

WORKING DOCUMENT ON MIGRATION AND WAGE-LABOUR

MIGRATION AND RURAL AREAS IN EUROPE



European Coordination Via Campesina

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ECVC Background Document on Migration and Rural Wage-Labour

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Synopsis: *The various forms of exploitation of migrant wage-workers occurring predominantly in the agricultural sector in Europe can't leave us indifferent. Nor can the repression and violence of States and European institutions in response to the massive migratory flows engendered by socio-economic, climatic and political destabilization in many countries.*

In this document ECVC analyzes the causes and effects of the exploitation of agricultural workers and explores means and strategies that would help put an end to these abuses. La Via Campesina in Europe, representing farmers and agricultural workers, grounds its politically stance on the principles of food sovereignty, human rights, a peasant economy and solidarity between Peoples.

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1. Beginnings and actions of the working group

The working group was established in 2006 under the leadership of COAG. Two European days were organised then in Seville and Murcia. Since 2008, it has been coordinated by the Confédération Paysanne (Nicolas Duntze) with the support of SOC-Andalusia, l'Autre Syndicat, CNA and ARI.

Racist incidents in El Ejido (Almería) in 2000 shattered the wall of silence that prevailed in Europe over the living and working conditions in agricultural greenhouses. In 2010, other very serious racist attacks occurred in Rosarno (Calabria) against African seasonal workers. The SOC started to actively defend foreign seasonal workers in Andalusia, with other European organisations, as CODETRAS in France. The Confédération Paysanne, through volunteers, started to carry out investigation assignments on the ground in various European countries. Two reports were published, in 2011 and in 2014/15, and a blog was created : www.agricultures-migrations.org.

The Migration/Foreign seasonal workers ECVC working group organises meetings, produces publications on a regular basis and participates in different events, while building alliances, making the voice of agricultural workers heard within and outside of La Via Campesina (LVC), and presenting the peasant vision on the topics of migration, refugees and rural wage-labour.

This historic endeavour currently conveys particular attention in regards to the evolution of migratory flows, its causes and its various forms, as well as of the social and political destabilisation in many countries.

2. Rural workers and their organisations within ECVC

We consider rural workers those who work in the agricultural, forestry or fishing sector in exchange of payments in cash or in kind. They represent an

important part of the sector and must also be considered as food producers. The European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) is comprised of “professional agricultural organisations that bring together farmers, agricultural workers, people who struggle for access to land and people with projects to set up new farms and defend their interests”. Wage-workers in all types of farms participate in the different national or regional coordinations through their own workers’ unions or mixed organisations, with both independent producers and wage-workers.

We are aware of the difficulties surrounding this issue, in its approach and our organisations’ priorities. ECVC is firmly committed to defending rural, indigenous and migrant workers and promoting their organisation and participation in the peasant movement.

In general, there is little organisation of agricultural workers and little social support to their struggles. Major trade unions negotiate and represent the sector in administrative bodies, but rarely do a thorough work, as it isn't profitable in their political-union model. The agricultural model on the ground (Industrial) is not questioned, either. Workers’ unions, migrant associations and support organisations generally work in urban settings.

From outside, ECVC is not sufficiently seen or recognised as the representative of the rural wage-worker and rural migrant. Yet, our role is fundamental in denouncing their condition and defending their rights -among which figures their right to self-organise- from a peasant perspective. The way the migration phenomenon touches us is twofold, first as peasants that are forced to abandon their livelihood and to emigrate, and secondly, as rural workers, being exploited in intensive or industrial agricultural systems. The prevailing system segregates and instigates competition and clashes between workers based on nationality, administrative or work status, gender, sexual orientation, race or social condition.

It is necessary to establish strategies aiming at building broad alliances and create networks that break this logic.

3. Migratory movements and the rural world

Individual and collective migrations, and even that of entire villages, have been part of human history since the beginning of time and have been fundamental in the changes that have taken place in the rural world and in agricultural, fishing and forestry production. They have constituted and constitute to a great extent a positive phenomenon in the promotion of economic, cultural and technical exchanges, as well as of productive and social development.

Migrations have also been the cause and consequence of wars and clashes and, as mechanisms of conquest, have served to subjugate native peoples and economically benefit from their resources and the labour exploitation of their inhabitants. The development of global capitalism has been accompanied by imperialist policies in which colonial invasion and the forced displacement of millions of enslaved people have been a fundamental part of their strategy. In the last century, and until now, the migration-management policies of the industrialised countries have served to perpetuate the same actions of plundering of resources and exploitation of human beings.

In recent years, conflicts, repression, environmental damage and resource grabbing has taken enormous dimensions, provoking new massive migratory movements. Given this background, States and European institutions have reacted with more repression, closing of borders and systematic violation of international conventions on asylum and human rights, favouring exclusion and racism.

We find ourselves faced with the belligerent military policies against communities and people of the most powerful states and large multinational corporations, which are increasingly centralising their power.

Faced with the projects of war, the peasant world opposes the strategy of peace. Faced with the free movement of goods, capitals, arms and armies that produce natural, economic and social devastation, we promote food sovereignty and solidarity between peoples. Faced with the fences and walls, and the

repression and genocide of migrants, at borders and within states, we promote the free movement of people and peasant solidarity, which is capable of taking in migrants in their farms and villages. Faced with a “migration management plan” based on arguments of public safety, priority of national interest and hand-outs, we have raised the flag of human rights and its supremacy over the interests and profits of transnational corporations and states.

We cannot accept the difference of treatment between migrants -whether refugees or not- that the administrations and the media want to impose on us. All displaced people flee from different facets of the same phenomenon: the looting and impoverishment of their local economies, desertification and climate change, terrorism and wars, hunger, lack of a decent future as well as of political, labour and social repression.

4. Migration and seasonal work exploitation in Europe

There is an increasing number of agricultural wage-workers around the world, while at the same time the number of small farmers, essentially self-sufficient ones, is decreasing. This historical trend is not new, but it has accelerated in the past decades, with virtually no country talking about land redistribution and/or the important and vital support to peasant agriculture in its government programs. There are multiple causes:

Destruction of local economies and livelihoods depriving peasants of their lands and driving millions of people into exile:

a) Land and natural resource appropriation by multinationals, States, financial funds and private individuals ; wars, climate change and growing poverty and unemployment.

b) Commodification and financialization of resources with agricultural actors who are not direct producers but “managers” working for the interests of financial or political groups, who demand payments in return for their investments.

c) Bilateral free trade agreements that accelerate the circulation of goods and capital, and exert utilitarian control over migrations.

Large-scale industrialisation and mechanisation of agriculture which implies:

- a) Increasing demands for labour -a flexible, cheap and essentially seasonal one- with techniques that enable food production all year round, soilless crops and with no limitations related to seasons.
- b) Globalisation of trade, leading to competition between production areas, favoring pressure on production costs and labour. A capitalist, productivist, extractivist and large-scale agricultural model is imposed.

5. Agricultural and migrant labour control and exploitation mechanisms

In rural settings, there are extreme working conditions, including situations of servitude. The international regulation on labour and union rights is not implemented. Without unions, administrative control or social support, self-organisation of foreign seasonal workers is very complicated.

Furthermore, the availability of precarious, flexible and cheap labour is guaranteed by the flux of people (internal and external migration) and the imposition of specific regulations on foreigners that establish controls and discriminations against migrants, so that they are forced to accept exploitative working conditions. This situation is reinforced by discourses and policies that promote segregation, racism, as well as institutional and social violence.

Most frequent exploitation mechanisms:

- a) Lack of control on the compliance with laws and collective agreements, in particular the protection against occupational risks (accident, sickness, chemical products, etc.).
- b) Lack of accommodation and adequate housing, subsidized housing within farms controlled by a business and/or with high prices, or the presence of segregation in certain marginal areas.
- c) Recruitment systems by way of intermediary private companies that legalise disinformation, disunity and the implementation of poorer working conditions.
- d) Specific restrictions for migrant workers and their families: Restrictions, control and repression at

border crossings (fences, Frontex), favouring mafias of “smugglers”, leading to the suffering and death for thousands of people.

e) Restrictions and refusal to grant residence and work permits, thereby leading them to resort to irregular recruitment (with less rights and salaries) and limiting mobility.

f) Conditionality of work permits, tenure, and protection, creating a dependence on employers and encouraging corruption.

g) Temporary recruitment systems (originally International Migration Office-OMI) that create an obligation of annual return, an impossibility to bring together family members and the absence of rights to unemployment and other benefits (EU Directive on seasonal workers).

h) Discriminations in accommodation, culture and public services.

6. The situation of Women and Children

We highlight the particular vulnerability and discrimination of women who suffer twice from exploitation: in the agricultural sector -in the entire food chain, and in domestic and personal care work.

Certain agro-industrial activities are specifically reserved for female tasks (harvesting, conditioning...). Others even resort to the indecent work of children. These groups are the object of particular discrimination, which can go as far as sexual harassment and rape. Family relationships frequently become fragile and links are broken. Moreover, the use of female labour is tied to the “return policies” to their country of origin through family ties (women whose children stay back in their country).



7. ECVC principles on the subject: *Against exploitation and discrimination from a peasant perspective of food sovereignty and peasant economy*

As we point out, large-scale intensive and industrial food production models implement work mechanisms which seek to guarantee the greatest flexibility and the lowest cost possible, including the restriction of civil rights and repression of protests. We denounce neoliberal and neocolonial globalisation that imposes the unconditional opening up of the markets and the destruction of local economies, while establishing repression at borders and legal discrimination of human beings.

At the same time, the development of this agricultural model pushes small farmers to produce on a larger scale and at lower costs to ensure profitability, forcing them to permanently or seasonally employ wage-labour, and to increasingly resort to the same mechanisms and norms used by big businesses.

La Via Campesina does not tolerate or justify any kind of labour or social discrimination and exploitation of wage-workers and/or migrant rural workers, whether in large farms or in small ones. We reject the paternalistic arguments of many employers who justify right restrictions and the failure to fulfil their obligations due to their own low income situation or because of low profits. Together, we must break with the productivist and capitalist logic in which we are immersed, moving from a model based on profit, accumulation, extractivism and lack of solidarity, to a model of peasant economy, mutual support and finding our well-being through food production, respecting and contributing to the environmental and social balance. We do not accept the commodification of natural resources or labour.

Our actions and strategies aim at overcoming those exploitation and discrimination situations by way of a comprehensive and popular agricultural reform which guarantee land and resource access for all the

people that want to produce food, thereby avoiding which guarantee land and resource access for all the people that want to produce food, thereby avoiding forced migrations and rural workers' acceptance of disgraceful conditions. Our perspective consists of food sovereignty, peasant agroecology, environmental protection and full respect of human rights.

This does not alter the fact that, on this path towards the transformation of the agricultural and social model, our priority axis is the struggle for the improvement of labour, social and administrative conditions of native and migrant seasonal workers alike, in order to obtain the greatest equality of rights possible and to avoid more deaths, harassment and a restriction of liberties at borders, in the CIEs (Migrant Detention Centres) and in the workplace.

8. ECVC alliance policy on foreign seasonal workers and rural migration

The fact that certain trade unions or rural wage-workers and/or migrant workers' collectives do not question the prevailing agro-industrial model or rally the fight for common resource access, does not prevent LVC organisations from building concrete alliances to defend and improve the rights of workers and of their families. To do so, it is essential to strengthen solidarity and the organisation of workers in defence of their rights.

It is also fundamental to promote coordination and alliances, in rural and urban settings, to move towards a new model of production, distribution and consumption based on food sovereignty, which includes small farmers and livestock farmers, fishermen, rural, precarious and urban workers, as well as researchers. It is imperative that people in urban areas become aware that when we fight for peasant producers' rights and food sovereignty, we are defending the right to a decent home, sufficient, adequate and quality food for everyone, the right to health of all people, as well as the sustainability of human life on the planet in the face of climate change, desertification and environmental disaster.

9. ECVC proposals and demands concerning foreign seasonal workers and migration: *the full exercise of peasants' rights for all people living and working in rural areas*

Our social and economic peasant alternative consists of food sovereignty which, in addition to the control of our resources, food production, distribution and consumption, inextricably implies the protection and respect of nature, as well as the guarantee of a decent life for every inhabitant. Our main combat strategy is centred on the priority, recognition and respect of human rights rather than on economic profits and the power of States, Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and global capitalism. Peasants' rights do not only concern independent producers and native communities; they are also fundamental for rural wage-workers, this also includes compliance with labour and social legislation, as well as the free movement and equal rights of migrants and of their families, taking into account the specific vulnerability of agricultural workers.

The affirmation and the struggle for peasant rights is a tool of unity and cooperation between peasants and rural wage-workers. The right to a minimum income that allows a decent life in the countryside, must be guaranteed for all people via fair prices or decent salaries. Universal social protection must be ensured in rural areas through public support and services.

We want to prevent the exodus of peasants and situations where employers hire workers without first making sure they can provide decent salaries and working conditions.

Therefore, the need is urgent to stop any kind of political support to an agricultural model that doesn't recognise the rights nor the dignity of workers. Any public assistance, and in particular the CAP (European Common Agricultural Policy), must include social conditionality on the basis of the respect of the fundamental labour and social rights

of rural wage-workers, including all the actors in the food chain (production, processing, marketing). Europe should not implement export strategies whose socio-economic effects are detrimental to peasant economies and the rights of workers from other countries.

10. Strategic plan of the Migration/Foreign seasonal workers ECVC WG

The issue of wage-workers of the agricultural sector is addressed in a cross-cutting perspective, because their exploitation, whether they are migrants or not, is linked to multiple dynamics inherent to the agro-industrial production model. Therefore, we are addressing on the one hand agricultural workers' working and living conditions and the temporary work systems favouring such labour exploitation, and, on the other hand, European policies on immigration and agriculture, distribution networks and the possible peasant alternatives to the agro-industrial model. We intend to reach all rural wage and migrant workers across Europe, support the recognition of their social and working conditions and promote their organisation and mobilisation for the defence of their rights. We also intend to promote the integration of these labour unions and migrant organisations that share LVC's and the Coordination's peasant vision, with the seasonal workers and migrant LVC organisations in other regions by means of the international Collective.

We also encourage the participation of ECVC and its member organizations in all initiatives, networks or projects that promote the visibility and improvement of the condition of rural workers and migrants, especially the creation and consolidation of a European coordination, with multiple social alliances, on rural labour and migration around food sovereignty.



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