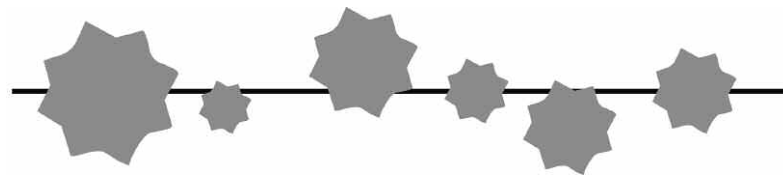


***Extended abstract***

*Migrant temporary workers in the  
countryside of Lerida (Spain): profiles  
and socio-occupational situations*



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*Highlights:*

1. Intensive agriculture requires the hiring of large contingents of workers at specific moments.
2. In Spain, these temporary workers are mostly migrants.
3. Their status as migrants and seasonal workers places them in a vulnerable situation.
4. The greater the legal stability, the better socio-labor conditions they have.

*Abstract:* The hiring of foreign workers was one of the elements that made possible the development of intensive agriculture in Spain. The condition of foreigner supposes a limitation of rights that made them attractive for the business community. Various authors point out that, as a consequence of their greater vulnerability, they tend to accept tougher jobs, rarely organize themselves and do not usually demand job improvements. This article seeks to build the profile of seasonal workers based on their legal status and the time they have been in Spain and relate it to their social and residential situation. The study was developed in the agricultural regions of Lleida, a territory that has been receiving seasonal workers for years, reaching up to 20,000 hires during the harvest. Thus, the research was carried out based on a survey conducted to 900 seasonal workers and 22 interviews with those responsible for the organization of the agricultural campaign that allowed to corroborate the existence of various profiles of seasonal workers and how their socio-labor reality is different depending on the profile where you are.

*Keywords:* intensive agriculture, seasonal workers, working and living conditions, Lleida (Spain).

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## *Extended abstract*

### **1. Introduction and reasons**

In Spain, farm work is normally done by a type of worker known as "seasonal worker". These seasonal workers are labourers who leave their place of residence to move to another place in order to find work before returning to their place of origin or travelling to another area where similar work is available (Pedreño, 1998).

Nowadays, seasonal workers are mostly migrants because national workers have gradually left farm work. This is the consequence of not only better education and better job offers in other sectors, but also of foreigners' vulnerability that makes such hard-working and badly paid jobs appealing (Basok & López-Sala, 2016).

This article aims to examine in-depth the profiles of seasonal workers in Spain. To do so, it defines their profile according to their legal status and the time they have lived in Spain to verify if these elements have an impact and, if they do, what type of impact they have on their occupational and residential status.

### **2. Theoretical-conceptual Bases**

Torres, Allepuz and Gordo (2014) maintain that farming activities require a vast cheap, flexible and little worker-demanding workforce. This has led to the search for and substitution of conventional native labourers for foreign workers.

As they are foreigners, seasonal workers' situation is a particularly vulnerable one. This means that they are more prone to risks and being exploited at work (Sakala, 1987), and are more exposed to dreadful living conditions (Basok, 2002) or to poor housing (Hennebry, McLaughlin & Preibisch, 2016).

### **3. Objectives, methodology and sources**

The objective of the present research work is to define the different profiles of the seasonal workers who work in intensive agriculture, and then to verify if a relation exists between their legal status and them remaining in Spain on the one hand, and their occupational and residential status on the other hand.

The geographical area selected to conduct this research was the Llerida province (NE Spain), which has been traditionally known to draw large numbers of seasonal workers for sweet fruit summer harvests.

A mixed methodology was used. The first phase consisted in conducting 22 in-depth interviews with the representatives of the businesses that organise fruit harvests. At the end of this first part, the second quantitative-type phase began, when a 43-item questionnaire was devised with open and closed questions and Likert scales.

No register exists with reliable data about the number of people working, or wish to work, in the farming harvests of Llerida. However, harvest organisers estimate that around 20,000 seasonal workers travel to Llerida in summer. If we consider this figure, and based on a  $\pm 3.26$  statistical error (given a situation of  $p=q=50\%$  and a 95.5% confidence margin), the optimum sample to form (and was formed) would include 900 surveyed people.

### **4. Results**

The typology built by surveys about seasonal workers' legal status and the time they had lived in Spain allowed us to distinguish five groups: EU citizens (23.44%), EU citizen, but born outside the EU (2.89%), legal immigrants from other non-EU countries (27.56%), those who have recently become legal immigrants (36.78%) and, finally, illegal immigrants (9.33%).

By taking these groups as a reference, we observed significant differences in working conditions and housing conditions. The data herein collected showed that the seasonal workers who were legal immigrants, such as EU citizens and permanent migrants, faced less unemployment and were exploited less at work, were more satisfied with their work and tended to live in better equipped housing than non-permanent and illegal seasonal workers.

The qualitative results revealed that the representatives of the different businesses linked with harvest management stated that harvest organisation is well-planned. The fact that contracts are planned and the workforce is selected beforehand means that most jobs are reserved before harvests commence, which lowers the number of job offers for those arriving without having previously reached a verbal agreement about a job and housing. This reduces this workforce's vulnerability, as the surveys underlined.

## **5. Discussion and conclusions**

The obtained results indicated that the generalised trend of being a foreigner limiting seasonal workers' rights and freedom (Martin, 2004) also came over in this case study. The typological profiles evidenced this reality by showing how those seasonal workers born in the EU had a better socio-occupational status than the other profiles, which was more marked for illegal seasonal workers because they were more vulnerable.

The seasonal workers in fields in Lérida do not differ much from the situations detected in other agricultural areas of Spain and abroad. This study evidences that more or less opportunities, and a more or less fragile labour market, depend on the legal situation. This, in turn, conditions residential status. The main peculiarity of Lérida harvests lies in the efforts made to organise and foresee it, which implies a bigger difference in the socio-occupational conditions of those workers included in the planned organisation and those whose status is illegal or less stable in the study area.

## **6. Future lines**

The results show feminisation for the product-handling sector and more women in the group from EU countries. The qualitative data reflect how this distinction is given by country of origin stereotypes, which relate working in fields with African and Latin American workers, and storage jobs with Europeans. This involves workforce ethnicity, which agrees with what some authors like Cachón (2009) have stressed for years. This aspect has never been questioned and has, thus, remained while organising contracts until the present-day. This leads to gender differences

because Africans and Latin Americans are an extremely masculinised group, while Europeans form a highly feminised group. Notwithstanding, it is necessary to conduct future research to examine in-depth the link between gender and certain origins and job posts.