could have really bad legal consequences. It is in fact very hard. Very hard when you go there like this, with no protection. And when you feel that there is nobody there to help you, you may end up enduring that situation. I have no idea about other organizations they could go to. But I can imagine how hard it must be, I can imagine how they must feel...”*

*„To be honest, carabinieri would be my answer, but...they would do nothing for her. Because they know her boss and they are probably accomplices. The only advice is: do not go alone! Because overthere everyone tries to abuse them, to have a little fun with them, to turn them into prostitutes. In Spain they are used as prostitutes even by their own husbands. I saw and heard about really bad stories”*

*„She should look for a new workplace. And she should file a complaint. I know it is not easy to find a new workplace, but she should not allow him to manipulate her. And she should not accept this relationship if she does not want it. Italians fall in love so quickly, they are a little dumb, they are easily attracted by women”*

One of the respondents deeply empathised with the case and considered it to be happening right now, in real life, so she came up with the solution of putting the woman in contact with Romanians that she knows who previously supported Romanian workers who were having a difficult time while working there, in agriculture.

*„Oh, this is bad, very bad, she should leave there as soon as possible. Do you know where she is? In which region? I know some Romanians who are helping women there. Tell me where she is and we can talk to them, so they can help her”*

### Case study 3 - Luciana

Luciana is 48 years old and she works in Italy in agriculture, under a working agreement. She lives in a building next to the working field. The Italian employer did not pay her salary for three months now and every month he promises that he will pay her next month and add a financial bonus. When Luciana tells him she cannot wait anymore because back in Romania her children depend on this income, the employer informs her that she cannot leave because, as stipulated in her working agreement, if she wants to quit her job she needs to pay her employer 5000 EUR, for the years spent living in his building free of charge. Luciana does not read well and she only understands basic Italian. What could Luciana do in this case? Where could she ask for support?

#### Strategies suggested

The strategies in the last case study presented during the interviews seem to take into account to need to have access to someone who speaks very well the language of the contract, as well as the different professionals and authorities who could help: an accountant, a legal expert, institutions with a mandate in verifying businesses, employers' associations, the Embassy, the police etc. This is the case in which the highest number of patterns of action appear, compared to the other two. Although just a supposition, this could also relate to the fact that this final case is not considered to be „debatable”, it is seen as a clear-cut case, where stereotypes and victim-blaming are less present.

*„She should go see a legal specialist. I did not encounter such a case, where someone was not paid, but I also think it really matters if you have someone who protects you; for example in many cases we felt protected, because even the drivers who were taking us there for work knew where we were, who was our employer, they knew where we were going”*

*„She should see a lawyer specialized in foreigner workers' rights. Because you know, those employers that keep human beings in containers, they expect you to do exactly what they say”*

*„She should go see a lawyer. But she needs money, and someone who speaks Italian very well. She needs an Italian friend to guide her and to be on her side”*

*„She should speak to an accountant who can explain the working agreement to her, step by step. If the contract does not say she should pay rent, then she really should not, it would be illegal for someone to ask her for rent. Yes, the trials in Italy take a long time, to recover your rights, but then she should go to*



*their tax authorities, to the employer's association...they have all their contracts registered and they will check it deeply and finally she will get her legal rights back"*

*„She should let the police know. And really keep a copy of your contract, always, so you can prove something is not right"*

Some of the respondents also reflect on the reasons why some Romanians agree to leave when the working conditions are not safe or clear and on the motivations behind the rush of finding a job that pays decent money compared to what they could make in their own country. Some do not think there is a lot one can do in such a situation.

*„She should go to ask the labour force authorities. But when you work in agriculture it could be a little more difficult. Many Romanians go abroad without knowing where they are going. They leave out of despair, out of poverty, they are not informed. I didn't properly gather information either. But there was someone there I really trusted. But many go without knowing anything. You cannot go under no matter what circumstances; for example I do not believe I would choose Italy anymore at this point. Because of the system in our own country, we are perceived at the most stupid in the schoolyard. You know why? Because Romanians have no options in their own country and that means they will stay and accept everything anyway. Other nationalities do not accept everything. Because they have some options back home. We don't, so we take whatever comes"*

*„It is very hard when you don't know the language. You need to know someone who can help you. We also had, in our region, employers who did not pay. We would have left such a job at that time, without our legal rights. And that is only because we had no information, no idea what to do. We were happy that we had work to do and that was taking all of our time, we didn't have time to get informed"*

*„I heard about this situation many times before. Especially in the case of people leaving on their own, not through a recruitment agency. Please let us know if she needs any help, we can recommend her where to go"*

*„If she works illegally there, she is a lost cause. Maybe she can get some help from the Embassy, but on her own I believe she cannot succeed"*

# MOTIVES AND REFLECTIONS UPON RETURNING

In the cases of the women interviewed, there were different types of reasons for returning to Romania after their experience of working abroad, as follows:

- The relationship with their employer becoming difficult, with conflicts and a continuous disrespect for workers' rights (for example, unpaid extra hours)
- The refusal of the employer to increase the pay per hour
- The effects of the hard work on women's bodies (especially knee and back problems) and on women's mental health (grave depression)

Most women see both positives and negatives in the way their lives changed through this experience of working in Italy in agriculture. The positives always have to do with the financial aspects of their lives: they went to make more money than they could have made in their regular jobs in Romania, in order to solve certain specific life situations: to repay a bank loan, to build a house, to repair a house, to pay for a child's expenses and school-related costs or fees, to help out a family member who can no longer work due to disability or who is left unemployed, to support a family member with health issues etc. The negatives, in most cases, have to do with the loss of relationships and emotional connections (mainly with their children, with their parents, with other important figures), but also with the fragility of their health, mostly physically, but in a case also psychologically, as the hard work had a high impact on their bodies.

Looking back, the deep feelings of loss are very obvious, especially in the case of the women who spent a long time working in Italy and who had one or more children in Romania, who were left to be cared for by their grandparents. In some cases, women feel that they have lost their children's childhood entirely and the feelings of loss are also accompanied by the feelings of guilt. Guilt relates to only fulfilling one part of their children's needs, the financial one, very much connected to their desire to not subject their children to the same levels of poverty and limited opportunities they were subjected to. However, they do fill that they were not there for their emotional needs, for their relational needs. The lost connections, with their children, their own parents and other important figures



in their lives result in them still experiencing chronic ambivalence when reflecting back on their time spent in Italy.

*“We made money, me and my husband. Yes, we bought a house, we kept our daughter in school. We were very careful with the expenses and worked very long hours, all the time, Sundays too. We were two adults working and we were supporting my daughter and my mom. My mom raised my daughter. So I lost 9 years of my daughter’s life. 9 years. I came back when she was graduating from high school, when she was turning 18 and she became an adult. Yes, I came for this graduation, but maybe I wasn’t there when she most needed me. All these moments that I have lost, I am so sorry about all of them. My daughter says it is OK and I should not worry, that I have compensated the absence by working hard and making sure she had money”*

*“If I would leave again, I would do it differently. I would come back home more often. I missed so much, I lost so much, I felt that I lost my relationship with my child, I never saw her growing up, I lost my relationship with my parents”*

*“My child, even if he was young when I left, and even if he is still young now, that I returned, he still asks me: do you remember, mommy, when you left me behind?”*

*“My son is an adult now and he is still telling me how harmful it was that I went to work abroad and left him back home. It is still hard for him”*

*“My sister in law stayed there, she did not return. Because her son was born there and speaks Italian mainly and he is completely adjusted to the Italian life. He goes to high school there now and he is very talented in something and he started going that way, so she has to stay there for him. She does not want to, but she has to. She has to endure for his future. This is how it works, you have to endure so that your child can have a life better than yours”*

*“It changed my life, yes, but not to the best, really. Because it was a huge amount of work. But we did learn to cherish our family, our friends, and maybe some of us learned to be more optimistic and to have more self-respect, because you need to have it overthere, if you do not have it and if you do not assert yourself and your point of view, you are taken advantage of...”*

The women who were interviewed and who left for different periods of time without their children state that they would only return to work in agriculture in Italy if they would be able to take their child or children as well; one outcome of



the experience and their post-experience reflections is that they would never leave their child in Romania again.

Some talk about things changing in the wrong direction in Romania. Especially being treated badly at work in your own country for much smaller pay seems to be a reason for frustration and demotivation. The current pandemic also increased the level of insecurity for people who are employed in Romania.

*“Yes, so I came back and realized that in Romania the prices are now just like in the EU, but we have very small salaries, how can you manage? And on top of everything employers treat you badly here as well, so...”*

*“Yes, I grew up with them, there, I changed my mentality, I saw other places and people and I do not regret it. I would go back. Of course I readjusted in Romania, because this is my country, this is where I belong, but I was not able to find a proper workplace here. The way some employers treat you...It matters a lot to me and it is demotivates me...”*

*“Yes, it did change my life, not in a negative way. There are all kinds of people and all kinds of jobs. Here in Romania we used to have some food money and some vacation money from our job. But now with the pandemic, we were sent in technical unemployment and we have 380 RON/month....how can we live on that money? And now we were back to work and we are waiting for our pay day and, as one of my coworker said, this time we will probably cry on the pay day...”*

One of the respondents mentioned both negative and positive changes that she was able to observe when returning to Romania. For another one, the bigger frustration is related to having to search for work abroad because you do not have opportunities in your own country.

*“On one side, I saw the roads are worse, there are even bigger holes now. But in my village a lot of things are better, we now have water, gas, a good sewerage system”*

*“This is all because of what is happening in our own country. If you could find work here nobody would leave, I know a lot of people desperate to come back to Romania, but then you come back and you open a small business and all you do is pay a lot of taxes to the authorities”*

Some respondents are also impacted by the way the members of their local community treated them upon their return from years of working abroad. Others refer to the mentalities remaining the same in Romania, which they perceive as a negative aspect.



*“Changes in my community there were, especially when you came back from Italy and everyone, even your friends were like...oh, so you came back from Italy, you must have a lot of money and you must be very arrogant, they were very skeptical about us, even if nothing changed about us...”*

*“No change in my community, the same conceptions, the same mentalities, people are the same. The same thoughts: it is not worth going, it is better to stay in Romania. Yes? What if your child is starving or cannot go to school? You need to advance, to move forward, to have an ideal...And you do this with sacrifice, of course. Young people think that abroad anything is easy and it is not true. It is very hard, you work a lot, you have no free time, the employers are harassing you like you are an object and you fully belong to them”*

Most of the respondents do not think an institution would be able to help them to leave to work abroad better prepared. They would, however, search for recruitment agencies with a good reputation; they believe that it is important to have a connection with such an agency that could protect you, since they know very well the legal framework and workers’ rights in Italy. Several of the respondents would choose to go back abroad for work, but many of them would no longer choose Italy. If something would make things better, that would require a coherence between talk and action, in the perception of one of the respondents.

*“I would only go on vacation, not for work. And I think that if we want things to be better, we should have an union of the Romanian workers there, and also the Embassy and the Consulate should get involved more, but not just by talking, by action. And there should be more controlling activities to the employers in agriculture, because everything is different in reality from how it is in the contract or on your papers. Also, it would be great if someone would also intervene to support and help the badante. For 500 EUR/month they live through a lot of abuse and humiliation...it is unfortunate that Romanians became used to endurance...”*

*“If I would go back, I would do it for more money now. Because when I first went there, a bottle of oil was 1,09 EUR, but when I left it was 1,59 EUR, but I was making the same money...and I would ask for a vacation, which I did not when I got employed, because I needed that job, I accepted all of their conditions with no comments...I would no longer keep my mouth shut now”*



They do not see concrete ways in which they could support other women there, in most cases. This is also because they were not informed themselves, about their rights and what they could do to protect it. However, they do have very high levels of empathy with women who could be in potential risky situations and this could serve as an important motivation factor for them to become resource-persons for other women working in Italy in agriculture.

## **ANNEX 1**

# INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR WOMEN WHO WORKED IN AGRICULTURE IN ITALY IN THE PAST 5-10 YEARS

Good morning! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a researcher as part of the BRIGHT project team, implemented by CPE – Center for Partnership and Equality; the BRIGHT project aims at promoting the rights of foreign women working in agriculture in Italy. In order to achieve this, we would need to gain knowledge and a better understanding of your experiences regarding agriculture work in Italy and this is why we would be grateful if you could answer a few questions.

Our discussion will last for about 45-60 minutes, while I will also write down some of your answers. On the basis of answers collected from women from different geographic areas in Romania, we will compile a report. Even though some of your answers will be included in this report, your identification details (name and surname) will not be included anywhere in this report. Your identity will only be known to the project team and will not be made public under any circumstances.

If you have questions for me, you can ask them at any time. If a question is unclear, please let me know so I can come back to it and clarify it. You can also stop the interview at any time.

Thank you for your participation to this interview and for supporting our project!

## A. General information

Age

Place of birth

Current residency

Relational status (married, single, divorced, widow, living in a civil partnership etc.)

Children (yes/no, number and age)

Education/Studies (primary/secondary school, high school, university etc.)

Workplace in Romania before leaving to work in Italy

## **B. Information concerning the work experience in Italy**

Did you go to Italy for work in the past 10 years? I will ask you to please describe each of these experiences, one by one (if multiple).

When was your first such working experience? For how long did you work there?

Where did you work, in which part of Italy? What type of work did you do?

What about your most recent experience? How long did it last for? Where did you work? What type of work did you do?

If you had several work experiences in Italy, can you please tell me which were the differences that you observed?

What determined your decision to seek work in Italy? Do you remember the exact moment when you made this decision? How did you make this decision?

How did you find out about the opportunity to work in Italy? From whom?

Who provided support to you? Who helped you to get ready for the trip? Did you consulted or contacted any institution to help you with the formalities?

Did you speak the language prior to your leaving? If no, do you speak Italian now?

Did you already have a working agreement when you left? If you did not have one before leaving, was the working agreement signed upon your arrival? Did you also work without a working agreement?

Were you aware about the pay/salary from the beginning? Did your pay change during your stay in Italy?

Was your salary sufficient to cover your expenses? Which were your most important expenses? Were you able to save money? Were you able to send money to the relatives back in Romania?

How did you feel you were treated compared to the Italian workers? Better? Worse? The same? If there were differences in terms of treatment, how would you describe these difference?

Where did you live while working in Italy? Did you live alone or with someone else?

Did you move to Italy with your husband/partner? Did you take your children with you? If not, whom took the partental role and responsibilities for your children?

If you left with your children, who took care of them while you were working? Did your Italian employer provide any kind of support or facility for your children?

How often were you communicating with your family in Romania (parents, children, other relatives etc.)? How many times a year did you come back home? For how long and when?

Please describe, as detailed as you can, a regular working day in Italy, from the moment you woke up to the moment when you went back to bed.

Did you ever change your working place during your stay in Italy? If yes, how did this happen? Did you receive support from any institution?

Did you ever contact an institution while you were in Italy (police, 112, child protection, social assistance, city hall, work services etc.)? Can you please tell me what was the subject of your request? How was your request solved? How were you treated?

Did you feel safe at the workplace? If yes, what made you feel safe?

If not, what made you feel unsafe? Did you ever feel threatened? How did you manage these situations?

Were you in contact with other Romanian women working in agriculture in Italy? If yes, how would you describe the relationship with them?

Are you aware, in Italy or Romania, of organizations or institutions promoting the rights of foreign agriculture workers? Or organizations protecting the rights of Romanian women working in Italy?

Please take a few moments to think of the following three situations and to respond about what could be done in these contexts.

**Adela.** Adela is 34 years old, a mother of 2 young children. She left with her husband to Italy for work and the children stayed back home, being cared for by her husband's parents. Though when they move to Italy her relationship with her husband is very good, he does not adjust to the new country, he starts to drink a lot and he turns very violent. After the occurrence of the last act of violence, Adela needs to be hospitalized for three days. What can she do to make sure this situation stops? Where could she ask for support?

**Sorina.** Sorina is 24 years old and for the past 4 years she worked in Italy, in agriculture. Her work is supervised by Nunzio, a 44-years old Italian men, recently divorced. He tells Sorina she can achieve much more, that she is very smart and he could make her his right hand. But that he feels alone and he would also like to have a relationship with her. Sorina tells him that she is not interested, but Nunzio does not stop and he constantly harasses her. What could Sorina do to stop this situation? Where could she ask for support?



**Luciana.** Luciana is 48 years old and she works in Italy in agriculture, under a working agreement. She lives in a building next to the working field. The Italian employer did not pay her salary for three months now and every month he promises that he will pay her next month and add a financial bonus. When Luciana tells him she cannot wait anymore because back in Romania her children depend on this income, the employer informs her that she cannot leave because, as stipulated in her working agreement, if she wants to quit her job she needs to pay her employer 5000 EUR, for the years spent living in his building free of charge. Luciana does not read well and she only understands basic Italian. What could Luciana do in this case? Where could she ask for support?

What determined your decision of returning to Romania?

How did this experience changed your life (how did your working in Italy change your occupational status, financial situation etc.)?

Did you see any changes in your community once you came back to Romania?

Taking into consideration all these experiences you mentioned, would you be willing in the future to search for a job in agriculture in Italy? Would you do anything different from what you did in your previous experiences? What?

What needs would you now think you may have to leave better prepared?

Do you see any institution in Romania that could provide support in order for you to leave better prepared? If yes, what institution? Where you you go to require support before leaving?

What do you think could be done specifically in Italy in order to better protect the rights of Romanian women working in agriculture? Would you get involved? How?

**Thank you for your availability!**