



# The agrifood-migration nexus: migration regimes and the politics of labour shortages in Italy and Sweden

Alessandra Corrado, Lucio Pisacane & Cristián Alarcón Ferrari

**To cite this article:** Alessandra Corrado, Lucio Pisacane & Cristián Alarcón Ferrari (2024) The agrifood-migration nexus: migration regimes and the politics of labour shortages in Italy and Sweden, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50:5, 1252-1276, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279749](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279749)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279749>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 11 Dec 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 578



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 6 View citing articles [↗](#)

# The agrifood-migration nexus: migration regimes and the politics of labour shortages in Italy and Sweden

Alessandra Corrado <sup>a</sup>, Lucio Pisacane <sup>b</sup> and Cristián Alarcón Ferrari <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Political and Social Sciences, Center for rural development studies, University of Calabria, Italy; <sup>b</sup>National Research Council Institute of Research on Population and Social Policies, Rome, Italy;

<sup>c</sup>Division of Rural Development, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis has put the spotlight on the role of migrant workers as ‘essential’ for agrifood systems in Europe and elsewhere. The paper compares Italy and Sweden in terms of the interplay between labour shortages in agriculture and the policies facing migrant workers’ exploitation within their respective agrifood systems. Our cases show how labour shortages are politically constructed and have become a key issue in the possibility for migrants to integrate within the current corporate-environment food regime. There are clear indications that a shift in agriculture is reshaping migration policymaking; with important consequences for how labour migration is being redefined and the impact on the future of agrifood systems in Europe. We conclude that national migration policy responses are politically conditioned by the way governments use state mechanisms and regulation to implement decisions produced by ideological positions on the future of labour, agriculture and food supply at the national level.

## KEYWORDS

Migrant workers; labour shortages; migrant workers’ exploitation; food regime; migrant labour in agriculture

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has put the spotlight on the role of migrant workers as ‘essential’ for agrifood systems in Europe and elsewhere (Anderson, Poeschel, and Ruhs 2021; Kalantaryan, Mazza, and Scipioni 2020). However labour laws and regulations have proved ruinous in protecting the rights of migrant workers in recent decades including during the COVID-19 period (ILO 2020; Jones, Mudaliar, and Piper 2021; Palumbo and Corrado 2020). The blockage of intra-European and extra-European mobility to limit the circulation of COVID-19 generated a shortage of labour in the agrifood chain while making more evident the role of undocumented migrants ‘stuck’ in the country but with no access to worker rights and social protection measures (for other articles in this Special Issue concerned with COVID-19; see ; Anderson et al. 2024; Cheng et al., 2024; Kaczmarczyk, 2024; Kilkey and Baldassar, 2024.). Following the ongoing war in

**CONTACT** Cristián Alarcón Ferrari  Cristian-Alarcon.Ferrari@slu.se

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Ukraine, agriculture has continued to be an important source of employment for Ukrainian migrants and refugees (OECD 2022; 2023; Kaczmarczyk 2024 in this Special Issue).

Meanwhile the restructuring of agrifood systems brought an increase of wage workers in agriculture (i.e. in fruit and vegetable production), changes in farming and food chains including a growth in labour intensification and scale of production, increase of food packaging and processing and also resulted in deteriorated working conditions including the resurgence of piece-rate and gangmaster systems (Rye and Scott 2018).

Power asymmetries along the food chains dominated by a small number of transnational food producers and retailers, exacerbated by growing competition in international markets, have contributed to a price-squeeze in agriculture. Employers adjust to competitive conditions by leveraging workers' wages or seeking innovations in order to reduce prices (Gertel and Sippel 2014). Thus, the resulting labour demand in agrifood in the EU has been increasingly more reliant on migrant workers who compensated for the depopulation of rural areas and the reluctance of natives to do agricultural work. Employers in the agrifood system often claim that there is a 'need' for migrants to fill labour and skills shortages. However, in many cases such claims simply reflect employers' preferences for recruiting workers at the lowest possible wage, that means 'cheap labour' of the 'exploitable migrant' workers (Anderson, Poeschel, and Ruhs 2021; Ruhs and Anderson 2010). In this regard, we argue that labour and migrant labour shortages in the agrifood system are politically constructed rather than inevitable (Geddes and Scott 2010).

Furthermore, this paper aims to analyse migration/labour mobility policies shaped by the political dynamics around the Italian and Swedish agrifood systems. The interest in developing a comparison between the two countries arises from quantitative differences in terms of the number of migrant workers employed in agrifood systems and from parametrically opposed regulatory and policy approaches to migration, as made evident in the literature debate on international migration. However, dynamics of exploitation of migrant agrifood workers are found to be similar in both countries. In particular, we will address the following research questions: (1) How are migrant labour shortages in the agrifood system politically produced? And (2) How do national migration policies respond to the new challenges of recruitment of migrant workers to be employed in the agrifood sector?

In line with the Special Issue's focus on unpacking the mechanisms connecting migration and other systems (see Tagliacozzo, Pisacane, and Kilkey 2024), the paper will shed light on how (labour) migration policies can inform and be informed by the specific political dynamics of national agrifood systems within the European Union (EU) making evident *feedback loops* and *spillover effects* among systems at micro and meso level. Empirically, we focus on the following dimensions of the migration-agrifood nexus: (a) temporary or seasonal labour migration schemes; (b) migration/asylum and labour mobility policies; (c) mechanisms of labour recruitment or intermediations; (d) migration and other kind of policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine for overcoming the limitation to intra EU/international mobility, and (e) regulations addressing labour conditions in agriculture.

Following this introduction, the paper is organised into three parts. The first part presents the theoretical framework, which highlights our conceptual tools for the analysis of the migration-agrifood nexus. The second part presents the methodology to analyse and compare the cases of Italy and Sweden. The analysis of policy documents, national and international reports and scientific literature has been integrated with qualitative

interviews with employers' associations, trade unions and key informants. The third part presents the results of our study and the analysis of the two cases. This is followed by discussion and conclusions.

## 2. Agrifood-migration nexus: a conceptual framework

Important reviews on migration policy theories have stressed the need to approach both contingent political processes and long-term structural factors in the stability and shifts regarding migration politics at the national level (Massey et al. 1993). Also, an important body of literature emphasises the particular dynamics of migration in the European Union where one can discern specific migration regimes that reflect structural and ideological determinants of migration and incorporation of policies within the national context (Cvajner, Echeverría, and Sciortino 2018; Horvath, Amelina, and Peters 2017; Koslowski 1998). However, while looking at the definition and effects of migration regimes at the national level, their connections to the context of international relations and political economy must be considered; so, rather than as taken for granted, a regime must be understood as a 'space of negotiating practices', consisting of 'different actors, forces, discourses, interests and economies' (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). On the other hand, literature addressing migration linked to agriculture has shown the key role of wage differentials and differences in working conditions associated with migrant labour in agriculture (Kalantaryan et al. 2021; King, Lulle, and Melossi 2021).

In a historical and global perspective of capitalist development, migration or mobility regimes are conceived as functional to the creation, segmentation and control of labour; but also to the reduction or management of social conflict, to the search for legitimacy and consensus within national institutions and political parties, and to the definition of the international political order (Arrighi and Silver 1999; Silver and Slater 1999). Thus, labour mobility is related to the analysis of agrifood development in the world system (Arrighi and Piselli 1987; Wise and Veltmeyer 2016; Wallerstein 1974). Today, a neoliberal 'corporate-environmental food regime' implies convergence of environmental politics and corporate power concentration, especially through a retail-led reorganisation of food supply chains aimed at increasingly bifurcated class diets, distributing healthy and quality food to affluent consumers and unhealthy and standardised products to the poor (McMichael 2013).<sup>1</sup> Here, migrant labour has become an essential element in the production of 'cheap food' – not merely for wage costs but directly in terms of price – at the systemic level (Corrado, de Castro, and Perrotta 2016; Molinero-Gerbeau 2021; Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone 2016).

However, the interplay of labour migration/mobility policies and agrifood policies remains overlooked. Thus, our conceptual framework pays special attention to the analysis of the specificities and commonalities between migration politics and policy-making associated with agrifood systems in Sweden and Italy. Bearing the above in mind, we conceive the politics of migration regimes as an ideological and structural process where conditions for the opening and closing of borders for agricultural workers are contingent on internal and external political factors within the capitalist economy. This reproduces, and in some cases, it leads to, segmentation in labour markets and the structuring of multiple labour market arrangements. As our cases show, the multiple migration paths within the European migration regime and the

national migration regimes also mean multiple types of migrants and labourers (Mez-zadra and Neilson 2013). These forms of migration are defined by the rules and regulations that apply to migrants because of their primary citizenship, as is the case of third country nationals, and as EU citizens who become mobile workers within the EU. The European migration regime is characterised by a high degree of selective openness within Europe and increasing restrictions towards migrants from outside the EU – with EU borders progressively changing and affecting the conditions for migration. This migration regime is based on elements such as temporary labour, EU border control and externalisation, Dublin regulation,<sup>2</sup> and the Schengen System.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the analysis of politics within the national States and the EU, and the efforts of different actors to frame those regulations in the definition of migration regimes is key for the understanding of the connections between a corporate-environment food regime and a migration/labour mobility regime which are summarised in Table 1 below.

Following this perspective, we focus on the intersections between migration politics and rural/agrifood politics. These intersections take place through different forms of regulation, resulting in tensions between formal regulations based on State policy and law(s), and other forms of regulation of labour and migration in rural areas and agrifood systems, such as non-market mechanisms (i.e. feminisation and illegalisation) (Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2014). Hence the analytical links between formal regulation and the politics of migration and labour mobility become key for the understanding of similarities and differences in States’ approaches to migrant labour in agrifood. In this regard, as Ruhs and Anderson (2010) argue, institutional and regulatory frameworks of the labour market and wider public policies (e.g. welfare and social policies, immigration policies) cause ‘system effects’ that produce certain types of domestic labour entangled in particular social contexts. Both system effects and social context may be heavily, but not exclusively, influenced by the State’s laws and policies.

Analytically, we draw on Anderson and Ruhs to put special attention on the following elements in relation to agrifood systems in Italy and Sweden: (1) characteristics, dimensions, and determinants of employer demand for labour; (2) characteristics of and segmentations in labour supply; (3) employers’ recruitment practices and use of migrant labour and, (4) immigration and alternative responses to perceived staff shortages (Anderson and Ruhs 2010, 16).

**Table 1.** Food regime and migration/labour mobility.

	Corporate-environment Food Regime	Migration/Labour Mobility Regime
Feeding the world	Intensive production based on countries’ comparative advantage in liberalised markets	Circular/temporary labour migration (‘triple win’ perspective)
Role of agriculture in national development	Increased exports of agrifood produce along large retail-driven value chains	Just-in-time, flexible workers
Role of technology in agricultural development	Increased productivity through scientific innovation, adoption of technology, and modern management	Skilled workers, green jobs
Environmental stewardship/sustainability	Environmental and quality regulation, multifunctional/social agriculture	Fair labour/quality food certificated Refugees/asylum seekers included in rural areas

Source: Authors’ own elaboration and partly adapted from Wittman (2011).

### 3. Methodological approach

Our methodological approach encompassed a three step analysis of: (1) the main features of the policy; (2) the main agrifood structural characteristics that make the policy needed; (3) the role of the agrifood employers' associations and trade unions in shaping policies. The analysis was undertaken on scientific and grey literature, newspapers articles and policy documents from public and private actors. Additionally, interviews were conducted during 2022 with agrifood employers' associations and trade unions.<sup>4</sup> In Italy interviews included: FAI-CISL<sup>5</sup>, FLAI-CGIL<sup>6</sup>, USB<sup>7</sup>, Coldiretti<sup>8</sup>, CIA<sup>9</sup>, ARI.<sup>10</sup> In Sweden, we conducted interviews with a trade union officer working within Kommunal, Sweden's largest trade union representing among other workers employees in agriculture and forestry, and with an officer working with workforce and migration issues at the LRF.<sup>11</sup>

Italy and Sweden were selected as relevant cases because of the different characteristics of migrant labour force in the agricultural sector, the recent impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine in the agrifood restructuring processes, and also because of the significant differences in labour mobility/migration dynamics and formal/informal regulation, as already pointed out in the literature debate. In fact we start by noting that the migration regimes of North-Western and Southern Europe differ. North-Western European countries have economies more regulated and controlled with a larger intervention of stakeholders in the functioning of the labour market. This would reduce some of the advantages of migrant labour, including its typically lower cost. In Southern European countries, where immigration rates have tended to increase in the last three decades, more labour-intensive economies have had a larger demand for migrant labour especially for less-skilled jobs, such as in agriculture. Due to progressively more restrictive labour migration policies, asylum demand has increased (with rates of favourable resolutions lower) and the proportion of irregular migrants (a considerable part of which is due to overstaying) is higher. In Southern European countries the control of immigration is more difficult and over time several extraordinary regularisations occurred – as an *ex post* regulation instrument.<sup>12</sup> Also, larger informal economies make it easier to access the labour market without work or residence permits (Arango 2012; King, Lazaridis, and Tsardanidis 2000; Tagliacozzo, Pisacane, and Kilkey 2020).

However, under neoliberalism, changes in rural/agrifood as well as migration dynamics have challenged the distinctions between Southern and North-Western European models. This can be observed in the process of production intensification and food chain verticalisation from one side, and the role of the refugee crisis (partly due to restrictive labour migration policies) and the refugee dispersal policy in rural areas, as counterbalance to the negative trends in population and labour supply (i.e. in agriculture), from the other side (Alarcón Ferrari 2020; Galera, Machold, and Membretti 2019). While it has been noted that in 2020 about 5000–8000 migrant workers are employed in agricultural activities in Sweden, it has been estimated that there are around 370,000 migrant workers in agriculture in Italy, representing around 27% of the agricultural workforce employed legally in the country (Augre-Granier 2021; Caruso and Corrado 2022).<sup>13</sup> Yet, in the case of Italy these numbers need to be considered carefully as many workers in agriculture are undocumented migrants or are irregularly employed. Similar considerations must be made in relation to Sweden where employment conditions can differ due to the

country of origin of workers.<sup>14</sup> Thus, if the migrant workforce is a structural component of the contemporary agrifood system, then labour exploitation is a basic feature of it (Corrado, de Castro, and Perrotta 2016).

In more qualitative terms, there are important differences in the conditions for workforce migration. While Sweden in 2008 adopted an open and employer-led legislation on migration (that is regarded as one of the most open and liberalised workforce migration policies in the world), promoting a move away from the heavy influence of the trade unions within labour relations as well as labour migration to Sweden (Hedberg and Olofsson 2022), Italy is among those European countries with more formal restrictions and governmental control on workforce migration (SVR Research Unit/MPI Europe 2019). Yet, the effects of EU enlargement and asylum policy play a similar and important role in the regulation of workforce migration linked to agriculture in both countries. In Sweden, efforts to disperse refugees has resulted in a disproportionate settlement of refugees in rural areas (Wennström and Özge 2019), but few are employed in agriculture (Alarcón Ferrari 2020). In Italy, on the contrary, the agricultural sector has undergone a process of ‘refugeeization’ of agricultural labour whereby increasing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan and South-East Asia countries supply the flexible and low-waged labour the sector depends on (Caruso and Corrado 2022; Dines and Rigo 2015; Tagliacozzo, Pisacane, and Kilkey 2020).

## 4. Results and analysis

The agrifood-migration nexus in Italy and Sweden is characterised by a set of migration regulations which represent policies for migration adopted at the national and EU levels. A plurality of actors interact in the policy instruments we have identified. Table 2 summarises key migration regulations concerning the agrifood-migration mutual influences in Italy and Sweden.

### 4.1. Italy

The Italian migration model – as defined by Law No. 40/1998 and the Consolidated Act on Immigration (Law Decree 286/1998), and further strengthened by the right-wing Law No. 189/2002 – is evaluated as restrictive and rigid. This creates tensions with the rules and practices that regulate a post-Fordist labour market in the Italian agrifood system. In addition, a complex and even incoherent bureaucracy, coupled with a strong ideological bias against migration, hinders the legal entry and recruitment of workers, which also contributes to their vulnerable labour and living conditions (Corrado et al. 2018).

In 2011–2021, following the economic crisis, the quotas for seasonal workers almost halved (Table 3) and stopped correlating with the size and composition of the need for imported labour. So, the quota mechanism quickly turned into an instrument for regularising migrants already present in the country. In addition, the re-introduction of the principle of unavailability – a sort of labour market test – by Law No. 99/2013 further widened the gap between State regulation and the needs of labour due to the inability of the public employment centres to which the employer is obliged to turn to in order to carry out this type of verification. Thus, the rule is inconsistent with the very logic of the annual planning mechanism, based on the estimation of additional labour needs.



**Table 2.** Key regulations for migrant labour in the agrifood systems of Italy and Sweden.

Policy Instrument	Dimensions and channels of implementation	Actors involved
<b>ITALY</b>		
Quota entry system for Third country seasonal workers (Law No. 40/1998)	The number of workers to be admitted is defined in a yearly government decree setting quotas for different categories of workers.	Migration policy actors, agrifood trade unions, employers' associations
Consolidated Act on Immigration (Law Decree 286/1998)	The entry into Italy must normally take place only after the entire procedure for regular employment has been completed and according to the 'principle of unavailability'.	Single Immigration Desk, employers, employment centres
Law No. 189/2002 ('Bossi-Fini')	The entry of foreign workers into Italian territory relies on an employer-driven mechanism requiring a specific request from a resident employer. The residence permit is conditional on the possession of an employment contract.	Ministry of Interior, Employers
Law Decree no. 122/2020 The working and employment conditions of the host Member State also apply – if most favourable to the posted worker – to the employment relationship between the posted workers and the posting company. In addition, it is necessary to fully adjust the posted worker's pay to that of an Italian worker of the same category by applying the most representative collective agreement.	Transposition of the Posting Workers Directive 2018/957/EU Parliament, employers, workers	
Law Decree No. 142/2015	Transposition of Directive 2013/33/EU on standards for the reception of applicants for international protection and Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection status. Asylum seekers in Italy can work after sixty days from the submission of the application for asylum	Ministry of Interior, Employers, Refugee workers
Law 199/2016 on labour exploitation and illegal gangmastering	By amending the Criminal Code (art. 603bis), the Law targets both abusive gangmasters and employers who take advantage of workers' neediness and insecurity, and establishes that victims of labour exploitation can have access to article 18 of the Consolidated Act on immigration (Legislative Decree n. 286/98), which provides victims of violence or severe exploitation with a long-term programme of assistance and social integration, as well as (in the case of non-EU migrants) a residence permit for social protection, regardless of whether or not they cooperate with the competent authorities.	Ministry of Interior, Employers, workers, agrifood trade unions, employers' associations
Decree Law n.130/2020 (or 'Lamorgese Decree')	A new residence permit for 'special protection' is introduced for cases in which the foreigner's application for international protection has not been granted and at the same time expulsion or refoulement is prohibited. Convertibility into work permits is	



<p>This Decree was introduced to repair some effects of the Security Decree or 'Salvini Decree' (Decree Law No. 113/2018 converted into Law No. 132/2018) that, by abolishing the residence permit for humanitarian reasons, caused an increase in the number of irregular migrants. Legislative Decree n. 34/2020 known as 'Relief Decree', art. 103.</p>	<p>provided for certain types of residence permits (including special protection and disaster permits). Ministry of Interior, Employers, workers, agrifood trade unions, employers' associations</p>	<p>Government, Ministry of Interior, Employers, workers, agrifood trade unions, employers' associations</p>
<p>Interministerial Decree No. 66430/2022 'Framework of the social conditionality regime in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 and Regulation (EU) 2021/2116'</p>	<p>The regularisation scheme of undeclared labour relations only applied to the agrifood, care and domestic work sectors, and aimed to cover all those doing undeclared work, whether they were EU migrants, irregular or regular non-EU migrants, or Italian citizens. For non-EU migrants, the scheme established two channels. The first allowed employers to apply for a fixed-term employment contract for foreign nationals who were in the country before 8 March 2020 or to declare the existence of an irregular employment relationship with Italian citizens or foreign nationals. Undocumented migrants could receive a residence permit for work reasons. The second channel allowed foreign citizens with a residence permit that expired after 31 October 2019 who were able to prove that they had worked in the sectors concerned before this date to apply for a six-month temporary residence permit in order to look for a job in these sectors. The temporary permit could be converted into a longer residence permit for work reasons. In both channels, following the end of an employment relationship, foreign nationals had the possibility of applying for a one-year residence permit to seek employment.</p> <p>The Interministerial Decree fulfils a coordination function between different ministries for the application of social conditionality for granting aid introduced by CAP reform. The decree establishes a system of data flows concerning the executive decisions taken by the competent authorities, relating to social legislation on employment, as a result of the checks carried out on farmers and other beneficiaries receiving direct payments. Violations of employment and social legislation constitute a cross-compliance for farmers receiving direct payments; in case of such violations, farmers will lose all or part of their direct payments.</p>	<p>Government, Ministry of Interior, Employers, workers, agrifood trade unions, employers' associations</p> <p>Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry, Minister of the Interior, Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Minister of Health</p>
<p>Ordinance 872/2022 of the Civil Defence</p>	<p>The Ordinance provides that, with only an application for a residence permit linked to EU temporary protection, Ukrainians will be able to work both subordinately, including on a seasonal basis, and on a self-employed basis. The pass linked to EU</p>	<p>Government, Ministry of Interior, Employers, workers, agrifood trade unions, employers' associations</p> <p>Ministry of Interior, Employers, Ukrainian refugees and potential agrifood workers, agrifood trade unions, employers' associations</p>

(Continued)



Table 2. Continued.

Policy Instrument	Dimensions and channels of implementation	Actors involved
	protection has a limited duration: one year, renewable for two further periods of six months each. Compared to the long time it takes to issue residence permits, in the case of Ukrainian refugees, employment could be much quicker.	
<b>SWEDEN</b>		
Amendments to the temporary ban on entry into Sweden during the COVID-19 emergency	Government decision, entered into force on 8 June 2020. List of groups of workers with essential functions in Sweden, included seasonal workers in the agricultural, forestry and horticulture sectors.	Government, Swedish Migration Agency
New rules for work permits starting 1 June 2022 Government's legislative proposal 2021/22:134	One important change is that from 1 June, an employment contract must be attached to the application in order for the Swedish Migration Agency to grant a work permit.	Government, Parliament, Swedish Migration Agency
Special rules for berry pickers who are Third-country nationals. Work permits and residence permits issued by the Swedish Migration Agency	These rules require an application for a residency permit and also a work permit. These rules distinguish between applications as individual workers or through a foreign staffing company. In the latter case, the staffing agency needs to have a branch registered in Sweden and provide the required information about the terms of employment	Government, Parliament, Trade Unions, Employers, Swedish Migration Agency
Work permits for seasonal workers Seasonal Workers Directive (or Seasonal Employment Directive) transposed in 2018 Government's legislative proposal 2017/18:108	Citizens of a country outside the EU / EEA and Switzerland who have been offered a seasonal job in Sweden by an employer established in Sweden can get a work permit for seasonal work.	EU, Parliament, Government, Swedish Migration Agency, (Interest groups)
Rules establishing additional requirements for work permits in certain industries, including agriculture and forestry Rules from the Swedish Migration Agency, 2012	Requirements for reporting on working conditions to Swedish Migration Agency and requirement that the employer must show that the salary can be guaranteed for the time that an employment offer is valid in connection with the application for a work permit.	Swedish Migration Agency
New rules for posted workers in relation to EU regulations 30 July 2020. Proposal 2019/20:150	The new rule aims to ensure that posted workers receive similar conditions as workers have in Sweden. This means stricter requirements for employers who send workers to Sweden. Only 3% of posted workers to Sweden in 2019 went to agriculture, forestry and fishing. The largest group from Thailand; this posting is concentrated in the months of August and September	EU, Parliament, Swedish Work Environment Authority
Temporary Protection Directive (EU) Amendment to the ordinance entered into force on 26 April 2022.	Rules to regulate arrival of Ukrainians in the context of the war	EU, Government, Swedish Migration Agency

Source: Authors' own.

**Table 3.** Programmed annual quotas (total and seasonal labour, in thousands round-off upwards), 2001–2022.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	89	80	80	80	100	550	252	230	80	184	60	53	48	33	31	31	31	31	31	31	70	76
Seasonal labour	39	60	69	50	45	80	80	80	80	80	60	35	30	15	13	13	17	18	18	18	42	44

Source: Authors' own elaboration using data from the Italian Ministry of Interior.

Within the context of quotas for seasonal workers, the inflow of migrant labour into the labour market is indirectly shaped by institutional regulations, but it also occurs largely outside of them, driven by migrants' strategies and the interest of employers in having an adaptable and cheap workforce. However, this informal channel results in problems for the farmers. As explained by a representative of FAI CISL:

(...) the migration governance in Italy and therefore the agrifood sector workforce is often left at the management of informal mediators, not planned at national level and at the end of the day [this is] a problem for the farmer.

The specific agrifood-migration nexus is also pointed out in the words of a representative of FLAI CGIL:

I believe that migrant workers are contributing to the growth of the Italian agrifood systems coming from a very peculiar individual perspective: very poor living conditions in the country of origin and suddenly very poor conditions in a rich agrifood production sector as the Italian one. The actual working condition of migrants in the sector is so degrading that often there are no significant differences with the country of origin. This means a frustration of the migration project of many thousands of migrants and could soon lead to relevant forms of social tensions.

In the words of a USB representative, the apparent contradiction of the system is expressed as follows:

The nexus between migration governance and agrifood sector in Italy is twofold: from one side the workers' quotas to be employed in the sector and on the other side the presence of a large number of irregular migrants present in Italy and already employed in the agrifood sector. So I would say that the migration policy partially governs and influences the Italian agrifood labour market because a large amount of the labour force is irregular or employed in irregular employment conditions. (...) As for today the migration policies are unable to respond to the needs of the agrifood sector and at the same time the sector is finding 'reality shaped' solutions to the labour shortage without the capacity to influence the national migration policy.

Since 2020, employers' organisations have obtained an increase in annual quotas for seasonal labourers and gained a new role in the management of the entry system. Quotas of workers in the agricultural sector are reserved for applications submitted by employers' organisations (on behalf of employers). In 2020 and 2021, these reserved quotas on the total units for seasonal workers in the agricultural and tourist-hotel sectors were respectively 6000 out of a total of 18,000 units, and 14,000 out of a total of 42,000 units – compared to an effective demand of more than 200,000 workers. In general, both trade unions and employers' organisations are dissatisfied with labour migration regulation. One element criticised is the seasonal or temporary migration approach that means seasonal workers employed for precisely the necessary time before returning to the country of origin. This circular temporary migration model is fostered by the 2014 EU Seasonal Workers Directive. As the representative of FLAI CGIL states:

The circular migration idea contrasts the evolution of the modern agrifood system that is increasingly deseasonalised, also due to the support of subsidies. The production is now spread all over the year and technology has dramatically changed the sector. The circular approach is therefore very much utilitarian for intensive agriculture that is basically exploiting workers to increase profit margins. (Representative of FLAI CGIL).

Recently, a ‘Made in Italy food consensus’ has emerged through the progressive construction of Italian agrifood as a guarantee of healthiness and an expression of tradition and place identity (Corrado, Lo Cascio, and Perrotta 2018). This construction has been translated into a political and market strategy: the idea that quality is the distinctive characteristic of Italian agriculture. Quality food production has been associated with fair labour conditions too. In fact, following the growing concern regarding the exploitative conditions experienced by migrant workers, several policy initiatives have been promoted. Since 2012, following the transposition of the EU Employer Sanctions Directive 2009/52/EC30 into Italian legislation (Legislative Decree n. 109/2012), which criminally punishes employers illegally hiring irregular third-country nationals, employers have preferred to hire Eastern European workers (i.e. Romanians, Bulgarians, and Poles), as the irregular employment of EU workers is less risky for them. In addition, EU workers are less collectively organised and are often willing to accept lower wages and longer working hours – also by virtue of a shorter migration project, a circular migration dynamic relying on the origin countries to cover reproductive costs (i.e. children offspring, schools, houses, elderly dependents, pensions) – unlike more experienced and long-staying national groups, which have very few possibilities for circular mobility, such as Africans (Kilkey and Urzi 2017).

Along with the pressure exerted by large-scale retailers, Law n. 199/2016 which establishes criminal penalties, has functioned as a further major deterrent for farmers to resort to labour exploitation and illegal gangmastering. It also provides for the articulation of the Network of Quality Agricultural Work – established to register companies respecting fair labour and employment conditions in the agricultural sector – into territorial sections aimed at developing active labour market policies and promoting regular labour intermediation. However, the development of these territorial sections has been slow due to the low level of cooperation among the institutional bodies involved and from business: out of a total of 740,000 agricultural firms in Italy, only 6397 were listed in the network as of February 2022 (INPS data).

On 20 February 2020, the Inter-Institutional Committee on labour exploitation adopted a National Action Plan to prevent and tackle illegal gangmastering (*caporalato*) and labour exploitation in agriculture (2020–2022). The Plan received support from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the European Commission resulting in a multi-institutional and wider approach to address migrant agricultural workers’ exploitation. To date, its impact remains to be seen. However, there is strong evidence that short-term programmes are inadequate to efficiently combat illegal gangmastering and to address housing issues (Caruso and Corrado 2022).

With the COVID-19 emergency in 2020 and the labour shortage turning into a mainstream narrative, migrant workers in the agrifood sector have been considered ‘essential workers’ (see also Kaczmarczyk in this Special Issue). However, many migrant workers in the sector, especially those with an irregular or precarious administrative status, have remained in vulnerable working and living conditions. In 2020 the Italian Government promoted a scheme to formalise irregular employment relationships targeted at undocumented migrant agrifood workers and carers. The requirements to apply and the application procedures contained significant shortcomings that severely limited its scope, leaving numerous migrants in situations of irregularity and precariousness (Tagliacozzo, Pisacane, and Kilkey 2020).

All representatives of the trade unions interviewed criticised the regularisation scheme, pointing out its poor effectiveness and the failure both as a migration policy and as agrifood policy, especially due to the heaviness and slowness of bureaucratic procedures, the employer-driven approach applied, and the ‘cultural problem around migration policy’ in Italy.

The 2020 regularisation was the migration policy instrument preferred by the Government due to the push factor of the pandemic and to the impossibility of implementing ‘green corridors’ to facilitate the arrival of seasonal workers, in particular from Romania and Bulgaria (FLAI-CGIL and CIA). In fact, restrictive measures such as ‘active quarantine’, which implies that foreign workers can work but their work and living spaces must be strictly separated, were not suitable for the size of Italian farms and their capacity to equip themselves; unlike their German counterparts (interview with CIA representative). Indeed, Italy established bilateral agreements with India and Morocco which allowed workers to travel for the agricultural season by private charter flights organised by farmers’ organisations.

According to the farmers’ organisation Coldiretti, the largest agricultural organisation at the national and EU level, with 1.5 million members and 800 offices, and a key actor in the definition of agrifood policy, the regularisation of migrant workers would be the solution. Also, in order to preserve the reputation of the Italian agrifood system:

One solution may be to offer regular work that allows agricultural workers based in the informal settlements in the South [of Italy] to re-enter the circuit of regularity and transparency in order to be able to stay in Italy. (...) Addressing the problem means making decisions that are not politically favorable (...) We cannot afford to maintain or feed a slum as a country system. If we are part of the G7 we cannot afford to have slums (...) When I read the surveys from abroad they stain the sector, and instead it is a sector that for 99% of cases is made up of good businesses, good workers and transparency. Yes there are exceptions, but let’s face them.

In this respect, in April 2022, 200 million euros were allocated to municipalities to deal with irregular settlements of farm labourers – one of the objectives of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, in the framework of the Next Generation EU programme following the COVID-19 crisis.

Labour shortages in agriculture are also related to the flight of foreign workers (i.e. Romanians and Bulgarians) from the sector. According to a 2022 survey of tomato growers who are members of Confindustria, between 25 and 30 per cent of those workers who had worked the previous year for the first time did not accept seasonal re-employment (Valentini 2022). CIA and Coldiretti as well as some producers and agronomists interviewed pointed out the access to basic income (*reddito di cittadinanza*) as a disincentive to employment in agriculture for both Italian and foreign workers. In addition, farmers’ organisations consider that in some EU countries (Germany and the Netherlands) there is more flexibility on seasonal work and this has repercussions for pay packets, which can be considerably larger than in Italy, where taxation and contributions end up shearing the remuneration.

In addition to quantitative terms, the problem of labour shortages is also understood in qualitative terms, respect to the skills of the workers. In this regard, while complaining about the abandonment by the most experienced workers, the CIA representative

emphasises concerns about the ability to cope with sustainability-oriented agrifood innovations. When considering the structural changes in the sector:

The number of working days in the agricultural sector is increasing and this is a positive fact because it means that businesses tend to become more structured. There is a very slight decrease in the number of agricultural enterprises, (...) but basically the labour force remains steady and the working days grow. So it means that people are more stable in our sector (...). [There is] the need for companies to have workers (...) who are those linked to a more innovative part of agriculture. That's where the shortage is. It's not so easy to find workers who are today trained from the point of view of, for example, technological innovations which are required in the agricultural sector. (...) If you look, the whole issue of sustainability is closely linked to technological innovation, which will lead our companies to have to think not only in terms of tools and resources, but also in terms of skills suited to the transition required. This is an issue of very specialised skills in the sector.

In 2021, the in-depth investigation on the phenomenon of irregular gangmastering in agriculture, launched by the Joint Parliamentary Committees on Labour and Agriculture, advocated more appropriate rules for an orderly and continuous entry of foreign workers, interventions to ensure labour intermediation, appropriate housing and transport systems, and to remove the imbalances and distortions in agrifood value chains (caused by the concentration of power in large retailers and price-based competition) but also investments in technological innovation and production sustainability.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4.2. Sweden

In Sweden, state decisions on migration policy are taken by the Parliament and the Government, and policy decisions are operationalised through migration laws and regulations and the Swedish Migration Agency is commissioned to act thereby. A specific annual letter of appropriation decided by the government directs the migration agency's activities and objectives and a special migration court can interpret migration laws and decisions by the Migration Agency. The Swedish Migration Agency also elaborates annual reports and forecasts concerning migration trends and scenarios.<sup>16</sup> In the terms of the Swedish Migration Agency one of the goals of the migration policy in Sweden is to promote a needs-driven labour immigration.

**Table 4.** Work Permits for Agriculture, gardening, forestry and fishery workers.

Year	Work Permits for Agriculture, gardening, forestry and fishery workers	Work Permits Berry pickers and planters	Total
2022	1000	6534	7534
2021	1607	5546	7153
2020	1170	3490	4660
2019	787	6162	6949
2018	528	4882	5410
2017	434	3043	3477
2016	268	3199	3467
2015	466	3784	4250
2014	16	2885	2901
2013	475	5915	6390
2012	376	5708	6084
2011	536	2821	3357
2010	391	4508	4899

Source: Authors' own elaboration using data from the Swedish Migration Agency.



Key elements of policy making concerning migration in Sweden are the commissions of inquiry that conduct investigations and recommendations for specific policy goals. Policy investigations can be carried out by Parliament, government ministries, public agencies, county councils, municipal governments, or other public bodies (Petersson 2015). These investigations, including consultation with experts and referrals with the opinions of interest groups, aim to foster deliberation before proposing government bills.<sup>17</sup>

As Neergaard and Woolfson (2017) explain, one of the characteristics of migrants in Sweden is the increasing fragmentation of their legal status and the existence of a hierarchy of formal entitlements for migrants: naturalised migrants, migrant with a permanent residency, migrants with other Nordic citizenship, EU mobile workers, third country temporary labour migrants, asylum applicants and undocumented migrants (most of whom are rejected refugee applicants). Third country temporary labour migrants are in a particularly vulnerable position as their right to reside and work is tied to maintaining the employment relationship with a particular employer, or to finding another employer within three months and reapplying for residence (Neergaard and Woolfson 2017, 208–210).

Especially relevant for labour in agriculture are third country temporary labour migrants and EU mobile workers. According to estimations generated by several actors during the context of the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine, the agriculture and forestry sectors need 8000 seasonal workers per year in Sweden (5000 and 3000 respectively). Using data from the Swedish Migration Agency, Table 4 shows work permits for berry pickers and planters compared to work permits for other activities in agriculture, gardening and forestry.<sup>18</sup>

Two key actors in the political discussions about regulations for workforce migration to agriculture in Sweden are the trade union Kommunal, which has a specific political focus on workers in agriculture, and the Swedish Association of Farmers LRF, which represents around 140,000 farmers. Recently, both organisations have adopted the term ‘green sector’ to frame their work concerning the nexus between agriculture, food production and the environment. This is a relevant terminological shift as issues of labour in agriculture are now more deeply articulated in the light of new concerns about agriculture and politics of sustainability and the environment. This is manifested in the discussion about provision of competences for this green sector and the food system, where different actors have identified new needs in terms of workers and skills and have argued that there is a lack of an appropriate workforce to address these needs. Though it is deeply dependent on agriculture, the political meaning of the green sector goes beyond activities that in the past were framed in terms of agricultural politics. Thus, ongoing discussions about food security and the implementation of a national food policy have added political relevance to the meaning of a green sector and the role of agriculture and forestry thereby. From our interview with a staff member at the Swedish Farmer Association, two key issues emerged. First, he explained that only a minority of the workers in agriculture, forestry and other activities of the green sector in Sweden have full-time employment (INT. 1. Sweden).<sup>19</sup> Secondly, our key informant explained that in some cases the activities for seasonal work only last some weeks and they vary according to the crops and geographical areas of agriculture in Sweden. In this regard, the need for securing the right workers for those agricultural seasons gained the attention of LRF before the COVID-19

crisis and the COVID-19 crisis triggered the need to find a more stable fix for what recently has been more clearly defined in terms of a labour shortage in agriculture. The problem of a labour shortage has been widely presented as the main challenge for key agricultural and forestry activities in Sweden and some actors often sound alarms about impending crises for activities such as harvests of some vegetables and planting and clearing of trees. For our key informant at LRF, the labour shortage arises from a mix of domestic factors and also changes in relation to the type of foreign workforce moving to Sweden for seasonal work in agriculture:

The general norm in Sweden is full time work. The social security system is structured to try to get people to work full-time today. For seasonal workers, the unemployment insurance fund becomes irrelevant because an individual loses his/her national insurance quickly. This makes seasonal employment unattractive. Then, in such a context, the sector [agriculture] looks for workers outside Sweden. It is above all for the very short seasons, as for example, seasons of six weeks, three months, maybe 6 months. In that case it is foreign workers who are employed. (INT.1. Sweden)

Particularly, and regarding the process of securing seasonal workers, the interviewee explained that for farmers who want to employ migrant workers they have to take into consideration the bureaucratic procedures and the risk of making a mistake. Hence farmers tend to rely on experts that can work through the bureaucratic procedures and make sure that all norms are followed to employ seasonal workers. In addition, the interviewee highlighted that in the last 5 years, workers from third countries are coming to work in Sweden too.

LRF's tendency to position itself in the context of migrant workforce can be analysed in its submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Labour Immigration 'An improved system for labor immigration' (SOU 2021, 5), which was made public in 2021:

LRF supports an open and clear system that allows labour immigration and an open society that enables the green business community to produce food, raw materials, services and climate benefits. The operations in the agricultural sector are seasonal. This affects when staff are needed. The way the Swedish labour market policy is designed makes it difficult to get staff locally for the work that is done for a few weeks or months. Both the labour market policy and the social security system are built on the basis of a full-time paradigm. This makes employment for short and medium-term seasons uninteresting/unattractive as this kind of employment has serious consequences for the situation of individuals in the social security system. Our sector is in a difficult situation as the parliament has decided that food production should increase. Yet, we lack an influx of staff in the right numbers, with the right skills, at the right time. (Referral 2021/8762)

It is relevant to note that the role of the EU Directive regulating season work was addressed in the Inquiry:

The Seasonal Workers Directive aims to meet the structural need for seasonal labour within the EU, contribute to the efficient management of migration flows and ensure reasonable working and living conditions for seasonal workers. A third-country national who has been offered a fixed-term employment as a seasonal worker in Sweden by an employer established here must be granted a permit for seasonal work in the form of a work permit for seasonal work if the stay does not exceed 90 days, or a residence and work permit for seasonal work if the stay exceeds 90 days. (SOU 2021, 5)

For the trade union Kommunal, a main problem in agriculture continues to be some employers' abusive practices and the consequences of this for the workers, and the differences in salaries between workers under collective bargains and agricultural workers with individual contracts. Regarding the first problem, the interviewee at Kommunal stressed that in case of problems with working conditions or the application of collective bargaining, then it is the worker who has to leave the country. Yet, in such cases, the union would like to see sanctions for the employers, but without affecting the workers. In relation to wage differentials, according to the interview those in collective bargaining contracts can be paid more than double the hourly wage compared to others; the union has identified workers being paid 40 Swedish Krona for an hour of work in agriculture in circumstances where collective bargains establish 126 Krona per hour. Here, the explanation about a labour shortage in agriculture differs from the explanation of LRF, as for Kommunal, this.

(...) has to do with the fact that the sector is not attractive and that the employers see the opportunity to make gains using a cheap workforce. (INT.2. Sweden)

These different views have to do with how the question of labour shortage in agriculture is understood and the reasons explaining this. While for the Kommunal this is clearly a matter of wage differentials, for the representative of LRF it has to do with the type of work demanded and inadequate short-term contracts in relation to social security regulation in Sweden. The need to count on seasonal workers became central in the discussion during the COVID-19 crisis and recently during the war in Ukraine. Within these contexts, worries about labour shortage have been amply expressed by representatives from farmers and forestry companies. A public strategy to face this problem received special attention during the COVID-19 crisis. This strategy was delegated to the Swedish Growth Agency, which mobilised resources to provide skills and competencies training for the agriculture sector. This is taking a long term view and is based on a diagnosis and possible solution to seasonal work in agriculture. A report from the Swedish Growth Agency states:

(...) employers in the green industries feel that the rules regarding foreign labour are complicated. In addition to simplifying the regulations, efforts may be needed to reduce dependence on foreign labour. The state could promote projects where people receive a shorter education in, for example, forest planting or harvesting, as an introduction to work in the green industries. Efforts to increase the attractiveness of these works are also necessary. (78)

As shown above, defining a labour shortage in agriculture is connected to understanding the role of seasonal workers and the legal procedures to ensure those workers. This is deeply intertwined with the types of agriculture developed in Sweden and to fully understand this it is important to bear in mind that the volume of workers for seasonal work in agriculture is estimated at around 8000 workers per year. Though this does not mean many workers in comparative terms, it does mean a number of workers with specific competences who are vital for the agricultural sector needs. Sometimes these competences are based on manual labour and other times are based on skills to operate advanced agriculture machinery and technology. In this regard, our interviews with farmers and public officials show that to find a good approach to the agrifood-migration

nexus is difficult as an option for long term employment of migrants in Sweden. Also, while some farmers are willing to employ foreign workers, they consider it especially challenging to find migrant workers with the specific skills needed to operate advanced agricultural machineries. Even in the context of a new national food policy that aims at providing jobs for migrants in rural areas, employment in agriculture continues to be a difficult goal to reach and is not the main focus of intervention.

Political proposals to reverse an important component of the migration policy of 2008 characterise the ongoing debate in Sweden. In May 2022, the minister of immigration and integration of the social democratic government, who was accompanied by the leader of the union for construction workers in Sweden, announced that a key political goal included in legal reforms proposed by the social democratic government aimed at legislation to ensure that low qualified workers already living in Sweden obtain those low qualified jobs in the country. Another aspect of this proposal is to focus the regulation of migration on the issue of labour shortages. In the terms of the then government Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Anders Ygeman,

The conservative party [their migration policy] repealed the examination of the labour market needs and this led to extensive labour immigration, often in occupations that require low skills where there is no shortage of labour. (Regeringen 2022)

Thus, to face this problem, the previous government considered that:

What is needed is an objective examination of the needs in the labour market. (Regeringen 2022).

The proposal was rapidly criticised by employer associations including the Swedish Federation of Green Employers. In the view of this federation, the government has a politics of protectionism, and the problem would be that:

There is a need for labour immigration also in industries where there are occupations with lower educational requirements. In order for a profession to be classified as having a shortage, there must be few jobseekers, but many vacancies. There is a risk that jobs with low formal requirements will not be classified as shortages even if employers never succeed in filling jobs within the country. An authority-based labour market examination can therefore make it impossible to recruit for jobs in several industries. (Gröna arbetsgivare 2022)

Discussions about a migration problem framed in terms of labour shortages gets inseparably entangled with a rethinking of the politics of how different labour markets are regulated in Sweden. This is especially relevant for the analysis of the situation of workers coming to Sweden for seasonal activities in the berry industry and of workers from Ukraine. As one can observe in [Table 4](#) above, berry pickers, along with planters, are classified as separate workers in the official statistics. Also, as shown in the literature, berry picking has a very specific labour demand following the expansion of markets (Hedberg 2013), which depends on recruiting practices outside Sweden and operates through networks of personal contacts in order to first move and then work in Sweden for the season. The special conditions that apply to these workers are partly explained in the several conflicts arising from their working conditions, which have even led to indebtedness to work and sometimes no monetary gains due to weather conditions, making berry picking an activity that is not paid enough to afford the costs of coming to work in Sweden. In this regard, the working conditions for these third

country workers includes a mix of agreements obtained through the union Kommunal, collective bargains and labour standards regulated by the Swedish Work Environment Authority. For the case of workers from Ukraine, recent journalist investigations have identified cases where workers in horticulture have been forced to work in extreme hardship and even at risk to their health (Fyrk 2022). As one of these cases shows, the efforts of another trade union to improve their working conditions and achieve similar salaries and conditions as those established in collective agreements, has been faced with counter arguments based on the special migration policies applicable to these workers.

These struggles around policy and policymaking show the central place of the State in the disputes about migrant regulations for the capitalist development of the agrifood system in Sweden, but also important tensions between political and economic interests. As the agreement to form the recent right-wing government in Sweden shows, limiting workforce migration and increasing the minimum salary required to employ migrant workers creates conflicts of interest between some employers and parties selectively opposing migration to Sweden. This agreement includes more stringent rules for workforce migration and also new minimum salaries for migrant workers in Sweden. Yet, as expressed by the representative of the business association of Sweden:

This risks competitiveness. It is growth-inhibiting in a situation where companies are crying out for labour and sometimes have to go to countries outside the EU to find it (Jan-Olof Jacke, quoted in Nyman 2022).

This shows that the migration regime in Sweden and its ongoing restructuration can be partly understood as a 'space of negotiating practices'. As we discuss below, our findings suggest that in the case of Sweden and Italy the political construction of labour shortages are key for the analysis of how labour migration policies can inform and be informed by the specific dynamics of national agrifood systems within the EU and the capitalist-driven transformations of agrifood systems.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

In what follows, we organise our discussions and conclusion in relation to our two research questions, namely, (1) How are migrant labour shortages in the agrifood system politically produced? And (2) How do national migration policies respond to the new challenges of recruitment of migrant workers to be employed in the agrifood sector?

In Italy and Sweden, the COVID-19 crisis triggered a debate on what has been defined in terms of labour shortages in agriculture. But the political construction of labour shortage is also linked to the unattractive conditions of the sector and the problems related to the employment of migrant workers. The vulnerability of these workers is caused by employer abuse, and the asylum and migration regulations. The intersections between discourses on labour shortages, migration and public policy can be analysed by considering: employer demand for labour; segmentations in labour supply; employer recruitment practices and use of migrant labour and, immigration and alternative responses to perceived staff shortages.

The cases of Sweden and Italy indicate that there is an ongoing political construction of labour shortage in agrifood. Though in quantitative terms in Sweden this sector does not employ large numbers of migrant workers as in Italy, the labour power and skills of

migrant workers, and the wages those receive are key for the development of agrifood in both countries. In this regard, the regulatory role of the EU poses a fundamental question about the formation and regulation of labour markets for the agrifood sector. In fact, EU rules contribute to the formation of multiple (or differently segmented) labour markets from where workers can potentially be recruited. Recruiting migrant workers in agriculture in the two countries is not only a matter of lower wages because the requirement of specific skills in some agricultural activities continues to play a key role in selection processes. In both countries it is particularly challenging to find migrant workers with the specific skills needed to operate in technologically innovative agriculture.

Our two cases show that demand for skills in agriculture cannot be understood without a proper explanation of the structural changes in agricultural labour, productivity increases through incorporation of new technologies in agriculture and the political construction of labour shortage for some agricultural activities where manual labour is key (also due to the expansion of markets). In both countries, labour issues in agriculture are today articulated in the light of discourses on sustainability, quality and the environment, which are in turn related to productivity, innovation and competitiveness goals. However, while the dependence of the agrifood system on migrant workers is now fully recognised and there are intentions to make green jobs more attractive, the recognition of training for the skills needed for these changes has led to divergent views on how to expand the inflow of foreign workers and to simplify the related procedures. In this regard, the analysis of the nexus between agrifood and migration highlights the role of new ideological aspects in the process of capitalist accumulation through agriculture today. This perspective helps us to understand how national agricultural processes are locked into labour and migration movements, and work organisation practices that are not only nationally bounded, but transnational and global in their structure. The cases of Italy and Sweden show that the capitalist development of agriculture and food production produces specific tensions between economic and political interests and ideologies shaping labour migration policy in relation to the agrifood system. A manifestation of this tension is the ongoing political struggle to define labour shortages for agrifood systems. In this regard, we have shown that independent of the size of migrant labour in agriculture, there is today a structural dependency on those migrant workers where a combination of skills and salaries determines specific labour demands in the development of capitalist agriculture in both countries. Thus, wage differentials and labour conditions within agrifood systems show that instruments to select and channel migrants in agrifood and rural areas reflect how socio-economic position and access to labour rights of migrants are shaped by the capacity of representatives of agribusiness and trade unions to get their interests represented in the policies and regulations enacting migration regimes locally.

As shown, an analytical focus on wage differentials and labour conditions in agrifood allows us to explain migration patterns more deeply within the European migration regime. Migration across more developed advanced countries is basically rooted in wage differentials across segments of the global working class. Within this context, defamilisation of agriculture, concentration of agrifood industrial production processes on fewer and larger farms, the development of long food chains and the increasing role of corporations have been accompanied by labour processes that require a large number of flexible workers. Hard working conditions and lower wages make working in the



agrifood system less attractive compared to other sectors, discouraging native-born workers from engaging in it. In addition, different levels of technological penetration and transformation of agrifood systems creates qualitative and quantitative differences in terms of labour needs for agriculture across countries.

Labour shortages are politically constructed and become a key issue in migrants' possibilities of integration in agrifood systems under a corporate-environment food regime. In this regard, the main conclusion of our study is that there are clear indications that a reorientation of agrifood in the context of environmental politics and sustainability concerns is reshaping migration policymaking with important consequences for how labour migration is being redefined along with the struggles for the future of agrifood systems in Europe. Thus, the responses of national migration policies to new visions for agrifood in Europe are politically contingent on how governments use State mechanisms and regulation to implement political decisions produced through ideological differences about the future of labour, agriculture and food provision at the national level.

## Notes

1. Food regimes theory reformulates the state – market relationship within a specific time and space in order to make capital accumulation possible and stable in agriculture. Every food regime and transitional period has redefined development policy and has revisited the purpose and significance of agriculture and food technologies, with implications for natural resources, food security/sovereignty, rural livelihoods, and labour-production relationships. In this sense, the food regime theory provides an original and historically comparative perspective on the ecological and political relations of modern capitalism (McMichael 2013, 7–9).
2. The Dublin Regulation is the EU law setting out which country is responsible for looking at an individual's asylum application. This is usually the country where the asylum seeker first arrives in the EU.
3. The Schengen system is one of the core achievements of the European integration process. Set up by the Schengen Convention entered into force 1993, it permits all those persons who are present in any of the signatory States – which consist of most of the EU's Member States, and several non-EU Member States besides – to cross the borders between these States without being checked.
4. We complemented our empirical analysis with findings from interviews conducted during 2021–2022 with key informants and farmers employing immigrants in their farms in the Uppsala Region in Sweden (3 interviews) and in Calabria Region in Italy (5 interviews).
5. Federazione Agricola Alimentare Ambientale Industriale Italiana – Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori
6. Federazione Lavoratori Agroindustria – Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro
7. Unione Sindacale di Base
8. Confederazione Nazionale Coltivatori Diretti
9. Confederazione italiana agricoltori
10. Associazione Rurale Italiana
11. Federation of Swedish Farmers
12. In Italy, extraordinary regularisations were set in 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2012, and 2021 due to the Covid-19 emergency.
13. Italy is one of the first three EU member States (together with Spain and The Netherlands) for agrifood production and value of production (Eurostat data).
14. As reported by the ILO the estimated proportion of the agricultural workforce in informal employment is 40% in Italy compared to 3.4% in Sweden (Williams 2019). However, abusive



and exploitative practices have been detected in Sweden too (Iossa and Selberg 2022; SVR Research Unit/MPI Europe 2019).

15. Some of the solutions advocated are: combating unfair trade practices, supporting ethical production chains, promoting supply chain agreements, and adopting social cross-compliance for the public aid granted to farms, in accordance with the new Common Agricultural Policy Cfr. Commissioni parlamentari riunite XI Lavoro e XIII Agricoltura, Indagine conoscitiva sul fenomeno del caporalato in agricoltura, 12 May 2021.
16. In the context of the war in Ukraine, and as part of its mission of elaborating scenarios and forecasts about migration, the Swedish Migration Agency produced three scenarios for the arrivals of Ukrainian refugees in Sweden; one scenario estimating 50,000 refugees, a second scenario estimating 80,000 refugees and a third scenario estimating 200,000 refugees arriving in Sweden.
17. Migration is an area of several recent policy investigations and today's proposals for new migration regulations have followed those investigations. The new government formed in October 2022 aims at reforming the migration policy by also launching commissions of inquiry and building upon the conclusions of previous commissions.
18. The Agency includes permits for fishery workers along with work permits for agriculture, gardening and forestry.
19. The statistics for 2020 concerning the number of workers in Swedish agriculture shows that there are 143,000 permanently employed, but only 20,000 are full time employed.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## ORCID

Alessandra Corrado  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3817-0235>

Lucio Pisacane  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6764-161X>

Cristián Alarcón Ferrari  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3760-1830>

## References

- Alarcón Ferrari, C. 2020. "Contemporary Land Questions in Sweden, Far-right Populist Strategies and Challenges for Inclusionary Rural Development." *Sociologia Ruralis* 60 (4): 833–856. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12319>.
- Anderson, B., U. Khadka, and M. Ruhs. 2024. "Demand for Migrant Workers: Institutional System Effects Beyond National Borders." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50 (5): 1202–1225. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279741.
- Anderson, B., F. Poeschel, and M. Ruhs. 2021. "Rethinking Labour Migration: Covid-19, Essential Work, and Systemic Resilience." *Comparative Migration Studies* 9 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00252-2>.
- Anderson, B., and M. Ruhs. 2010. "Migrant Workers: Who Needs Them? A Framework for the Analysis of Staff Shortages, Immigration, and Public Policy." In *Who Needs Migrant Workers? Labour shortages, immigration, and public policy*, edited by M. Ruhs and B. Anderson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arango, J. 2012. "Early Starters and Latecomers. Comparing Countries of Immigration and Immigration Regimes in Europe." In *European Immigrations Trends, Structures and Policy Implications*, edited by M. Okólski, 45–64. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Arrighi, G., and F. Piselli. 1987. "Capitalist Development in Hostile Environments: Feuds, Class Struggles, and Migrations in a Peripheral Region of Southern Italy." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 10 (4): 649–751.

- Arrighi, G., and B. Silver. 1999. *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Augre-Granier, M.-L. 2021. *Migrant Seasonal Workers in the European Agricultural Sector*. Bruxelles: European Parliamentary Research Service. European Union.
- Bonanno, A., and J. S. B. Cavalcanti, eds. 2014. *Labor Relations in Globalized Food*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Caruso, F., and A. Corrado. 2022. "Essential but Exploitable: Migrant Agrifood Workers in Italy and Spain." *European Journal of Migration and Law* 24 (2): 193–216.
- Cheng, Y., B. Yeoh, J. Lee, J. Water, and P. Yang. 2024. "Migration Governance and Higher Education During a Pandemic: Policy (mis)Alignments and International Postgraduate Students' Experiences in Singapore and the UK." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50 (5): 1138–1156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279731>.
- Corrado, A., F. Caruso, M. Lo Cascio, M. Nori, L. Palumbo, and A. Triandafyllidou. 2018. *Is Italian Agriculture a 'Pull Factor' for Irregular Migration; and, If So, Why?* Florence: European Policy Institute, Open Society Foundation Report.
- Corrado, A., C. de Castro, and D. Perrotta, eds. 2016. *Migration and Agriculture. Mobility and Change in the Mediterranean Area*. London: Routledge.
- Corrado, A., M. Lo Cascio, and D. Perrotta. 2018. "Introduzione. Per un'analisi critica delle filiere e dei sistemi agroalimentari in Italia." *Meridiana* 93.
- Cvajner, M., G. Echeverría, and G. Sciortino. 2018. "What do we Talk About When we Talk About Migration Regimes? The Diverse Theoretical Roots of an Increasingly Popular Concept." In *Was ist ein Migrationsregime? What Is a Migration Regime?*, edited by A. Pott, C. Rass, and F. Wolff, 65–80. Wiesbaden.: Springer VS.
- Dines, N., and E. Rigo. 2015. "Postcolonial Citizenships Between Representation, Borders and the 'Refugeeization' of the Workforce: Critical Reflections on Migrant Agricultural Labor in the Italian Mezzogiorno." In *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe*, edited by S. Ponzanesi and G. Colpani, 155–172. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Fyrk, J. 2022. "Branscherna där ukrainare riskerar utnyttjas: 'Vet inte vad som gäller'." <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/branscherna-dar-ukrainare-riskerar-utnyttjas-vet-inte-vad-som-galler/>.
- Galera, G., I. Machold, and A. Membretti, eds. 2019. *Alpine Refugees: Immigration at the Core of Europe*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Geddes, A., and S. Scott. 2010. "UK Food Businesses' Reliance on Low-Wage Migrant Labour: A Case of Choice or Constraint?" In *Who Needs Migrant Workers?: Labour Shortages, Immigration, and Public Policy*, edited by B. Ruhs and B. Anderson, 193–218. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gertel, J., and S. R. Sippel. 2014. *Seasonal Workers in Mediterranean Agriculture. The Social Costs of Eating Fresh*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Gröna arbetsgivare. 2022. Gröna arbetsgivare starkt kritiska till regeringens arbetsmarknadsprövning." <https://via.tt.se/pressmeddelande/grona-arbetsgivare-starkt-kritiska-till-regeringens-arbetsmarknadsprovning?publisherId=2754661&releaseId=3321422>.
- Hedberg, C. 2013. "'Grapes of Wrath'? Power Spatialities and Aspects of Labour in the Wild Berry Global Commodity Chain." *Competition & Change* 17 (1): 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529412Z.00000000025>.
- Hedberg, C., and I. Olofsson. 2022. "Negotiating the Wild West: Variegated Neoliberalisation of the Swedish Labour Migration Regime and the Wild Berry Migration Industry." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 54 (1): 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X211048195>.
- Horvath, K., A. Amelina, and K. Peters. 2017. "Re-Thinking the Politics of Migration." On the Uses and Challenges of Regime Perspectives for Migration Research." *Migration Studies* 5 (3): 301–314. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnx055>
- ILO. 2020. *Seasonal Migrant Workers' Schemes: Rethinking Fundamental Principles and Mechanisms in Light of COVID-19*. Policy Brief. Geneva: ILO.

- Iossa, A., and N. Selberg. 2022. "Socio-Legal Aspects of Labour Market Segmentation in the Agrifood Sector in Sweden: Spatio-Temporal Dimensions." *European Journal of Migration and Law* 24 (2): 241–264.
- Jones, K., S. Mudaliar, and N. Piper. 2021. *Locked Down and in Limbo: The Global Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Worker Rights and Recruitment*. Geneva.: International Labour Office.
- Kaczmarczyk, P. 2024. "Covid-19 and Labour Market Adjustments: Policies, Foreign Labour and Structural Shifts." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50 (5): 1226–1251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279745>.
- Kalantaryan, S., J. Mazza, and M. Scipioni. 2020. *Meeting Labour Demand in Agriculture in Times of Covid 19 Pandemic, JRC Technical Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Kalantaryan, S., M. Scipioni, F. Natale, and A. Alessandrini. 2021. "Immigration and Integration in Rural Areas and the Agricultural Sector: An EU Perspective." *Journal of Rural Studies* 88: 462–472. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.04.017>.
- Kilkey, M., and L. Baldassar. 2024. "Conditioning Grandparent Care-Labour Mobility at the Care-Migration Systems Nexus: Australia and the UK." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50 (5): 1157–1176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279732>.
- Kilkey, M., and D. Urzi. 2017. "Social Reproduction in Sicily's Agricultural Sector: Migration Status and Context of Reception." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43 (15): 2573–2590. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1286971>.
- King, R., G. Lazaridis, and C. Tsardanidis, eds. 2000. *Eldorado or Fortress? Migration in Southern Europe*. London: Macmillan.
- King, R., A. Lulle, and E. Melossi. 2021. "New Perspectives on the Agriculture–Migration Nexus." *Journal of Rural Studies* 85: 52–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.05.004>.
- Koslowski, R. 1998. "European Migration Regimes: Emerging, Enlarging and Deteriorating." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 24 (4): 735–749. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.1998.9976663>.
- Massey, D. S., J. Arango, G. Hugo, A. Kouaouci, A. Pellegrino, and J. E. Taylor. 1993. "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal." *Population and Development Review*, 431–466. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938462>
- McMichael, P. 2013. *Food Regimes and Agrarian Questions*, 21–60. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Mezzadra, S., and B. Neilson. 2013. *Border as Method, or The Multiplication of Labour*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Molinero-Gerbeau, Y. 2021. "The Problem is not Covid-19, It's the Model! Industrial Agriculture and Migrant Farm Labour in the EU." *Eurochoices* 20 (3): 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1746-692X.12308>.
- Molinero-Gerbeau, Y. M., and G. Avallone. 2016. "Producing Cheap Food and Labour: Migrations and Agriculture in the Capitalistic World-Ecology." *Social Change Review* 14 (2): 121–148.
- Neergaard, A., and C. Woolfson. 2017. "Sweden: A model in dissolution?." In *Trade Unions and Migrant Workers: New Contexts and Challenges in Europe*, edited by S. Marino, J. Roosblad, and R. Penninx. Cheltenham: Edward Edgar.
- Nyman, J. 2022. "Näringslivets högsta topp kritiserar regeringen Kristersson: 'Vi är oroade'." Accessed November 11, 2022. <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/naringslivets-hogsta-topp-kritiserar-regeringen-kristersson-vi-ar-oroad/>.
- OECD. 2022. *The Potential Contribution of Ukrainian Refugees to the Labour Force in European Host Countries*. OECD. Accessed January 5, 2023. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/e88a6a55-en.pdf?expires=1700495385&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=044C1632CBFA5E9A9536E172CC2-E5A1B>.
- OECD. 2023. *What We Know About the Skills and Early Labour Market Outcomes of Refugees from Ukraine*. OECD. Accessed January 5, 2023. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/c7e694aa-en.pdf?expires=1700494859&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=FBB2CB3BB434923B6A5A7F4E66BF25EC>.

- Palumbo, L., and A. Corrado. 2020. *Covid-19, Agrifood Systems and Migrant Labour. The Situation in Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden*. Florence, Brussels: European University Institute and Open Society Foundations.
- Petersson, O. 2015. "Rational Politics: Commissions of Inquiry and the Referral System in Sweden." In *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics*, edited by J. Pierre, 650–662. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Regeringen. 2022. "Pressträff med integrations- och migrationsminister Anders Ygeman om arbetskraftsinvandring." 27 april. [Pressmeddelande]. Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2022/04/presstraff-med-integrations-ochmigrationsminister-anders-ygeman-om-arbetskraftsinvandring/>.
- Ruhs, M., and B. Anderson. 2010. *Who Needs Migrant Workers?: Labour Shortages, Immigration, and Public Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rye, J. F., and S. Scott. 2018. "International Labour Migration and Food Production in Rural Europe: A Review of the Evidence." *Sociologia Ruralis* 58 (4): 928–952. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12208>.
- Silver, B. J., and E. Slater. 1999. "The Social Origins of World Hegemonies." In *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, edited by G. Arrighi and B. J. Silver, 151–216. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- SOU. 2021. *Ett Förbättrat System för Arbetskraftsinvandring*. Stockholm. Delbetänkande av Utredningen om arbetskraftsinvandring Statens Offentliga Utredningar.
- SVR Research Unit/MPI Europe (The Expert Council's Research Unit/Migration Policy Institute Europe). 2019. *Legal Migration for Work and Training: Mobility Options to Europe for Those not in Need of Protection*. Berlin: SVR GmbH.
- Tagliacozzo, S., L. Pisacane, and M. Kilkey. 2020. "The Interplay Between Structural and Systemic Vulnerability During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Migrant Agricultural Workers in Informal Settlements in Southern Italy." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47 (9): 1903–1921. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1857230>.
- Tagliacozzo, S., L. Pisacane, and M. Kilkey. 2024. "A System-Thinking Approach for Migration Studies: An Introduction." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50 (5): 1099–1117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2279708>.
- Tsianos, V., and S. Karakayali. 2010. "Transnational Migration and the Emergence of the European Border Regime: An Ethnographic Analysis." *European Journal of Social Theory* 13 (3): 373–387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431010371761>.
- Valentini, C. 2022. "In Gara per Attrarre Immigrati." *Italia Oggi* 12: 9. <https://www.italiaoggi.it/news/in-gara-per-attrarre-immigrati-2548138>.
- Wallerstein, E. 1974. *The Modern World-System. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wennström, J., and Ö Özge. 2019. "Political Hedgehogs: The Geographical Sorting of Refugees in Sweden." IFN Working Paper, No. 1266, Research Institute of Industrial Economics (IFN), Stockholm.
- Williams, C. C. 2019. *Tackling Undeclared Work in the Agricultural Sector: A Learning Resource*. Brussels: European Platform Undeclared Work. European Commission.
- Wise, R. D., and H. Veltmeyer. 2016. *Agrarian Change, Migration and Development*. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing.
- Wittman, H. 2011. "Food Sovereignty: A New Rights Framework for Food and Nature?" *Environment and Society* 2 (1): 87–105.