

# RAISE UP

Stop undeclared work in agriculture





# ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS

Investigation carried out by  
METES FOUNDATION

As part of the RAISE UP - grass Root Actions project,  
Innovative approaches and Stakeholders  
Engagement to tackle Undeclared work Propensity  
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## The survey: the objectives, the choice of tools and the methodology used

Undeclared work in agriculture is not an exclusively Italian phenomenon, but is to be found in various European countries. It is only through transnational cooperation, the involvement of all the interested parties and the adoption of a holistic approach that we can think of finding a solution to the problem.

This is why trade unions, employers' organisations and institutions from Italy, Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia were able to work together and, in January 2018, thanks to funding from the European Commission, launched the RAISE UP project to engage in strategic discussions and develop effective policies and concrete measures that will contribute to combating undeclared work in agriculture. This project supports mutual learning on innovative policy measures and practices and their transfer into regional and national systems through cross-border cooperation.

In particular, through the planning and implementation phase of mutual learning, we hope to contribute to the drawing up of strategies based on concrete experiences and action plans for the future, enhancing the contribution of all the interested parties, in order to ensure powerful and efficient coordination above all among labour inspectorates, social partners and other key players, and to develop joint activities, including transnational cooperation, at an operational and political level, starting from the established practices to improve them or promote new ones.

To this end we have collected the cases of 10 privileged witnesses, all with long experience in the fight against undeclared work and exploitation in agriculture, who operate on a daily basis in areas in which agriculture is a strategic sector for the economy and employment; expresses the highest incidence of irregularities, according to a trend of constant growth; has registered, as a sector, a reduction in added value, demonstrating that "undeclared work steals from everyone". In particular, the experiences in Italy in the territories of Foggia,

Lecce, Trapani, Caserta, Latina, Saluzzo and Gioia Tauro were analysed, in addition to the good practices implemented in Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia.

According to ISTAT data (2017) about 1,050,000 workers are employed in the Italian agricultural sector, most of them workers with fixed-term or seasonal contracts (964,000). This trend of seasonality has been consolidated over time.

The increase in agricultural workers, in fact (+2.2% compared to 2008), concerned in particular workers with fixed-term or seasonal employment relationships whose numbers grew by 3.5% compared to 2008. Conversely, the reduction in the same period of the number of agricultural workers with permanent employment contracts was in the region of 10.4%. Apulia with about 185,000 employees is first in the ranking of the Italian regions in terms of the number of agricultural employees. In second place is Sicily and then Calabria and Campania. And it is precisely these regions, in fact, along with Lazio, which are affected by a higher incidence of irregularity. All these regions saw an increase in the rate of irregularity in agricultural work compared to 2016, in particular, in Lazio, the region where the most significant increase was recorded (+3.4%). An economic analysis of the trends in Italian agriculture at regional level also shows that, in the last year, all these regions recorded a reduction in agricultural added value: -6% in Lazio, -5.7% in Calabria, -4.7% in Sicily, -2.3% in Puglia.

In Bulgaria, undeclared work represents 15.9% of employment and, in the agricultural sector, this percentage rises to 48.1%. Agricultural workers are particularly vulnerable subjects, with very low incomes, and no social security or benefits to supplement income. The actual number of workers for whom social security contributions are paid is 110,605 out of 2,802,898, equivalent to only 3.95%. The situation does not change in the Republic of North Macedonia either, where agricultural workers in exploitative conditions work 10-12 hours a day, are paid less than other workers, and are difficult to intercept as they migrate from one region to another, or to other countries, following the seasonality of crops. They are women above all and come from Romania.

The RAISE UP project offers all parties directly involved in the fight against illegal work and exploitation the opportunity to compare directly with each other on the basis of concrete experiences, resulted in the opportunity for representatives of the Bulgarian and Macedonian trade unions to meet the Bulgarian and Macedonian workers employed in Italian agriculture and to suggest how to turn to the Italian union, introduced to them as a reliable and trustworthy interlocutor, contributing to their active participation within the organisation.

This is an experience that has added value to daily work, a fruit of the transnational dimension, contributing to the construction of the idea of unity in the fight against exploitation, promoting solidarity among workers, trade unions, local institutions and control bodies, beyond any differences relating to the country of origin or residence, thus raising the level of attention on the protection of workers' rights globally.

We have chosen to analyse the experiences of the privileged witnesses, selected through interviews carried out with a semi-structured questionnaire with open answers. The choice of this tool was based on the need to carry out a comparative analysis, but, at the same time, to respect and bring out the economic and social diversities at the structural level which justify and presuppose different strategic and operational approaches in concrete cases.

This methodology allowed the highlighting of two different characteristics of the phenomenon, connected to territorial, economic and productive peculiarities. Where, in fact, there are great harvesting campaigns, the use of labourers is concentrated in certain periods of the year, although following a constant regularisation of the work that leads to a repetition of the use of the same people year after year. On the contrary, in those areas where cultivation is possible throughout the year as a result of substantial investments and integration processes in the supply chain, the employment of labourers assumes stable characteristics and determines the conditions for permanent employment. These differences are evident in the choice of objectives, in the approach with the workers, in the

priorities to deal with problems connected to placement, transport, housing, social integration and welfare services. However, the analysis made it possible to reconstruct the work flow, identifying the individual phases for the planning, implementation and follow-up of the initiatives. For each of these phases, the interviewees described the main problems they face, also showing, through their concrete experience, the solutions that were found, illustrating their advantages and disadvantages. The needs and expectations of the participants, all they should/wanted to know before undertaking this kind of activity, were summarised in ten short videos lasting a few minutes in which the interviewees describe their own experience and provide practical details.

The result is a collection of good practices, innovative solutions that have been concretely tested and produced results. Solutions that can be improved by mutual comparison in terms of repeatability or transferability to other contexts, or that can be the starting point for creating new forms of collaboration.

## 1. The context

The most recent period highlights the dramatic spread of the criminal phenomenon of the exploitation of workers in need, especially in agriculture.

Among the main causes, there are those of an economic nature (convenience, fractional entrepreneurial fabric, avoidance of taxes and NI contributions); institutional (bureaucratic and administrative complications, abuse of flexible forms of work and subcontracting, total/partial non-application of legislative instruments for the repression of violations, poor incentives/reward tools for the enhancement of virtuous behaviour, inadequate approach to the governance of the migration phenomenon); and socio-cultural (poor awareness of the phenomenon at the social level). The effects of undeclared work are devastating and affect the whole of society: unfair competition and social dumping; public finance deficits; erosion of civic and social sense.

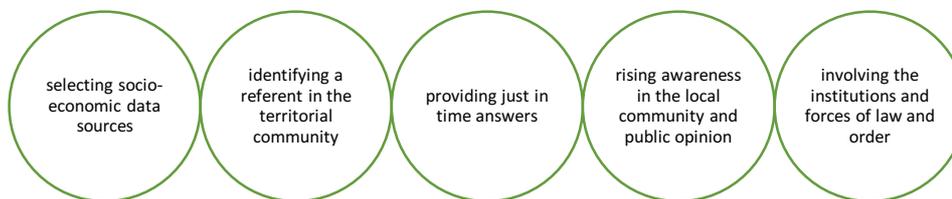
The importance of the phenomenon in agriculture is mainly due to the seasonal nature of agriculture and the widespread use of daily labourers; these factors have not found sufficient enforcement tools to reduce the use of irregular labour in either the regularisation measures for foreigners or those regulating atypical work. As stated in recent literature and reinforced by the 2016 European Platform that addresses undeclared work, cost-effective methods to address the underground economy move away from the “stick and carrot” approach and are based rather on indirect controls.

It is essential that the main players learn from each other about what works and what does not, to develop integrated and holistic approaches and ensure cross-border cooperation that brings together the efforts of Member States in their fight against undeclared work.

## 2. The problems

We asked the interviewees what the main problems are that they face in order to concretely organise an effective campaign against undeclared work based on bottom-up actions.

The prevalence of interviewees indicated the following problems:



The selection of the sources concerns the analysis of the territory from a socio-economic point of view, a preliminary and indispensable activity in order to obtain information on the main crops; on the type of labour employed; on the locations of labour recruitment; on the most represented ethnic groups; on the existence of places of worship or for meeting. In particular, this last aspect is linked to the second problem represented by the interviewees, and refers to the difficulty in identifying a referent in the territorial community, who might assist in overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers, creating a sense of trust in the workers towards the organisation. Moreover, a careful analysis of the territory, also taking into account the fundamental elements of the contract of reference (rates of pay, working hours, classification) allows the identification of the expectations and needs of workers first, thus developing the capacity to respond to their requests in real time. Another aspect is the involvement of all the interested parties, both from the point of view of operations and dissemination. Raising awareness

in the local community and public opinion on the importance of the holistic approach as a priority for integration in all its aspects (housing, school, regulatory and fiscal policies) is a fundamental aspect for creating the conditions for lasting integration founded on the principles of mutual respect and solidarity. Finally, for the interviewees it may be difficult to proactively involve the institutions and the forces of law and order.

### 3. The organisation: the work flow and the operational phases

The objective of a campaign to combat undeclared work based on bottom-up actions is to reach workers who, due to logistical or cultural reasons or fear of retaliation, do not report the conditions of exploitation that they are forced to suffer in the workplace, in order to inform them of their rights and who can help them.

On the basis of the experiences gained, we were able to reconstruct the following organisational steps:



Below we will look at the problems that the majority of interviewees identified with reference to each phase.

### 3.1 Socio-economic analysis of the territory

Where can useful data to plan the initiative be found? What are the formal and informal sources?
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According to the interviewees, before setting up the initiative, it is necessary to analyse the territorial context from a socio-economic point of view in order to obtain useful information for arranging an intervention tailored to the needs of the territory, the production context, and the ethnicity and customs of workers.

Migrant work in agriculture over the last decade has increased exponentially, especially in the most economically disadvantaged areas and largely in harvesting operations, that is, among the least professional and lowest-paid workers.

However, very often, official sources (data from the Chamber of Commerce, national welfare and social assistance institutes, institutions that monitor the functioning of the labour market) are not always reliable, because they tend to underestimate the phenomenon of undeclared work. Knowing therefore the true data of work in agriculture, also taking into account undeclared work, is not simple, but it is essential to set up indicators useful for monitoring and evaluating interventions. Interviewees in this regard consider it useful to turn to those who know that territory well, such as operators in the local union organisation, in line with a criterion of proximity.

In particular, in some cases, it has been possible to build a network of useful contacts, in the world of associations, to preside over different aspects of the problem of exploitation, enhancing the importance of a holistic approach.

Over the years, experiences and research in the field have led to trade unions having a unique heritage of knowledge that contributes to enhancing and giving authority to the work done. This is also useful in terms of involving the stakeholders, in particular local government institutions and the forces of law and order.

Finally, a further tool for territorial socio-economic analysis might be commissioning a survey on working conditions in agriculture from a local research institute.

### 3.2 Identification of a territorial referent in the community

How do I get workers to trust me?
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Language and cultural barriers can often be an obstacle and a source of mistrust in the approach to workers. For this reason, most of the interviewees state that it is essential, especially in the first approach, to have a territorial referent in the community who can present the trade union organisation as a valid and reliable interlocutor with the workers.

Sometimes it might be one of the workers, sometimes someone from the same country, or a cultural mediator.

In order to approach the workers and create a feeling of trust in a short time, the interviewees feel it is useful to have some gadgets to distribute to the workers (straw hat, water bottles, bicycle lights, reflectors, gloves, shoes and socks against the cold and rain, waterproofs). The choice of which gadgets to use must be functional to the activity to be carried out in the field and to achieve the objective of the campaign. At the time of planning it is important to estimate the costs with reference to any gadgets that are to be distributed.

### 3.3 Activity planning

How long does it take to organise the initiative? What human resources are involved? Where is it intended to approach workers? What activities will be carried out? What tools and materials are needed? What is the budget?

The planning of activities is the result of choices that take into account the objective to be achieved and the needs, expectations and requirements of the workers, without ever constituting a risk for their safety in the workplace.

Time is an important variable to bear in mind, for planning, implementation activities and follow-up. For the interviewees it is necessary to consider the commitment of at least two people for at least a month for the planning phase of the campaign and at least one person for the two-three months following the end of the campaign, since it is fundamental to guarantee continuity to the campaigns. In some cases, especially where the agriculture involves protected cultivation, the need is to guarantee a presence and support to the workers not so much and not only with reference to a single harvesting campaign, but throughout the whole year. In this case, the approach is completely different because the needs and expectations of the workers involved change as well, since they are mostly settled and now rooted in the social fabric of the territory.

Time is also an element of risk during the implementation of the campaign, since the time available to approach workers in workplaces or recruitment locations is low (5-10 minutes maximum). The tools to manage this according to the interviewees are: having a clear and shared strategy before starting; having an adequate number of human resources to blanket the territory as quickly as possible.

In some cases, during the planning phase, reconnaissance and surveys of the territory were carried out using technologies (Google Maps bookmarks) capable of geo-

locating the areas in which to intervene subsequently. This type of preliminary analysis is useful, on the basis of the experiences gained, to circumscribe the area of intervention in which to concentrate the resources available and assess the needs, requirements and expectations of the workers in order to intervene with immediate and effective responses to their needs.

The lack of time, according to the interviewees, also leads to a further need: that of providing just-in-time answers, without taking anything for granted, using simple and immediately understandable language without being influenced by the customs and lifestyles of our own cultural models.

Workers can be approached at work; at the end of the working day; in recruitment locations; in places of worship on holidays; in community meeting places. The choice of intervention modalities is the result of an analysis of the living conditions of the workers in that territorial context and, in particular: of the evaluation of the housing conditions (possible presence of ghettos); the recruitment methods and the conditions of engagement (possible presence of gangmasters); of how they go to work. On the basis of the experiences gained, when the campaign takes place at the time of recruiting labour or in the workplace, the activity is purely informative: brief multilingual explanatory flyers are therefore delivered which contain basic information on the types of contracts, on individual and collective protection, and organisation contacts so that the worker knows who to contact and where. Instead, in the case of activities that take place at the end of working hours, a longer period of time is available, in which information can also be provided regarding pay slips, resident's permits, sickness and disability, agricultural unemployment benefits and other forms of income support.

This type of activity is carried out, on the basis of the experiences gained, in reception centres above all, in which, according to a pre-established calendar, provisions are made to provide legal, tax and social security assistance services. These villages can help solve problems with reception and housing by providing, in addition to lodgings,

free services related to food, hygiene, medical care and transport, thus eliminating the notion of the intermediation of the gangmasters. However, according to the interviewees, it is necessary to keep an eye on reception centres in order to ensure decent living conditions and prevent them from becoming themselves places of illegal recruitment of the workforce. Furthermore, it is widely felt that these villages, in which access is allowed only to immigrant workers holding a regular resident's permit, exclude, also because of their limited capacities for reception, most of the workers who suffer from conditions of labour exploitation and degrading living conditions. In other cases, mobile workstations are set up (with a simple tablet or equipped campers).

In order to carry out an effective intervention, according to the interviewees, in these cases, it is necessary to foresee in the planning phase the provision of suitable infrastructures (computer, tablet, printer, wi-fi) and to select the work group in order to have the capacity to respond to all workers' requests, possibly also involving professionals from outside the organisation.

Unfortunately, the prevailing opinion is that the scarcity of human and economic resources is one of the greatest threats to the sustainability of projects.

### 3.4 Stakeholder involvement

How can I start a dialogue with the institutions? How can I involve the supervisory and control bodies? How to sensitise the local community?

The interviewees believe it is essential to involve the key players in a synergistic coordination, in particular, the control bodies (labour inspectorates, local government representatives,) and the institutions.

Permanent committees are sometimes set up, if complaints have already been made, or protocols signed. In any case, it is felt to be useful to provide additional information concerning working conditions in the territory and to request new controls and interventions in companies and farms that have already been reported.

However, the interviewees complain about the delays and difficulties in actively involving the institutions from an operational point of view. The institutions, in their experience, do not address operational issues and the contribution of the institutions is often not very proactive. However, in some cases it can give rise to innovative forms of collaboration, such as, for example, forms of experimentation in meeting labour demand and supply, thanks to synergies between institutional subjects. Finally, in other cases, the involvement of the stakeholders allowed the foundations to be laid for the institutional dialogue by starting legislative review procedures or the production of new regulations.

Another critical element to be carefully monitored, according to the interviewees, is the migration of workers according to the seasonal phases of the crops which risks making individual local campaigns fragmentary and ineffective. However, they consider it difficult, despite their efforts, to implement greater interregional and transnational cooperation, but they are confident that this could ensure a greater impact and reduce the duplication of interventions. The interviewees feel the need for greater national and transnational coordination, based on the sharing of experiences and the adoption of shared guidelines.

According to the interviewees, it is also important to involve the entire community of reference through effective communication: the problem of undeclared work is not just a matter of labour law, but is a social scourge, even if the general low level of awareness suggests a lack of sensitivity to the problem in local communities. In any case, the choice of communication channels has to be functional: if the target audience does not use the traditional media, it is pointless to use them.

The choice of communication strategies varies according to the territorial context: most of the interviewees state they use a full-blown communication plan (press releases, social networks), involving the press offices and contacting the local or national press to participate directly in the campaigns; in other cases, the interviewees prefer not to involve the press so as not to generate false expectations of an immediate change in their living conditions among workers and to not run the risk of speculation in the press about the conditions of exploitation of workers.

### 3.5 Monitoring and evaluation

How to set the goal of a campaign? On what basis do you evaluate if the campaign went well?

It is essential for all interviewees to evaluate the outcome of a campaign both in terms of quantity and quality. In many cases, meetings are held during the course of the campaign to assess progress and take corrective action.

To evaluate the outcome of the initiative it is necessary to establish from the beginning the objective of the campaign and the qualitative and quantitative indicators that might measure its impact and effectiveness.

For example, in the interviewees' experience, a campaign may aim to inform about the existence of the territorial organisation; promote knowledge of workers' rights; establish a contact relationship.

Indicators useful for monitoring the intervention might be: the number of workers who after the first contact turned to the union; the number of workers who sign up; the number of reports of cases of exploitation; the number of mentions and articles in the press. In some cases a database was established and data collection formats adopted

which are constantly updated. Most interviewees link the success of a campaign to the growth in the number of members and the impact this can have on the contract renewal phase in the sense of acquiring greater negotiating power.

Evaluation questions might be: was the time chosen right? Was the chosen location suitable? Did I meet a decent number of workers? Did I gain their interest and trust? In the following days, did any of these go to the territorial union headquarters to investigate the acquired information or report a negation of their rights? Did I collect data, information, images and useful testimonies to build a complete report of the situation to submit to the competent institutions and solicit their intervention? Did I receive positive feedback to posts on social media to publicise the initiative? Was I contacted by journalists wanting to learn more about the phenomenon? Did I receive requests from the territory (workers, delegates, local trade union leaders) for the replication of the initiative?

The interviewees believe that it would also be useful to monitor labour flows in the various geographical areas according to the harvesting phases (geo-referencing workers).

Finally, the majority of the interviewees expressed the need for a place in which to exchange their experiences also in order to ensure greater coordination. The interviewees, in fact, are aware that not all initiatives are replicable or immediately transferable, but they know that comparison is an essential moment to understand what to do and what not to do. According to the interviewees, study visits to the places of origin of the workers are important in order to understand people's lifestyles, meet the local unions and learn about the different ways of organising work.