



Building RIGHTS-based and Innovative Governance

for EU mobile women project **BRIGHT - 874511**

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STAKEHOLDER ANALYSES ROMANIA

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INTRODUCTION

As BRIGHT project aims at promoting the rights of foreign women (in particular Romanian and Bulgarian women) working in agriculture in Italy, through the stakeholders analysis we wanted to gain knowledge and a better understanding of the experiences, the needs and difficulties faced by the women who are going to Italy for agriculture work.

Putting together the responses obtained from the interviewed professionals, as well as from women who had direct work experience in agriculture in Italy, we will build a training program for those professionals interested in taking on a greater role in informing and guiding women who want to go to work in agriculture in Italy.

Romanian migration

The phenomenon of migration took off in Romania right after the Revolution of 1989 and has been increasing every year, particularly after the country joined the European Union, event which allowed Romanian workers to access jobs in the Western countries.

Data from the National Institute of Statistics shows that on January 1st, 2019, the resident population of the country was 19.405.000 people, a decrease of 1.255.000 compared to January 1st, 2018¹. Romania remains an emigration country, emigration being the second most important cause when it comes to the decrease in the country's population. In 2018, the balance of temporary long-term international migration was negative, with 57.000 more emigrants than immigrants². According to the NIS³ data, Romanian migration increased in 2018, with almost 239.000 Romanians going abroad for a period longer than 12 months.

A 2019 report of the European Commission shows that Romania could lose 40% of its population, primarily its active population, if inter-EU migration were to double⁴. A 2019 study of the OECD⁵ shows that 75% of the decrease in Romania's population is due to migration, from 22.4 million citizens in 2000, to 19.5 million in 2018. The researchers show that, in comparison to native workers, Romanian immigrants are three times more likely to be employed in low-skilled jobs, and are only half as likely to secure a high-skilled job.

¹ <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/content/popula%C5%A3ia-rezident%C4%83-la-1-ianuarie-2019-%C5%9Fimigra%C5%A3ia-interna%C5%A3ional%C4%83-%C3%AEEn-anul-2018>

² Idem 1

³ https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/poprez_ian2019r.pdf

⁴ <https://www.edupedu.ro/raport-ce-romania-va-pierde-78-milioane-de-locuitori-40-din-populatie-pana-in-2060-daca-se-dubleaza-migratia-vor-pleca-oamenii-cu-educatie-inalta-si-calificati/>

⁵ Talent Abroad: A Review of Romanian Emigrants https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/talent-abroad-a-review-of-romanian-emigrants_bac53150-en#page1



Romanian migration to Italy for work in agriculture

European statistical data shows that, on January 1st 2018, Romanians formed the largest ethnic community in Italy, numbering 1.190.091 people, 23% of Italy's total foreign population⁶.

The statistical data of the Italian National Institute of Statistics likewise shows that Romanians represent the second largest population in Italy, after Italians themselves, and the country's most numerous immigrant group; over 57.5% of the Romanian immigrants are women⁷. Approximately 110.000 Romanians work in agriculture in Italy, a third of the country's overall foreign agricultural workforce.

Many of the agricultural seasonal workers are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation; they work and live in difficult conditions, in isolation, without the necessary equipment and safety measures. Moreover, the issues most often mentioned by Romanian workers are the precarious living conditions, the lack of means of public transport to the workplace, the lack of childcare services.

Local communities face difficulties in integrating migrant workers, not least because a part of them are not officially registered and are, therefore, invisible.

Recent data shows that Italy depends on approximately 400.000 seasonal workers, the majority of whom come from Northern Africa or Eastern Europe, and who make up 36% of the seasonal workforce. This year, due to the travel restrictions and the fear caused by the Coronavirus, there is a deficit of approximately 250.000 workers, according to the biggest Italian agricultural association, Coldiretti.⁸ As a response to the problems created by the deficit in cheap workforce caused by the COVID-19 crisis, Italy enacted legislative measures through which the illegal foreign workers from the agricultural and caretaking fields can obtain legal work contracts (*the "Rilancio" law decree, nr. 34/19.05.2020*).

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/f/f6/Main_countries_of_citizenship_and_birth_of_the_foreign_foreign-born_population%2C_1_January_2018_%28in_absolute_numbers_and_as_a_percentage_of_the_total_foreign_foreign-born_population%29.png

⁷ <https://www.istat.it/>

⁸ <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/italia-crisa-fortei-de-munca-deschide-dezbaterea-privind-migratia-ilegala/30555340.html>



Connections with human trafficking for work exploitation

According to the analyses done by the National Agency against Human Trafficking (NAHT)⁹, in 2019, **work exploitation retains second place** in the hierarchy of the different forms of human exploitation, after sexual exploitation, with 16,5% of the total cases. The reasons on which people base their decision to leave the country looking for work remain the same, namely the Romanian economic context, which makes it difficult to find a workplace or to attain financial independence, as well as the lure of the potential gains and opportunities which cannot be found at home. In many situations, all of these lead people to accept certain promises and fake work offers coming from traffickers, without taking any precautionary measures. **Fake work offers** remain the main pretext for recruiting in 2019, with 134 victims of work exploitation having been recruited through external work offers.

With regards to the countries of destination for the victims of trafficking (not exclusively trafficking for work exploitation), **Italy** remains in **4th** place. Also constant are **the main counties that the victims originally come from**, namely Dolj, Iași, Bacău, Galați - with the mention that in certain areas, such as Dolj and Iași, the number of victims has doubled. Here it needs to be stressed that the data refers to the total victims of exploitation in 2019, regardless of the type of exploitation undergone.

INFORMATION AND PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS REGARDING THE WORK ABROAD

In the last two years (2019-2020), several public information campaigns were developed, meant to prevent work exploitation of those people who wish to leave abroad to work. The campaigns were both the initiatives of public institutions, and of NGOs active in the field of prevention of human trafficking.

During the COVID-19 crisis, starting with March 2020, several initiatives were implemented to inform workers about their rights, offering information fitting this specific context.

“Be responsible!”, Information Campaign by the Department for Romanians Everywhere (May 2020)¹⁰

⁹ Analiza succinta privind victimele traficului de persoane in 2019, ANITP, 2019 (*Short analysis regarding the victims of human trafficking in 2019*):

<http://www.anitp.mai.gov.ro/ro/docs/Cercetare/Analize/Analiza%20succinta%20victime%20identificate%20in%202019.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.mprp.gov.ro/web/drp-a-demarat-campania-de-informare-fii-responsabil/>



The campaign was addressed to Romanian citizens who went abroad during this period, and consisted of discussions with Romanians at the Nădlac I border point, as well as the distribution of brochures containing information regarding the risks they can expose themselves to and how to best protect themselves in the current pandemic context, whether in regards to their working conditions, or the protective measures and the different limitations and restrictions still in place in different states.

“Stay safe! Prevention campaign against work exploitation, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”, organised by the NGO E-Liberation, in collaboration with the main Romanian airports (2020)

The campaign consisted of creating a dedicated website, www.munca.info/riscuri, which contains information about work abroad, a support telephone line, as well as video communication instruments and printed materials to be distributed in the airports.

“The perfect Job – a one-way illusion”, Prevention Campaign of the National Agency against Human Trafficking (2020)

The campaign, created in partnership with the biggest website for job intermediation, draws attention to the work offers which offer extremely advantageous conditions (significant gains for very easy tasks) in Romania or abroad, as well as to the dangers of signing a contract without knowing its contents. The campaign wishes to increase the degree of information and the capacity to protect themselves for people who are looking for work, by disseminating information and useful recommendations regarding the process of analysing the different work offers available. The campaign’s messages were shared through the OLX (the most accessed Romanian website for various services intermediation) and Facebook platforms.

“INFORMATION AT HOME! SAFETY IN THE WORLD!”, National Campaign of the National Agency against Human Trafficking (2020)

The campaign addressed youths, as well as adults, and took place in Bucharest and all 41 of Romania’s counties. The purpose was to inform Romanian citizens about the different risks they might become exposed to once they decide to look for a workplace, a study programme, or to emigrate to a different country, and the principal points covered were:

- Efficiently informing Romanian citizens about the rights and responsibilities that they will have in the countries they intend to work, study and/or live in, including the respective social rights (social benefits and social services) they are entitled to in each country;
- Providing information about the access of Romanians to the foreign labour market, a better understanding of the legislative framework in their respective host-states, of workplace safety conditions, of the warranties and conditions included in their work contracts, as well as the ensuing workplace rights and obligations;



- Informing Romanian citizens about the available Consular services and information channels;
- Awareness of the dangers that single people, women and children might expose themselves to, and of the risks of becoming victims of international human trafficking networks;
- The right way of accessing a workplace

Materials containing useful information for the Romanian workers in Italy

Guide for the Romanian agricultural worker in Italy

A document created by the Romanian Embassy to the Italian Republic, based on the legislation in place on the 15th of April 2020, containing information for the agricultural workers in Italy (who had a fixed-term work contract). It contains information about work contracts signed with an Italian employer, the risks of undocumented work, workplace safety conditions in the Coronavirus context, opportunities of work in the agricultural field for the Romanian workers already living in Italy, the competent Italian institutions that can be appealed to in order to point out difficulties in the workplace or to obtain certain services.¹¹

Guide with Measures to support workers in Italy, in the Covid-19 context, contained in the "Rilancio" Law Decree (LD 34/19.05.2020)¹²

The guide contains information regarding the halt on redundancies until August 2020, unemployment benefits, employment in the agricultural field, the facilities available for people on employment benefits or income, fixed-term contracts, work from home, fighting illegal employment, parental leave/vouchers for baby-sitting services, COVID-19 furlough, workers' health etc.

Informational material for the Romanian workers in the agricultural field, created by the Romanian Embassy, with the support of FLAI Puglia¹³

Contains information about employment in agriculture on a legal work contract, rights and advantages, legal requirements regarding minimal daily pay rates and the required minimum number of working days to qualify for social insurance, conditions for obtaining unemployment benefits for agricultural workers, what is included in the Italian social security system, financial rights for underage children left behind in Romania, how to get a pension in Italy etc.

¹¹http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Munca/MobilitateaForteiDeMunca/ghid_lucratori_sector_agricol_italia_aprilie_20201.pdf

¹²https://roma.mae.ro/sites/roma.mae.ro/files/decret_rilancio.pdf

¹³https://roma.mae.ro/sites/roma.mae.ro/files/material_informativ_lucr%C4%83tori_rom%C3%A2ni_din_do_meniul_agricol.pdf



The Brochure “Protection in the Agricultural Field”, created by the Romanian General Consulate in Bari, alongside the CGIL-FLAI Puglia Union¹⁴

Contains information for agricultural workers about employment, the legal working hours for a working day, sickness, work injuries, health issues caused by work, work safety gear, employment benefits for agricultural workers, family stipends, social protection, work exploitation.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AREAS SELECTED FOR INTERVENTION AS PART OF THE BRIGHT PROJECT (THE OLTENIA AND MOLDOVA REGIONS, ESPECIALLY THE GORJ AND BACĂU COUNTIES)

Taking into account the official data regarding the main areas of origin for the people who become victims of work exploitation human trafficking, we selected two development areas for the activities of the BRIGHT project, namely South-Western Oltenia and North-Eastern Moldova.

The South-Western (Oltenia Region)

Active population. Population employed in agriculture

According to the NIS¹⁵, South-Western Oltenia has a population of 2.075.600 inhabitants and is made up of the following counties: Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea.

On the 1st of January 2019, the work resources of the area numbered a total of 1.204.500 people, out of which the occupied active population represented 64.6%. On 31st March 2020, the registered unemployment rate was 4.86%, with 41.300 people recorded as unemployed.

With respect to the main economic activities in the area, **30.7% of the civic population was employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing**, while 39.1% were employed in the service industry and 30.2% worked in constructions and industry.

Agriculture plays an important role in this region, with over 1 million hectares meant for crops of cereal, oleaginous plants, fruits and vegetables, potatoes, sugar beets and wine production.

Other data¹⁶ collected for the 2002-2016 period shows a constant and substantial decrease of the active population in the region, namely a 25% difference between 2016 and 2002, a

¹⁴https://roma.mae.ro/sites/roma.mae.ro/files/protectia_in_domeniul_agricol_2018.pdf

¹⁵<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?catId=9462&acro=Imi&mode=&recordLang=ro&lang=ro&parentId=&countryId=RO®ionId=RO4>

¹⁶ PRAI 2016-2025 Regiunea Sud-Vest Oltenia (*PRAI 2016-2025 South-Western Oltenia*)



percentage that is much larger than the national decrease in the active population, which is of just 11% for the same period.

The female population is particularly affected by underemployment (a 32% decrease, in contrast to an 18% decrease for the male population), and the same applies to the rural population. Moreover, youth underemployment is also more acute in the rural areas, and in the case of women.

The rate of decrease in the region greatly exceeds the national trends, both when it comes to divisions by gender, and to the division along residential areas. This greatly impacts the occupation of the workforce in the region. The occupation rate for the female population in South-Western Oltenia had decreased by 9% in 2016, in comparison to the year 2002.

Migration

Data collected for the South-Western Oltenia region¹⁷ shows that an increase in the permanent emigration could be noticed in all the counties of Oltenia, in 2015. For the entirety of the 1990-2015 period, the greatest number of permanent emigrants come from **Dolj** (6904 people), followed by Vâlcea (3105 people), Mehedinți (2534 people), Olt (2157 people) and Gorj (1592 people). With respect to the age of the permanent migrants, the age group 25-64 is the most numerous, these being the people who find it easiest to find a job outside Romania. The causes prompting the youth to leave the country are diverse: they leave to follow their parents (the 0-14 year old category), they cannot find a job in the country or they wish to find a better paid position (the 20-24 year old category).

The North-Eastern (Moldova Region)

Active population. Population employed in agriculture

NIS data¹⁸ for the North-Eastern region shows that it is the biggest region of Romania, in terms of both surface and inhabitants (the total population is 3.302.200 people). It is made up of the following counties: Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, Vaslui. The region ranks last in comparison to the other Romanian regions when it comes to the level of development and well-being of the population.

According to the Workforce Balance of the National Statistics Institute, on the 1st of January 2019, the region's workforce resources¹⁹ numbered a total of 1.965.500 people, of which the

¹⁷ Planul Regional de Actiune pentru Invatamant, Regiunea de Dezvoltare Sud Vest Oltenia, PRAI 2016-2025 (*The Regional Action Plan for Learning, the South-Western Oltenia Region, RAPL 2016-2025*)

¹⁸<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?countryId=RO&acro=Imi&showRegion=true&lang=ro&mode=text®i onId=RO4&nuts2Code=RO41&nuts3Code=null&catId=9459>

¹⁹<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?countryId=RO&acro=Imi&showRegion=true&lang=ro&mode=text®i onId=RO4&nuts2Code=RO41&nuts3Code=null&catId=9459>

occupied civil population represented 57.5%. The recorded unemployment rate on the 31st of March 2020 was 4.3%, with 49.200 people registered as unemployed.

With respect to the main economic activities in the area, **31% of the civic population is employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing**, while 42% are employed in the service industry, and 27% in constructions and industry.

Migration

In 2014²⁰, 44.475 people were registered as having migrated, a total of 8.8% of the total permanent Romanian migrants in 1990-2014 interval (504.363 people).

In the 2012-2015 interval, the total of temporary emigrants from the North-Eastern region was 31.403 people, out of which 66.6% belong to the 25-64 year old category, the category which has the highest interest and motivation in securing a workplace.

However, the official statistical data only record internal and external migration which includes an official change of residence. In reality, the worrying phenomenon of migration cannot be ignored, especially among young people and higher-skilled workers, with an accentuated tendency to emigrate medium term.

MAPPING THE STAKEHOLDERS

The North-Eastern (Moldova Region)

BACĂU COUNTY

INSTITUTION	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	DEGREE OF INTEREST	DEGREE OF INFLUENCE
National Agency against Human Trafficking - The Regional Center Bacău	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Local Employment Agency – Bacău	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Social Assistance Department – City Hall Bacău	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH

²⁰ <http://infraed.ro/migratia-si-impactul-generat-de-acest-fenomen-in-regiunea-nord-est/>



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The local agency for payments and social inspection – Bacău County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Child Protection and Social Assistance Department (DGASPC) Bacău	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Public Health Department Bacău	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Local Agency for Agriculture Bacău	Public Institution	Moderate	MODERATE
Local Action Group (GAL) Bacău	NGO	Interested to participate	HIGH
Community Foundation Bacău	NGO	Interested to participate	HIGH
Community Action and Resources Association	NGO	Interested to participate	MODERATE
AGROSTAR Federation	Trade Union	Moderate	MODERATE

IASI COUNTY

INSTITUTION	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	DEGREE OF INTEREST	DEGREE OF INFLUENCE
National Agency against Human Trafficking - The Regional Center Iași	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Local Employment Agency – Iași	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Social Assistance Department – City Hall Iași	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Child Protection and Social Assistance Department (DGASPC) Iași	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
The local agency for payments and social inspection – Iași County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Public Health Department - Iași County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH



Local Action Group (GAL) Iasi	NGO	Interested to participate	HIGH
Community Foundation Iași	NGO	Interested to participate	MODERATE
Community Safety and Mediation Center (CMSC) Iași	NGO	Interested to participate	MODERATE
Alternative Sociale Association	NGO	Interested to participate	HIGH

GALATI COUNTY

INSTITUTION	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	DEGREE OF INTEREST	DEGREE OF INFLUENCE
National Agency against Human Trafficking - The Regional Center Galați	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Local Employment Agency – Galați	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
The local agency for payments and social inspection – Galați County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Child Protection and Social Assistance Department (DGASPC) Galați	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Community Foundation Galați	NGO	Interested to participate	MODERATE

The South-Western (Oltenia Region)

GORJ COUNTY

INSTITUTION	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	DEGREE OF INTEREST	DEGREE OF INFLUENCE
Child Protection and Social Assistance Department (DGASPC) Gorj	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Local Employment Agency – Gorj	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH



Social Assistance Department – City Hall	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Public Health Department - Gorj County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
The local agency for payments and social inspection – Gorj County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
APSE Association	NGO	Interested to participate	HIGH

DOLJ COUNTY

INSTITUTION	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	DEGREE OF INTEREST	DEGREE OF INFLUENCE
National Agency against Human Trafficking - The Regional Center Craiova	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Local Employment Agency – Dolj	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Child Protection and Social Assistance Department (DGASPC) Dolj	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
The local agency for payments and social inspection – Dolj County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Social Assistance Department – City Hall Craiova	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Public Health Department - Dolj County	Public Institution	Interested to participate	HIGH
Vasiliada Association	NGO	Interested to participate	MODERATE



EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ROMANIAN WOMEN WORKING IN AGRICULTURE IN ITALY – NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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 rhythms 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?”

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“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 refering 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 someplace 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 times 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



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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.



PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE AND OPINIONS REGARDING THE SITUATION OF WOMEN WORKING IN AGRICULTURE IN ITALY – NEEDS ASSESMENT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the interviews

The interviews were conducted with the purpose of understanding the experiences and opinions of the professionals working in the communities that the project is focusing on, with respect to the needs and difficulties facing the women who work in agriculture in Italy.

Interview participants' profile

The interview participants were **11 women** from local communities from the **Moldova and Oltenița regions**. Most of the participants interviewed were **social workers**, but the group also included 2 **community medical nurses** and one **school mediator**.

Their main **responsibilities** entail community work with people from disadvantaged groups – women, children, elders, people with disabilities. Their work mostly consists of granting welfare benefits or support allowances, releasing civil registry documents, as well as offering medical assistance in the community, doing fieldwork and discussing with the families on matters such as child protection, domestic violence, or addressing issues such as the status of children who are not attending school or have issues at home etc. Most of the interviewees have been working in their current position for a long time (11-22 years), with only a few of them having worked there for less than 5 years.

WORK EXPERIENCE REGARDING WOMEN WHO ARE INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURAL WORK IN ITALY

Most of the interviewees say that they **have direct contact with women** leaving to do agricultural work in Italy (but also in other countries, such as Germany), due to the nature of the work that they perform. This happens especially in the context of women coming to the City Hall to complete mandatory declarations regarding the delegation of parental authority for the duration of their stay abroad, or looking to benefit from the child rearing services and allowances available, or, in direct relation to their planned work departure, because they require stamps or signatures from local authorities in order to fill in certain forms or even work contracts with foreign employers (including the completion of a section which states whether or not the person in question is a housewife). Likewise, other interviewees who do



fieldwork in the communities come into direct contact with the women leaving to do agricultural work abroad, and with their families too, because they are tasked with monitoring the children who are left at home. Some women also get in touch with City Hall because they need to submit the necessary paperwork in order to separate from their husbands and wish to retain custody of the children. Only 3 of the interviewees have said that they have never had any direct work experience with women who have left or are planning to leave for work in Italy. More than that, some of the interviewees have relatives who are in this situation.

When it comes to the **reasons** which determine Romanian women to go work in agriculture in Italy, **money issues, the lack of workplaces, the poverty** in their communities are the main grounds for their decision to leave. Some respondents also mention the communities with a significant Roma population, who are marginalised, impoverished and not supported by the state.

“Poverty, the difficulties they face in the country, the lack of money, the lack of employment”

“They say that agricultural work there is better paid than anywhere else, it is a sure source of income; they would never do agricultural work in Romania... only a few of them would do it; they say they are better paid there, so that they can also help their families back in Romania, some of them have created very good conditions for themselves with the money they made there, have built houses, have helped their children through university... which they would not have been able to do in Romania”

“The reasons why Romanian women go to work in agriculture in Italy are primarily financial. They leave because they wish to offer a better life to their children, to buy/build/modernise their homes or simply in order to save money with which to support their families for a while following their return to the country (usually for a period of a few months)”

The main **types of tasks** performed by the women leaving to work in agriculture are: picking various fruits and vegetables, depending on the season, particularly picking strawberries, grapes, oranges, cherries, tangerines, tomatoes. The work does not only entail picking the produce, but also sowing the seeds, digging and hoeing etc. On the other hand, some of the respondents also stated that there are also women who claim that they are going to Italy to care for old people, but, in reality, they are going to do agricultural work.

The women who leave for agricultural work in Italy mainly find out information regarding **the working opportunities available from acquaintances and relatives, people who have previous experience in the field.**

“Information passes from individual to individual, I go there, I do well, I tell my sister about it, she comes too. In her turn, she tells a friend... Those who are already there help other people, take them along; they know that the Italian employer requires more workforce”



“From people who have left a while back and with whom they’ve kept in touch; when they returned, they also told the others”

“They usually find out from one another, they are basically recruiting each other”

However, there was also the opinion that the women find out from **the local public employment agencies**, which offer information regarding the available workplaces, including for positions abroad, or even the opinion that there are **private companies** which send representatives to the villages, in order to promote these workplaces, or local enterprises who assign the available workforce. Some respondents also believe that there are also **intermediaries** who make certain amounts of money by recruiting women for work abroad.

“... As far as I know from the women with whom I have discussed such subjects in the past, there are some employers, some agencies who recruit them”

“They are being used there for work. Someone is making some money off them”

“Someone has just left to do seasonal fruit packaging work in Italy and as far as I understand, the person who helped them get there has asked for 1000 euro (in Italy). I don’t know what that money provided”

According to the opinion of most interview participants, the women who go work abroad **do not have previous contact with Romanian institutions who might support them** in being better prepared for their departure. Their only contact is with local authorities, in order to obtain certain signatures or approvals relating to their departure. But not all the respondents know exactly what those signatures and approvals are.

“They have no contact with institutions; there’s no one, nobody is taking care of this”

“It’s certain that no Romanian institution is preparing them for their future departure”

“They come to the City Hall, those who are about to leave for work in Germany, because in order to obtain the contract, they need a signature confirming that they come from place they have stated”

“The mayor signs some papers for them”

In most cases, **the women leave alone for work abroad**. There are also cases in which they leave with family members, but this happens less often.

“Usually, they leave alone”

“Most of them leave by themselves; on rare occasions, they leave with their husbands”

“They leave with husband and child and mother and grandmother, they all leave together”

As far as concerns the **signing of a work contract** upon leaving the country or upon reaching Italy, the respondents’ opinions are divided. Some respondents do not know when and if the



women sign a contract, others state that a type of contract or pre-contract is already signed in Romania (with one respondent even mentioning that the contracts include a section which needs to be filled out by the local Romanian authorities before departure), and others say that the work contract is signed abroad. One of the respondents was of the opinion that the women do not know whether what they are signing is a contract, and they are not given a copy of the signed papers.

“They sign a contract here [in Romania], the mayor also fills something out for them”

“They sign a pre-contract in Romania, with a contract to be signed there [in Italy]”

“They sign a contract here [in Romania], the mayor fills out a section for them as well”

“They said they sign it there [in Italy], I haven’t heard of contracts being signed in Romania”

“Lately, the women I’ve talked to know that they have signed something, but they don’t know exactly if it is a contract (this is what they believe), because they are not given a copy”

As far as **the payment information** is concerned, some respondents say that the women leaving for agricultural work in Italy do not have any such information, while others state that the women leaving know how much money they will receive for their work. However, there are many respondents who claim that the women do not know how much money they will be paid for their work, or that, even if they mostly do know what their salary will be, it is also the case that they encounter surprises and that there are differences between what they had been told and what they are confronted with after having been employed.

“They say they make 1000, 1200 euro per month; they already know this before they leave, they have been doing this for a few years”

“Some people know exactly where they are going, what their salary will be, others don’t”

“They don’t say the truth, but, for sure, they are told one salary and then they receive another there, which is why I deduced that someone is making some money off them”

“I don’t know about payment levels... some of them say they know the conditions and come back very disappointed, others don’t know, because they are leaving with friends”

“They don’t know their rights; they are paid by the hour; generally speaking, someone here organises the departures; they are told, for example, that they will be paid, let’s say, 4 euro an hour, but once they get there money also gets taken from them for accommodation, they live in shacks, they share a bathroom, a stove, this is what I’ve heard from them”

“They know that they will be paid a certain sum, depending on the number of hours they work or on the quantity of fruit/vegetables that they manage to pick in one day (for example: the number of kilograms or the number of boxes of picked fruit). However, once they get to Italy,



the situation changes, and the women end up earning less than they had been told before they left the country, because the employers no longer keep their promises about payment”

“At least as far as Germany is concerned, they know what their salary will be, they are given information”

“They don’t know the salary beforehand, but they do have information about what they will be doing”

“Sometimes they are told, look, it didn’t work out, the year was bad, it wasn’t the season for it”

Similarly, when it comes to information regarding **accommodation, transport, working schedule**, the respondents claim that **some women know the details before they leave, while others don’t** and that there are situations in which **things are different** from what they had initially been promised. Some people leave by themselves, others have transport arranged for them. Transport to the workplace is usually done by minibus.

“They say they have it there, on the basis of the contract... that they [the employers] also ensure accommodation or a home paid for with the money they make there; some leave with their own cars, because most of them have their own cars, others have transport arranged for them; so, generally speaking, they know where they are going and what for, and this includes the working schedule; even those who have not been before, because they talk to those people who already have”

“They are told what the working schedule is, about transport, most of them know”

“They have no information about accommodation and transport before they leave”

“Accommodation happens in precarious conditions. The homes are often unsanitary, there aren’t any sanitary and hygiene conditions and they are situated somewhere in an agricultural area, with the women being away from shops, pharmacies and other institutions they might need. Generally, these are taken to the city once a week in order to do their shopping. Transport is shared, in buses/minibuses, arranged by the employer, who requires payment to get them to Italy and back”

“There were also cases in which they found out that they were on a 10-hour working schedule, even though they had been told differently”

“The way there takes a very long time, with few stops, even if the people leaving would need more. They drive non-stop, without any accommodation on the way, with people resting in the buses/minibuses”

Although many of the interview respondents said that they don’t know and haven’t heard of **difficult situations for the women working in agriculture in Italy**, apart from the mentions relating to the differences between what they are told upon leaving and the reality they



encounter upon reaching Italy (with respect to payment and accommodation), there were also respondents who mentioned that some of the women have complained about improper working conditions, extended working hours, unsuitable food.

"I haven't heard about any issues"

"I had a conversation with a girl and she told me that the working hours are very long, the food is bad, meaning that it is not provided as they had been told, they are not paid according to the amount of work they do"

"They had to be in the fields, even if it rained, with a raincoat; they don't say whether they have problems there; many of them are simple women, from the countryside, they don't know what their rights are and they use them; some women recounted that they went fruit picking in the mud, they could only move their feet with difficulty, they had recipients tied to their waists to collect the apples... but, generally speaking, they don't say what happens there or how"

"I have met women who have confirmed that they've experienced negative situations"

"Many of the women who have shared their experiences with me return home exhausted, depressed, with different medical issues caused by the precarious conditions they have lived or worked in, because the work was too difficult or the working hours they were subjected to were too long. Some of them were even physically, psychologically or sexually abused. Upon returning home, they encounter issues with children who have not been supervised, husbands who are jealous, financial debt that other family members have acquired while they were gone"

Depending on the specificities of each season, most women go to work in Italy for a period of **2-3 months a year**. They return home at the end of the season and, generally, for the holidays as well, and then they go back to Italy. Upon returning home, it is also sometimes the case that they recruit other women for agricultural work in Italy. Family is the main reason for returning home, and particularly their children.

"Their family, their children, the land"

"Their family, the children"

"If they were offered workplaces in Romania, but work that is easier and well paid, they would stay here, this is what they say, that there is nothing to do here, they go work in the village by the day, but there's no comparison between the money they make here and the money they can make there; they return to get their houses in order, to give their children dowries"

The interview respondents say that those women who go work in agriculture in Italy **manage to save up from the salary they receive** and that **they invest the money particularly in**



upgrading their homes, their households, in paying for their children's education, or in order to buy a car or other goods, as well as in order to pay bills and other debts.

"They save money, a village was built in the community, it's all big houses, the Romanians are of poorer quality now, as opposed to them; they invest their money in cars and houses"

"They save.... Houses, they send money to their families, to their children (for driving school, for university), get cars; they would not have been able to do that there, you can clearly see the differences before and after their departure to Italy"

"They save, but they don't do much with the money, they pay their debts, or make a fence, install some windows, small things..."

"Yes, they save... this is what they live on, they pay their taxes, they invest in houses... to expand them"

"Yes. Out of these savings they are able to pay their bills, their bank loans, they can buy certain goods (electronic appliances), they can undertake certain reparations in their households or they build extra rooms in their homes, a bathroom, a kitchen. Generally speaking, they want to ensure better living conditions for their families/children. Similarly, many of these women also save up the money in order to ensure the minimum living conditions for their family over a period of a few months, until they leave for work abroad again"

Those women who **have underage children at the moment of departure leave them home**, in most cases, under the care of **the father, the grandparents or other close relatives**. There are also women who take their children with them or who leave with their whole family. During their stay, some children who accompany their mothers become integrated in local caretaking systems, where they are supervised and also receive schooling, but this is not a certified educational framework.

"The children stay under the care of the father or of the older siblings, of the extended family (grandparents, uncles, aunts) or even of the neighbours"

"If they leave their children home, they leave them in the care of older women – grandmothers, the mother in law, the older children can also manage by themselves, but, generally, they stay with other members of the family"

"Some of them leave with their children, some of the children attend school there, at least this is what the women say, and when they return, the school asks that they provide paperwork as proof... they would bring some papers... there were some auxiliary schools, institutions meant so that the children would not be left alone while the mothers were working, but they were not state schools, they were not assessed... some would stay in a monastery, there were some sisters who would run a programme with them, would assign them writing tasks, drawing, would give them food; some of them said that they stayed in their rooms; the women also have to do with begging, but they don't say that, they mostly lie"



“They mostly transferred the parental authority to the husband or the father in law”

“Some of them leave their children in Romania, others take them with them, those are the ones who say that they have no-one to leave them home with; some say that they enrol them in school there, but, when they return, they don’t bring anything to prove it (certificates)”

After returning to Romania, the women **don’t ask for any support from the Romanian institutions**, but many of them contact the City Hall in order to demand their legal rights at **child allowance**. Some of the respondents seemed to not agree with the women who wish to benefit from these services.

“They didn’t complain of problems in Italy and they didn’t ask for support from the Romanian authorities; maybe they also lack the courage, I suspect they did have problems there, of all sorts... but they keep them to themselves”

“They don’t request institutional support; some children become listless, you can feel that their mothers are away, particularly in the case of the girls, and they sometimes get in touch with the school psychologist; but there is nobody to offer counselling to the mothers”

“If they want their child allowance to be increased, they go to the City Hall, they pretend to be down on their luck and they need the Mayor to give them I don’t know what and to help them...”

“Some people give up their right to child allowance from the Romanian state, because they have received it abroad; others take advantage however, and they break the law”

The interview participants believe that the lives of the women who leave to work in agriculture in Italy **change** – on the one hand, **for the better** (financial gains, improvements in their outward appearance and/or their behaviour, in their way of thinking), but also **for the worse** (their family relationships deteriorate, the children are affected by their prolonged absences from home, their health deteriorates because of the chemicals used in agriculture and, sometimes, even their mental health is affected).

“They also change for the better... they make financial gains, they are able to do something in the country, to build a little house, to ensure better living conditions, but also for the worse... sometimes they go away and then husband and wife don’t make it and break up”

“Apart from the financial aspect, it also changes their way of thinking, they’ve become more polished compared to other years, they behave differently in society, they talk to their children nicely and respectfully”

“They say: I built a house, I saw my children grown up, but I also grew old, work there has eaten up many years of my life; some go into depression, they get ill, they don’t go back; there was this girl who came back after a few weeks in a deplorable state, she couldn’t stay there, she ended up seeing a psychologist, then a psychiatrist when she returned and then she didn’t



go back... but she never said what happened to her there; they've lost the best years of their lives there"

"I didn't see any changes... they just make some money to pay off some of their debts... you can't notice anything else"

"They have health problems because of all the physical work, their family relations suffer, extramarital affairs happen, the children suffer because of their absence"

"For the better – money, better looks, language, but also for the worse – some people return ill, they inhale the substances used in agriculture and get cancer"

EXPERTISE AND OPINIONS REGARDING POTENTIAL SUPPORT FOR THE WOMEN WHO ARE INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURAL WORK IN ITALY

When it comes to the information and opinions of the respondents regarding **potential support for the women who leave for agricultural work in Italy**, both in Romania, and in Italy, the respondents say **that they don't know any organisations or institutions** promoting the rights of people working in agriculture, in either of the two countries. They don't know of any institutions defending the rights of Romanian women working in Italy either.

The respondents believe that, in order for the women who wish to go work in agriculture in Italy to be better prepared, they would need to know the exact **clauses of the work contract**, what they will be expected to do at their workplace, namely their **tasks, payment, accommodation**, matters pertaining to **work seniority, health insurance, holiday benefits** and other rights. Moreover, they should also know **who they could turn to**, in case they encounter any issues.

"They should know the tasks that they will be assigned, what will be expected of them at the workplace, the accommodation conditions, payment; so that they know if they can handle it"

"They should know if they will have a place to live in there, if they have the certainty of the position, if they will be paid fairly"

"They should know their rights, be well informed about the contract, work seniority, they shouldn't do unofficial work, they should know what the equivalence is for the years spent working there, it would help them with retirement age; if they knew these rights, they would probably leave more at ease, more enthusiastically; they should know about their health insurance, I believe most of them don't have one"

"They would need better information beforehand. I think they should know exactly what is waiting for them there, regarding all the aspects I've mentioned above. They should also know



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who to turn to about all the abuse they will be subjected to or who could offer them support if they have a problem, or if their fundamental rights are violated”

“They would need more education, it’s hard to find a job with just secondary education, especially in the rural areas in which there are no jobs”

“Those who leave are going to the same place, they probably know the run of things, they know what they have to do”

One respondent also believes that the women who have had previous work experiences in agriculture in Italy could help provide information to other people who wish to go, but many choose to keep the information to themselves.

“Those who leave are individualists, they don’t help the others with information, they keep it for a small number of people”

Other respondents believe that state institutions don’t get involved and that women cannot count on any support from them. Another respondent believes that the women should be supported, but she doesn’t want more work to fall onto the social services she is working for.

“Not institutions, nobody from the administrations is getting involved... they’re all rusty there, you need to go out into the field... to get in touch with people, as it is, you just sign some papers for them when they leave, the children get left under the supervision of social services... and that’s it”

“It shouldn’t be on us... but someone should support them...”

According to the respondents, the **institutions/organisations** who might be able to help these women be better prepared for their departure are: the **City Hall** (through their **social support services**, by financially but also psychologically supporting the family that is left at home, by monitoring the children), **the the local public employment agencies** (by offering classes and certifications, job offers), the Work Ministry. In the case of Italy, they mention the embassy and Romanian lawyers.

The respondents believe that in **Italy**, the rights of the Romanian women working in agriculture could be better protected through institutional collaborations between the Italian and Romanian states, through activating NGOs who could help the women, or through involving people who are already working there, by establishing mediation and support points in the places in which numerous Romanian women are working, by informing them about their rights and the various facilities that they are entitled to in their workplace, and by respecting their human rights.

“They should have rights, they shouldn’t be tricked, they should be given what they are promised, they should have a legal basis for this”



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“Their human rights should be upheld... These people put up with a lot, some give up from the beginning, they believe that they are being mistreated and disrespected and then they leave... it’s better to come to my own country, even if I starve, this is what I’ve been hearing”

“An NGO to help the women or people who are already working there, to get closer”

As far as **Romania** is concerned, the respondents believe that the rights of the women would be better protected if the mayors got involved, by establishing conventions between the two countries, by increasing pay in the agricultural field, by getting NGOs involved in the communities, by involving the people in the communities, community workers (who could distribute flyers with information), by getting the schools involved.

“There is no interest in these matters in Romania, they could increase salaries in agriculture here and then these women wouldn’t have to leave... because we also have agriculture, but it is not cared for at all”

“There are organisations, foundations, they could come in the communities, in those places the women come from, in order to tell them what their rights are, who to contact if they run into trouble; they have no help there, they don’t know the language, they depend on those taking them there”

For both countries, a measure would be enforcing laws which punish abuse: *“I think it would be important for laws to exist which punish abuse on Romanian women who are there to work, but also the competent authorities who would check that this is happening”*

All the respondents want to take part in the **training programme** which will be organised as part of this project, in order to obtain information about the ways in which support can be offered to those women wishing to leave for agricultural work in Italy. Likewise, a part of the respondents said that they could get involved in informing and counselling activities, in creating and distributing informational materials. With respect to the time availabilities for the course, all the respondents would prefer a schedule of **less than 2 hours a day** in different days, especially after their current working hours, which are always very crowded for most of them.

In terms of concrete training needs, they mention: information about the realities of Italy, the concrete experiences of the women there, if their rights are respected, how the issue of children accompanying their mothers is addressed, information about the Italian institutions/NGOs the women could get in touch with in order to have their rights protected and to stop abuse, concrete information about jobs in Italy that they could offer to the women, who is waiting where for them in Italy, what their tasks will be, what the working schedule is, how overtime is paid, methods through which they could increase the trust of the women when it comes to support institutions in Romania.



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 consult 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 parental 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 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?

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



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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!



ANNEX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH WOMEN AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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 the needs and difficulties faced by women who are going to Italy for agriculture work 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 professionals 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.

Putting together the responses obtained from the interviewed professionals, as well as from women who had direct work experience in agriculture in Italy, we will build a training program for those professionals interested in taking on a greater role in informing and guiding women who want to go to work in agriculture in Italy.

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

Current job

Occupation

Concrete attributions at job

Previous working experience



Seniority in the current occupation

B. Information concerning the work experience with women involved in agricultural work in Italy; experiences and opinions

Does your work involve direct contact and / or providing services, in any form, to women who want to go to work in agriculture in Italy? If so, please provide details.

From your point of view, what are the reasons that determine Romanian women to go to work in agriculture in Italy?

As far as you know:

- What kind of work do they do there?
- Where did they find information about job opportunities in agriculture in Italy?
- Do they have contact with institutions in Romania to support them in being better prepared to leave? If so, with what institutions and what types of information they can get from each of them?
- Are they leaving alone or with family members?
- Do they sign a contract from the moment they leave the country or their contract is signed there?
- Do they know the salary level they will have there? But information about accommodation, transport, working hours, etc.?
- Is the departure safe?

From your point of view, how do the work experiences of women working in agriculture in Italy unfold? Are you aware of the difficult situations in which they found themselves (for example: improper working conditions, unpaid overtime, excessively long working hours, unsafe or dangerous work, non-compliance with rights, non-payment of promised salary, non-compliance with contractual conditions, discrimination, psychological or sexual harassment by employers, violence of various kinds, threats, blackmail, etc.)?

As far as you know:

- In which areas do women from your community go mainly to Italy to work in agriculture?
- For how long are they leaving?
- How often do they come home to see their families?
- In these moments of return, do they recruit other women to go to work with them in Italy?
- Do they manage to make savings from the salary obtained in Italy? What these savings are investing in?
- If they have minor children at the time of departure, do they leave with them? If not, in whose care do they remain?
- How long do their work experiences in Italy usually last?



- What causes them to return to the country?
- When they returns, they are asking for any support from the Romanian institutions?
- How do you think their lives are changing in the context of work experiences in Italy?

C. Information on potential support for women involved in agricultural work in Italy; experiences and opinions

Do you know, in Italy or in Romania, organizations or institutions that promote the rights of people working in agriculture? What about organizations that defend the rights of Romanians working in Italy?

What needs do you think women who want to work in agriculture in Italy would have, in order to leave the country as well prepared as possible?

Do you see any institution / organization / professional group in Romania that could offer them support so that they can leave the country as well prepared as possible? If so, what are those institutions? Where could the women go to ask for support in order to leave better prepared?

What do you think could be done concretely in Italy to better protect the rights of Romanians working in agriculture? But in Romania? How could you get involved?

Would you be willing to take part in a training program to gain information on how to support women who want to go to Italy to work in agriculture?

If so, what concrete training needs would you have? What topics would be of particular interest to you in this training?

How many hours would you have available to dedicate to this training program, which will be carried out online (2 hours a day/10 days, 4 hours a day/5 days, 7 hours a day/3 days, etc.)?

Do you know any other professionals we could involve in the program? If so, please provide us with their contacts.

Thank you for your availability!