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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Migrants subjected to contemporary forms of slavery in the Italian agricultural sector

APG23 would like to express its gratitude to the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, for drawing the attention on the labour and living conditions of migrant workers in the Italian agricultural sector.

“Migrant workers all over the world are too often subjected to unethical recruitment processes, indecent work conditions and lack of social protection.”¹ In Italy, labour exploitation, including forced labour, predominately affects migrant workers in agriculture, textile production, construction, domestic work,² food service industry and prostitution.

In particular in the Italian South, the standards of living of foreign agricultural labourers are so indecent that many NGOs described their conditions as a modern form of slavery,³ which caused 1500 deaths over the past six years.⁴ Migrants, many of whom are asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected or whose residency permits have expired, are susceptible to modern slavery due to corrupt recruitment intermediaries (“caporali”) and limited government resources to implement effective strategies against their labour exploitation.

We as APG23 would like to draw attention on another reality present on the Italian soil, the so called Rosarno of the North, that is hardly mentioned in the press due to the fact that it is located in the rich north west of Italy. In an agricultural area of almost 50 km, at the centre of which there is the municipality of Saluzzo, from June to October gather over 10,000 seasonal workers (of which 42% are African) who work as labourers in 7,950 farms.⁵ They are mainly engaged in fruit harvesting in one of the most important fruit and vegetable districts in northern Italy, 60 km from Turin.

In the city of Saluzzo there is a seasonal reception centre, where over 1,500 migrant workers find shelter (an estimated 25% of the total). However, those for whom there is no place in the centre managed by associations and the municipality sleep on the street: the luckiest in tents, the others on the sidewalk, with a cardboard and a blanket.

There are important differences with the reality of southern Italy. Working conditions, according to what the same workers tell and the trade union organizations report, are better if compared to those of Rosarno or Foggia, at least on paper: the expected pay is just over 7 euros gross per hour, for 8 hours a day, even if several workers report that they often work much longer.

However, there are also cases of undeclared work and, above all, “grey” jobs (i.e. wages and contributions paid only in part): in 2018 the CGIL started about 90 disputes, even if the

¹ OHCHR, “New migration pact highlights key role of business in protecting migrants, say UN experts”, 20/12/2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24035&LangID=E>.

² Global Slavery Index, 2018 Italy findings, <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/country-studies/italy/>.

³ Jones, T. and A. Awokoya, “Are your tinned tomatoes picked by slave labour?”, The Guardian, 20/06/2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/20/tomatoes-italy-mafia-migrant-labour-modern-slavery?fbclid=IwAR2Wc9SuzIxNVPfuwyhpNYbXemjQQiXeTWexz3Ewt2RQk7C4IKBP-lvnCoM>.

⁴ Mangano, A., “The silent massacre of the fields, where Italians and migrants die together”, L’Espresso, 15/06/2018, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2018/06/11/news/la-strage-silenziosa-dei-campi-dove-italiani-e-migranti-sono-uniti-dalla-morte-1.323615>.

⁵ Sala, D., “The difficult situation of laborers in Saluzzo”, Open Migration, 25/07/2019, https://openmigration.org/analisi/la-difficile-situazione-dei-braccianti-di-saluzzo/?fbclid=IwAR15AzwCLavwm0-w8uuNIDE05BUL4sUTpaiexn9_gYPW7Ft0Wgp71ztg5Qc.

registered irregularities were more than 400. Furthermore, in May 2019 there were three arrests for illegal recruitment by gang masters (“caporalato”).⁶

The problem stems from the fact that there is no efficient matching between demand and supply of labour;⁷ in addition, housing for seasonal workers are not provided, even if workers are functional to the system itself.

The regulatory framework to provide manpower for seasonal work is still the same of twenty years ago: the Bossi-Fini law and the flow decree system, which now provides just 1,200 seasonal workers for the entire province of Cuneo, when only in the Saluzzo area they need ten times as much. Moreover, this regulation is no longer relevant, as today migrants who need to work as seasonal workers are already on the national territory.

There is a very strong connection between social marginality and job insecurity. As a result of some bad reception models and a lack of policies for the effective integration of migrants in the social fabric, we are observing an enormous deterioration of the living conditions of asylum seekers: people are kept in a bubble for months and then sent away from centres without the slightest idea of how the system works, what their rights are and what to expect. The current trend in Italy in immigration management is creating the perfect labourers willing to be exploited. In general, what we are witnessing is an involitional process that is facilitated by having very adaptable manpower, vulnerable and who suffers from discrimination and political disenfranchisement, in a climate of tension in which racially motivated attacks have risen sharply, tripling between 2017 and 2018.⁸

The effect of the first “security decree”, which at the end of 2018 abrogated humanitarian protection, is to increase the number of people in an irregular situation, invisible and without rights, with the consequence of possibly causing an explosive social situation at all levels. This legislation is extremely restrictive and has raised numerous questions of constitutionality (art.10 of the Italian Constitution): it was approved without adequate measures to guarantee the stay of those who were already on Italian territory in possession of humanitarian protection and to regularize those who, even without a residence permit, were included in virtuous integration paths.

We, as APG23, believe that no man should be forced to have no alternative to sleeping on the ground, on a cardboard thrown to cover the asphalt. No one should be desperate for work, up to the point of accepting any job in the fields, even if the wages are far below, and the hours far above, union standards. Nobody should be afraid of reporting exploitation out of fear of being arrested or even deported.

Despite the crime of “caporalato” is regulated by Law 199/2016, the measures adopted by the institutions have not been sufficiently implemented and so far they have proved completely ineffective. Those actions, undertaken following a merely emergency logic without any prospect or long-term alternative, have favoured contexts of serious exploitation. For these reasons we oppose operations that simply act on the removal of the most visible aspects of agricultural exploitation, without acting on the causes that pertain to the entire production system.

We reiterate that solutions must be found to ensure legal working relationships from North to South Italy: the agricultural world is called, with increasing urgency, to structure supply chains that guarantee fair remuneration and the right working conditions for local agricultural entrepreneurs and those who harvest fruit for a living.

⁶ Boratto, L., “Three arrests for gang masters in the Saluzzo area: fruit migrants paid less than 5 euros per hour”, *La Stampa*, 23/05/2019, <https://www.lastampa.it/cuneo/2019/05/23/news/tre-arresti-per-caporalato-nel-saluzzese-migranti-della-frutta-pagati-meno-di-5-euro-all-ora-1.33703798>.

⁷ On 17/07/2019 the first experimentation of a public counter for the supply and demand of labour in agriculture was activated in Saluzzo, <http://www.targatocn.it/2019/07/19/sommario/agricoltura/leggi-notizia/argomenti/agricoltura/articolo/contrasto-al-caporalato-a-saluzzo-nasce-il-primo-sportello-di-collocamento-pubblico-in-agricoltura.html>.

⁸ Tondo, L., “Italy's intelligence agency warns of rise in racist attacks”, *The Guardian*, 28/02/2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/28/italys-intelligence-agency-warns-of-rise-in-racist-attacks>.

“Caporalato” and modern slavery are the effect of a system, not the cause of it: the logical result of putting profit before any other consideration,⁹ the effect of ultra-liberalism applied to agriculture, with the gain of multinationals, food corporations, supermarkets and also consumers, who follow the imperative of producing and buying at the lowest cost. But what is the human cost of these products?

As long as governmental policies will continue to leave the most vulnerable behind, these contemporary forms of slavery will continue to thrive unquestioned, shaped by socioeconomic dynamics, and we will never achieve target 8.7 of the 2030 Agenda on the eradication of slavery, so as to prevent these human rights violations and punishing the perpetrators.

If inclusive policies were not to be approved, more and more people are going to face vulnerable situations in the future, as more migration is expected in the coming years, due to conflict trends, labour market changes, demographic developments and also climate change. Sustainable development, economy, migration, justice are all interlinked facets of our world,¹⁰ and we would like to stress that, as stated by the SR, “in order to effectively eradicate such exploitation in all its forms, Governments and other stakeholders must address the root causes of poverty, social exclusion and all forms of discrimination,”¹¹ putting into practice the conditions so that a true development of the whole human family could really take place.

⁹ Jones, T. and A. Awokoya, “Are your tinned tomatoes picked by slave labour?”, The Guardian, 20/06/2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/20/tomatoes-italy-mafia-migrant-labour-modern-slavery?fbclid=IwAR2Wc9SuzIxNVPfuwyhpNYbXemjQQiXeTWexz3Ewt2RQk7C4IKBP-lvnCoM>.

¹⁰ Doctors with Africa CUAMM, “Stop the exploitation of migrant agricultural workers in Italy”, The British Medical Journal Opinion, 27/03/2019, <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2019/03/27/stop-the-exploitation-of-migrant-agricultural-workers-in-italy/>.

¹¹ Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Thematic report on challenges and lessons in combating contemporary forms of slavery (2013) A/HRC/24/43.