

# **Report on the Webinar “Working conditions and mobility of migrants in the agricultural and food sector, in a context of diverse policies”**

**December 4 2025**

**1 pm- 3 pm CET (UTC +1)**

## **Replay**

**<https://www.workinagriculture.com/news/iawa-webinar-working-conditions-and-mobility-of-migrants>**

### **I. Goal(s) of the webinar**

Address the working conditions and mobility of migrant agricultural workers in host countries and the threats implied by current policies on the continuity of farming activities, particularly the labour-intensive ones. These policies not only threaten food systems in many developed countries, but they imply growing tensions with regard to the status, the life and the work conditions of migrants in these countries, particularly those who are active in the agriculture and food sector. Such tensions raise questions about the quality and the decency of work and also the management of conflicts that may emerge between both migrants and their employers (farmers, slaughterhouses, etc.), as well as the administrative bodies, and the existing laws and regulations designed to manage such situations. The first two objectives were addressed, while opportunities, networking and prospects were not.

### **II. Program**

- IAWA welcome and introduction by Nathalie Hostiou, President of IAWA and researcher at French National Research Institute for Food, Agriculture and Environment (INRAE)
- Women's on the move: Navigating precarity and power asymmetries in Moroccan women's seasonal agricultural labour migration to Spain / Samiha Salhi and Zhour Bouzidi, Moulay Ismaïl University, Morocco
- Changing farm labour regimes in the United States: migration, precarity, and policy / Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, Syracuse University, USA
- Romanian seasonal migrants in European agriculture: Work experiences and long-term impact on agricultural workers' quality of life / Alin Croitoru Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, and Monica Serban - Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (SafeHabitus Romania) and Research Institute for Quality of Life (Romanian Academy)
- Cross-cutting questions on the three presentations / Priscila Malanski, INRAE
- Mohamed Taher Sraïri, Hassan II Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine Institute, Morocco, concluded by outlining the similarities and differences between the situations.

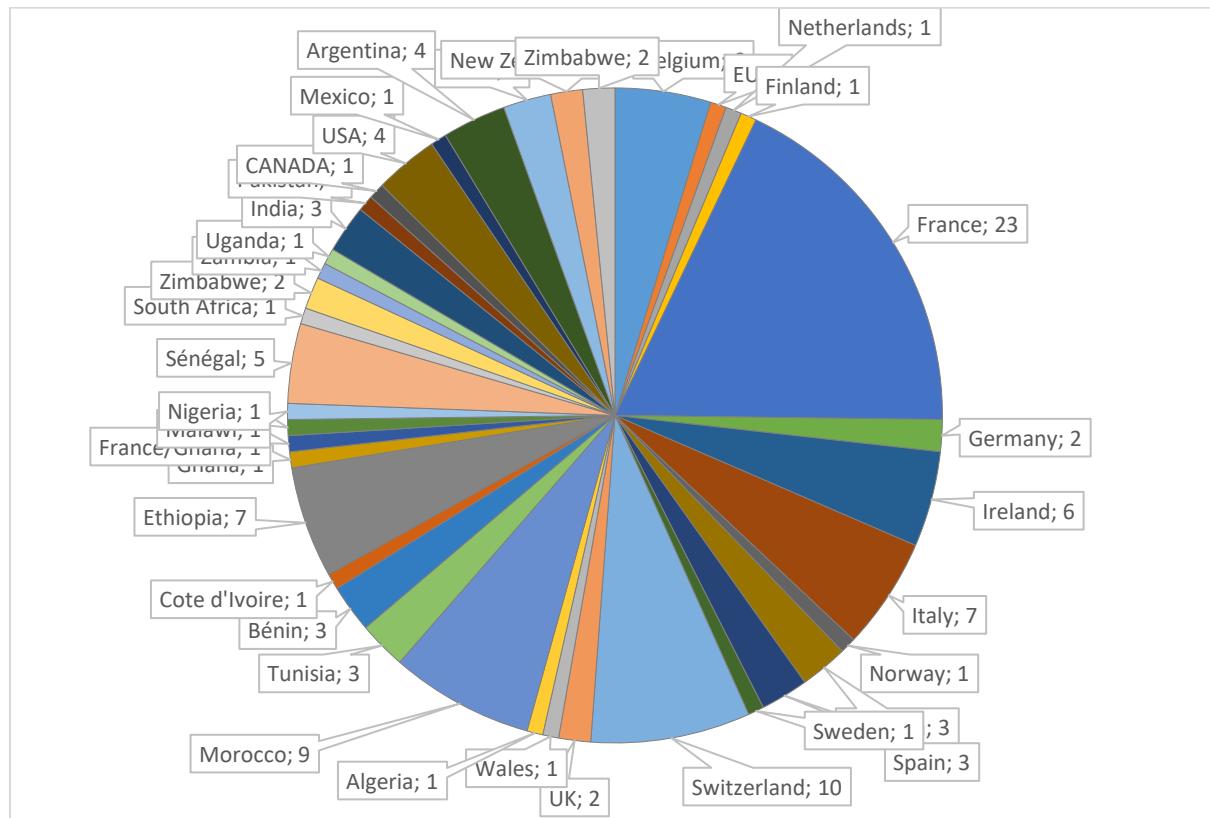
### **III. Registrants and participants**

127 registrants from a wide range of countries, with a preponderance of Europeans and Africans. There were also few people from Asia and Oceania (timetable a strong constraint). The academic

sphere was mainly represented, but the registration of policy makers, and advisers is also noted. Companies were not present.

The diversity of registrants reflects their interest in the subject, and validates the relevance of crossing cases comparing different situations on different continents.

Attendance was good (60 participants, including organizers and speakers), mostly from Europe and Africa, and mainly from the academic sphere (see Figure below).



#### IV. Webinar summary

*Women's on the move: Navigating precarity and power asymmetries in Moroccan women's seasonal agricultural labour migration to Spain / Samiha Salhi and Zhour Bouzidi, Moulay Ismaïl University, Morocco*

This presentation explores the case of Moroccan women's seasonal migration to Spain as a lens to understand the broader dynamics of migrant agricultural labour and working conditions in labour-intensive food systems. Since 2006, thousands of Moroccan women from rural areas have been recruited each year to work in southern Spain under a bilateral migration agreement. Framed as a model of "circular migration", this program is often presented as a mutually beneficial that balances Spain's agricultural labor needs while offering income opportunities for rural women. Yet, behind this narrative lies a complex reality of power asymmetries and gendered vulnerabilities. Drawing on recent literature, fieldwork insights and policy documents, this presentation situates the Morocco-Spain experience with debates on the sustainability of labour-intensive agriculture and argues that the circular migration model, while sustaining production through women's flexible labour, also reinforces precariousness and power asymmetries.

More information available in the special issue « Ouvrières agricoles » of the journal *Alternatives rurales* (<https://alternatives-rurales.org/numero-special-ouvrieres-agricoles/>)

***Changing farm labour regimes in the United States: migration, precarity, and policy / Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, Syracuse University, USA***

This presentation explores first the historical context of migration in the USA showing the context of slavery and dispossession, enabled by racialization and exclusion from legal protection on large and small-scale farms. Today, 40-80% of US farmworkers are undocumented, largely from Mexico/Central America, although migration from Mexico has decreased over the past 25 years. Within an increasing anti-immigrant political rhetoric and policy over past year, the H-2A ag visa program has been presented by policy makers and politicians as a solution to agricultural labour shortages and border closures/ violence, claiming it addresses major labour concerns for farmers and workers. But interviews with these workers participating in this program reported abuses and exploitation (overcrowded and unsanitary housing conditions, wage theft, contract violations, hiring discrimination, ...). The fact that temporary workers are restricted to seasonal stays in the USA limits their ability to create deep social networks and to effectively organize for better conditions.

See more:Dudley, M.J., Minkoff-Zern, L.A., Tynan, M. and Zoodsma, A., 2025. Thinking across agrarian class hierarchies in guest worker programs: Limitations to worker and farmer collective strategies. *Human Geography*, 18(1), pp.31-45

***Romanian seasonal migrants in European agriculture: Work experiences and long-term impact on agricultural workers' quality of life / Alin Croitoru Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, and Monica Serban - Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (SafeHabitus Romania) and Research Institute for Quality of Life (Romanian Academy)***

The seasonal migration from Romania for working abroad in agriculture started when Romania was not yet a member state of the European Union and during the last decades evolved to represent one of the significant intra-European migration flows originating in this country. Recent empirical data collected within the Horizon Europe SafeHabitus project enable us to explore the experiences and narratives of individuals engaging in this type of migration by thanking into account their particular profile. Interviews conducted with active or retired seasonal migrants provide valuable insights into the vulnerabilities faced by these workers and the long-term implications that this type of migration has on Romanians seasonal workers' quality of life.

See more: Corman, Sorina, and Alin Croitoru. 2023. Exploring Hidden Costs of Seasonal Migration in Agriculture within Roma Communities of Origin: Evidence from Romania. *Societies* 13 (11):239.

**VI. Questions asked in the chat box**

***Presentation “Women's on the move: Navigating precarity and power asymmetries in Moroccan women's seasonal agricultural labour migration to Spain” (Samiha Salhi and Zhour Bouzidi, Moulay Ismaïl University, Morocco)***

**Question:** Are there any associations that bring women together to defend their rights, train them...?

**Answer:** There are many associations and many organizations within the civil society who are working on this question of changing this program or making this program more suitable for these women. Especially, there have been a rise on the question of agriculture worker when some abuses and some harassments have been documented by some press releases and so on. So, they have been especially in 2018. And there are many associations and all the civil society who are talking about this issue in Spain. Even in Morocco, there are many associations who are talking about this issue about

the reform of this program, and especially the protection of these workers to the protection of their rights, and also the dignity of these workers as coming from Morocco to work in Spain in agriculture. But the problem is that the majority of these women workers are illiterate, there is a problem of illiteracy and also of language. So, there is a problem of contact between these women and the associations. So, in Spain, women are afraid to have contact with associations, because there is the fear of losing their job or the contract termination. And in Morocco, it's the same case, because there are many women who are expecting to have this experience of migration, because the work is well paid, is more paid nine, nine times more paid than Morocco. So, it's a dilemma to have an effectiveness of the work done by associations.

**Question:** Have you noticed in your interviews, a form of collective resistance from these women to improve their working conditions?

**Answer:** Yes. For the interviews, they said that there have been a lot of collective resistance, but this resistance did not come from them, they are not usually perceiving it because, when they contact this association or this organization in order to talk about the abuses about the labour violation or their situation, what they do, they try to make some resistance from inside. But most importantly, they try to contact some key gatekeepers in order to express their anger about their situation, about their conditions, about the housing and everything, but also from what we call the everyday resistance, the everyday resistance of these women, because as workers, they have sort of an agency, they are not passive, they are active, and they try to change their situation by changing some minimal rules in order to show to the employers that they are not passive that they are not okay with this situation. So, the collective resistance might be something which is concealed, but at the same time, they try to contact the association and other organization in order to show that there is something that should be done for their situation. But this collective resistance is usually less widespread between women because they fear for losing their job or their contract, or the non-renewal of their contract, because they are tied to only one single employer. And they put them on risk of losing their job, and they have families, they have children left behind. So, the question of being tied to only one single employer, they can't change their situation, and they try to accept the situation, or they try to avoid, get involved in this collective resistance publicly.

Just one more information in 2018, when there was noise about the abuse and the harassment that the migrant women faced in Huelva in Spain, there was some collective mobilization, some protestation lead by these migrant women. But all the women that were visible in TV, in the media, etc. They don't come back in Morocco because they take this risk to be visible and to assume the protestation and the resistance. But the cost was to not come back to Morocco, because there is stigmatization.

**Question:** those women who come back, do you have the profile, the socioeconomic characteristics?

For the women that they come back in Morocco, all women are chosen among women that came from rural area. So, they are poor, they don't have a chance to go to school. And also, when they come back in Morocco, it's difficult to speak about the harassment and about what they faced in Spain, because there is stigmatization. So, the majority of women we met in Morocco, they don't speak about harassment. And it's not easy for them to, to speak about that here publicly.

**Question:** Regarding exposure to phytosanitary products, is there a division of labour in the fields that assigns women to tasks such as pesticide spraying? Have you examined these aspects in your research?

**Answer:** Well, some human rights reports regarding this matter of the harmful pesticides, they said that, and especially there's one article in 2016, that they said that the labour-intensive agriculture within the strawberry sector, they use harmful pesticides for crops and in the fields. And automatically, these women are exposed to these harmful pesticides. Even the employers, they said that they don't use this harmful pesticide. And this was the same case in California for the strawberry. They said that many reports mentioned that these pesticides are harmful for the reproductive health of women regarding their pregnancy or regarding their situation as women. Well, the use of this pesticide is also documented by some reports in the strawberry sector.

### **Changing farm labor regimes in the United States: migration, precarity, and policy / Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, Syracuse University, USA**

**Question:** You mentioned that the H-2 visas are very used by large farms. Are there some similar programs for smaller farms, medium farms, for example?

**Answer:** It's the same program for all farms. So, we argue that the program is easier for the large farms because of the cost of management. So, what we found, especially with, and where I live in upstate New York, there are small farms. It's not like California or the West Coast with the big industrial farms. So, most of the farmers we interviewed are small or medium sized farms. And what they had to do was hire lawyers or hire accountants because they don't have an office with a bunch of office workers managing their human resources. And so, they have to hire someone else to manage the program to help them with it, which is quite expensive. So, that's why we argue that the program is more beneficial for large farms, but it's being used by small farms too. And there's also the question of economies of scale. So, the farmers around here, they might only bring in three workers through the H-2A program, but they still have to provide housing. So, of course that's more expensive for them overall to provide housing for three workers versus a farm in California that might bring in a hundred workers and can create these big housing facilities. So the program is used by all types of farmers, but it's harder and more expensive for the small farmers.

**Question:** How has the subject been discussed in the perspective of agri-food chains? Even considering the responsibilities of agents

**Answer:** So, this program is just for agriculture and it's just for seasonal jobs. So that's a really interesting question because there's nothing equivalent. And of course, if you look at food processing, there's some really similar dynamics going on, particularly in the United States in meat processing and highly processed food factories are also used immigrants and undocumented immigrants. So, there's really nothing equivalent. And I think that's the political push to expand this program to non-seasonal to year-round work. So currently for our program, and I'm curious how it compares in Spain or other parts of the world, the industry can only bring people in if they only need people by season. And so, like processing is by nature year-round. So, there's nothing equivalent, although we do have other visa programs, of course, but nothing exactly like the H-2A and definitely with the current crackdown on immigration and really kind of violent deportation tactics, all sorts of industries are saying, we want our own H-2A program. And our current administration, I think is very friendly to that idea.

**Question:** Do the USA have programs (R&D) to enhance replacement of these workers by robotization?

**Answer:** Yes. So, of course, you know, kind of being the birthplace of so much of the agricultural technologies and chemicals, that's, I think, the goal for so many researchers in agriculture and for so many farmers. They just say how do we just get rid of the workers? So, lots of big universities, largely large corporations are working on that all the time, until now. And I have colleagues that work on that piece of it. It's not my own research. Until now, because immigrant labour was so available and so cheap, because they could pay them so little and get away with it politically, the cost benefit of developing those technologies was not there. And so as long as the system worked, they went along with it and they have developed technologies to replace the workers. It is changing with our current political environment. And there is a higher level of investment right now, particularly in work like dairy. So, with milking and things like that, but across the board and using AI to make sure that you have kind of the perfect tomato at the perfect time. So, I think a lot of the barriers to that technology, they're getting over those barriers. Currently, I think the question is, like, is it can you make enough money to make the investment in that technology worth it? And then that really depends on the crop, because in some industries, the farmers don't have the money. So the question is, will the industry just consolidate from these big agri-tech companies? Will they take over this type of investment and production? So it really kind of depends on the region and the crop. But certainly there's a lot of interest and investment in technology that would that would get rid of workers or reduce the need for workers and the interest.

**Romanian seasonal migrants in European agriculture: Work experiences and long-term impact on agricultural workers' quality of life / Alin Croitoru Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, and Monica Serban - Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (SafeHabitus Romania) and Research Institute for Quality of Life (Romanian Academy)**

**Question:** How do migrants choose the host countries? Are there some kind of competition between countries?

**Answer:** Usually, they decide based on the prospective earnings. So, it's all about money. And Germany is very popular during this period because the earnings are higher compared to Spain or other countries. And it's also a question of proximity to Romania. Germany is closer to Romania compared to Spain. So, in a way you save money from traveling.

**Question:** How did you identify the returnees? Are there some organizations coordinating the migration?

**Answer:** No. This was a very challenging task. Even if we have experience and we conducted several field works with returnees up to this moment in Romania. It was challenging in a way because there are no organizations interested in seasonal migrants at home. There are at destination but at home we were not able to identify neither in Romania. And also, because this particular category of population is with low education and they have very low trust in discussing with strangers, with researchers, with people who are not in their proximity or social network. So, we used our previous contacts in some rural communities in Romania. And after that, we developed the fieldwork to snowboarding. And practically we had several seeds at the forest and after that it grows.

**Question:** Is there a documentation on how many workers participate in seasonal migration from Romania to the European countries? And there is some data on this movement of migration because there seems not to be available this data on receiving countries. And how about descending country, Romania? There is some data about it?

**Answer:** Unfortunately, the data are very poor on this subject. And it's very difficult to trace this type of migration within intra-European Union. At the moment they can travel without any restrictions

and without any registration at the origin or at the destination. There are some estimations. And now I think we can speak definitely about two or three hundreds of thousands of people. But it depends very much on the season and on the time of the year, for example, because they are also very mobile and these experiences are quite short.

**Question:** Is there some Romanian program try to create employment to keep these young people in the country? What would be the conditions, economic or social, of the workers to work in their own country?

**Answer:** I would say that in general migration is treated in Romania as a private affair. So, if you want to migrate, you are free to do it. But the state will not be very interested to keep you in the country or to support your return in the country at the moment. There were very few programs trying to stimulate return migration and to stimulate or to keep the people in the country. But those programs were focused on highly skilled migrants. So it was about doctors, medical doctors or about entrepreneurs who were interested in starting a business in Romania, for example, and they received some type of support from the Romanian state. However, there were only a few programs and in general not for this category of people.

**Question:** are there some social or economic impact on the community of a region of these migrant workers?

**Answer:** Yes, definitely. There are some social and economic impacts. First, it's about the social impact related with the children left in the country during their stay abroad or also with their parents or older people from the community, which are in a way deprived of help during the seasonal work. In terms of economic impact, it's very difficult to estimate, but there are employers who complain that they are not capable to find labour anymore in Romania or to develop their business because they don't have workers available in the country. Because one of the side effects of this type of migration is that people change their perspective about earnings and they expect to earn comparable wages with those earned abroad. So, they are not interested to work in Romania on 1,000 euro per month when they receive 2,000 in Germany, for example.

### **Cross-cutting session questions:**

**Question:** Why people keeping in this poor working conditions? Migration for better life is keeping despite the working condition in the destination is not so good. What are the main reasons?

**Answer:** all of our presentations talked about the vulnerabilities and precarity that they're experiencing at home before people go abroad. Certainly, it's not a choice that people are making because they have a lot of great options. In the case of North America, at least, or the United States specifically, it's tied to these histories of historical forced migration of international trade agreements. So, we have NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement that allowed really cheap food to be exported into Mexico, making it really difficult for Mexican farmers to sell their products on the market. So, I think there's economic competition that created vulnerabilities. That's just one vulnerability, of course. You have climate change; you have other conditions going on more currently. You have to look historically why people are so desperate for these opportunities

**Other Answer:** because Moroccan women are from rural areas, from socioeconomic conditions which are very bad. And because they have children, they have families, they are looking for this job as an opportunity. And because the wages are low in comparison with the European standards with Spain. In Morocco, sometimes some research mentioned that these prices or these wages are nine

times up from those they get in Morocco. So, economically speaking, women look for this opportunity as a tool to improve their conditions, the education of their children. And sometimes they get, they build their houses, and sometimes they buy some, they participate in the livestock, they buy some sheep, etc. It is a source of money, even if they work only nine months per year. This is primarily a source of money for them because they are recruited *à la carte*, as we say, because they targeted these women from this background in order to serve the agriculture in Spain. But we can't say that these women are well chosen. And for them, having money is something more important than the working conditions, because they say the working conditions are the same. The working conditions in agriculture in general, within the delocalization of agriculture, the companies coming from France, from the Netherlands, from Spain, also in Morocco, in the region of Sousse, and in the region of Saïss, and other regions, are the same. And even they are sometimes worse than those in Spain. For them, it is something equal, and economically speaking they will have wages higher than those that they can get here in Morocco. So that's why they prefer this work. Just to complete, the impact of seasonal migration can be positive, because it contributes to the schooling of children, for example, and improving the family's income. There are also negative impacts, because when a woman migrates to Europe, there is also this European dream or Eldorado of Europe among these women. It's an element that affects the social hierarchy and social stratification, because when women become autonomous, even if it's not a real autonomy, it disturbs the relationship with her husband, with the family. Sometimes it destroys this relation. And this is why there is many divorce when these women come back. They are in a very difficult situation between to see their children in a difficult economic situation and to have this dream to go to Europe. And even if it doesn't work with agriculture, they can stay in Europe and they can bring their families. Nowadays, there is some initiative led by the Labour International Office. They choose two hundred and nine women and they provide them with an amount of about two thousand and five hundred euros to make some small projects, generative income projects. But this amount is not enough and it cannot help this woman to get out of precariousness.

**Other Answer:** I totally agree that it's a complex question and the answer is not easy. Of course, we have this economic perspective and for a particular category of people it is attractive to earn in two months this money compared to have a monthly wage in the origin country where usually you have to use it only for subsistence, so for using for your daily expenses compared to have a bigger amount of money in two months, which can allow you to do something different, so to have some small improvements to your house or other bigger expenses. And also in the case of Romania, I think it's about the accessibility of this migration. So for intra-European migrants, this migration is very accessible. It's quite cheap and it's not selective. So if you want, you can go in this work experience and if it's not for you, you can search for other opportunities when you return or when you are abroad.

## VII. Conclusion

Concluding remarks for the webinar "Working conditions and mobility of migrants in the agricultural and food sector, in a context of diverse policies" – Organized by IAWA, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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To try to finalize the exploitation of the main ideas discussed during this webinar, here are some key take-away messages:

1. Migrant agricultural workers are now seen as important players by many farmers in developed countries to try to overcome work peaks, particularly in the livestock sector (dairy farms) as well as in the horticultural sector (harvesting fruits like berries, apples, etc.)
2. Agricultural workers seek opportunities to work abroad, often motivated by higher wages than in their origin countries
3. Working conditions have been described in all the host countries as bad and harsh, but the original background of these workers impose to them the acceptation of these conditions
4. Frequent tensions between foreign workers and their employers are recorded, but migrants may be forced to silence their remorse, as they fear losing the opportunity they have to get access to higher incomes
5. Particular characteristics of each of the case study presented during the webinar, like undocumented or documented workers in the USA, female workers in the case of Moroccan migrants to Huelva – Spain, citizens from the EU – Romania – making migration easier to host countries, add particularities to the analysis of the agricultural migrant workers' conditions
6. Additional case studies may be needed, from areas like the Middle East or Asia, to get a broader picture of the situation of migrant agricultural workers at a global scale. Perhaps a more structured network of researchers and investigation methodologies might be helpful to harmonize the analysis of this trend, which is expected to increase in the near future.