SafeHabitus

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES AND IMPROVING THE ATTRACTIVENESS TO WORKERS OF JOBS IN AGRICULTURE

D5.3

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Executive Summary

This report examines the health, safety and wellbeing challenges faced by inter- and intra-EU mobile agricultural workers, adopting a broad occupational safety and health (OSH) perspective that extends beyond accidents and specific illnesses to encompass the social, legal and material conditions of work and everyday life. These include recruitment and mobility regimes, employment relations, labour organisation, housing arrangements, access to healthcare, and exposure to violence, coercion and discrimination. The central analytical concern is how contemporary migrant-dependent agricultural systems produce and distribute risks across differently positioned workers, and how these dynamics shape both vulnerability and the perceived attractiveness of agricultural work.

The analysis draws on multi-sited qualitative fieldwork conducted within the SafeHabitus project (Horizon Europe, GA 101084270), combining in-depth research in a major Southern European agro-industrial enclave with complementary fieldwork in key countries of origin. In total, 169 farmworkers and 44 stakeholders were interviewed across Spain, Morocco and Romania. While the case study provides a detailed empirical anchor, the report explicitly situates its findings within wider European labour and migration configurations.

Three analytically central worker profiles are identified: workers hired at origin under state-managed temporary migration schemes, who experience heightened dependency and control; migrant workers outside such schemes, often exposed to extreme precarity and exclusion; and intra-EU mobile workers, whose formal freedom of movement mitigates some legal risks without guaranteeing secure employment or decent conditions. Across these profiles, OSH risks emerge as cumulative and socially produced, spanning physically demanding work, environmental exposure, insecure housing, limited access to healthcare and multiple forms of violence.

By integrating origin and destination perspectives, the report shows that vulnerability and attractiveness are shaped along entire migration trajectories rather than at destination alone. It concludes that improving OSH and making agricultural work genuinely attractive requires transforming the labour, housing and migration regimes that currently underpin structural dependency and preventable harm. The policy recommendations developed address these dynamics at EU, national and local levels, and are intended to inform debates across migrant-dependent agricultural contexts in Europe.

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Introduction

This report examines the health, safety and wellbeing challenges faced by inter- and intra-EU mobile agricultural workers, with particular attention to how these are shaped by mobility regimes, labour organisation and institutional arrangements. Rather than focusing narrowly on accidents or specific pathologies, it adopts a broad OSH perspective that encompasses the social, legal and material conditions of work and everyday life, including recruitment and mobility, employment relations, labour processes, housing, access to healthcare, and exposure to violence, coercion and discrimination.

The question is not only whether workers fall ill or are injured, but how the structural organisation of agriculture produces and distributes health risks among differently positioned migrant groups. In that sense, the report focuses mainly on risks which arise during work, and/or in company premises, and/or through the interaction with companies, employers and crew supervisors, but also in any other significant social and health risk which may occur without direct company involvement but is inseparable from these people's trajectories as farmworkers.

This research forms part of SafeHabitus – *Strengthening Farm Health and Safety Knowledge and Innovation Systems* (Horizon Europe, Grant Agreement No. 101084270). The project brings together institutions and stakeholders across EU Member States to analyse policies, engage communities of practice and co-develop tools to strengthen social sustainability in agriculture. Within SafeHabitus, Work Package 5, *From Fork to Farms and Workers*, focuses on agri-food chain dynamics and their implications for workers' health and safety. Task 5.4 involves qualitative fieldwork specifically designed to assess the OSH-related experiences of third-country and intra-European migrant farmworkers. This document therefore constitutes the expected results report of the study developed under that task, corresponding to Deliverable 5.3, *Understanding the challenges and improving the attractiveness to workers of jobs in agriculture*.

In line with the original definition of the Task and Deliverable, this report adopts a worker-centred, primarily descriptive approach: its main objective is to document and assess migrant farmworkers' experiences of OSH issues linked to their work, mobility trajectories and the socio-structural positions that emerge from the interaction of these dimensions. The core analytical strategy foregrounds workers' own accounts collected both at destination and in countries of origin, to capture how risks, harms and constraints are experienced and navigated in practice. These testimonies are complemented by a smaller but deliberately diverse set of stakeholder perspectives—including trade unions, civil society organisations, employers and public authorities—which help contextualise workers' experiences and

illuminate the institutional dynamics shaping them, without displacing workers' voices from the centre of the analysis.

The research draws on literature showing that agriculture in the global "core" (the dominant, most highly developed areas within global capitalism, including Western Europe among other regions) increasingly depends on migrant labour due to productive restructuring and shifting rural labour markets (Molinero-Gerbeau, 2020a). The industrial rationalisation of work processes, business concentration and export orientation fuel demand for low-paid, often unstable labour that local populations supply neither in sufficient numbers, nor under sufficiently precarious, disempowered conditions. Temporary migration schemes, recruitment intermediaries and selective regularisation channel workers from the global and European periphery into intensive farming (Ruiz Ramírez et al., 2024; Molinero-Gerbeau & Avallone, 2018).

Across the EU, migrant farmworkers sustain agri-food value chains, yet often face precarious jobs, rights violations and poor housing, as well as high health risks only partially protected by existing OSH regulation (Castillo-Rojas-Marcos & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2024). Studies document long hours, low wages, piece-rate systems, informal employment and persistent obstacles to social protection and healthcare (Corrado & Caruso, 2022). These labourers find themselves isolated in poor and segregated housing and thus, those sustaining an *essential* sector remain invisible and exploited (Ruíz Ramírez et al., 2024).

Within this wider frame, the literature highlights a "Mediterranean model" of agro-industry in Spain, Italy and Greece. It is characterised by intensive, technically advanced horticulture combined with high capitalisation, capital concentration and large volumes of cheap manual labour. Several agro-enclaves based on that industrialised model, fully inserted in global export markets but encompassing small sub-national areas, have proliferated across those Southern European countries (Castillo-Rojas-Marcos et al., 2026). They rely heavily on containing labour costs through mixed recruitment regimes—irregular or semi-formal channels all across the region, combined with formal hiring-at-origin schemes specifically in Spain (Checa y Olmos et al., 2023; Molinero-Gerbeau & López-Sala, 2022). Shantytowns, employer-controlled accommodation and abusive practices emerge as recurrent features, not exceptions. The prevalence of all those elements and their strong impacts on health, safety and wellbeing justify this study's broad OSH approach, looking beyond risks and harm strictly produced through the performance of work tasks.

Empirically, the analysis of these dynamics is grounded—as foreseen in the original design of Work Package 5—in an in-depth case study of the agro-industrial enclave of Huelva (Spain). It includes primary fieldwork conducted in Huelva, complemented by two additional fieldwork phases in the main countries of origin of the sector's workforce: Morocco and Romania. Huelva was selected as a particularly illustrative site in which several key features

of migrant-dependent agricultural regimes in Europe converge with exceptional clarity, including: the near-total migrantisation of its workforce, well-documented problems in living and working conditions, the significant presence of both third-country nationals and intra-European migrants, and the coexistence of high levels of informality and irregularity with instances of intensive state supervision, notably through a large-scale state-managed temporary migration programme (*all of which are discussed in detail in the next section*).

In other words, the Huelva case makes especially visible a set of core trends of analytical interest while simultaneously bringing together, within a single context, characteristics that are otherwise distributed across different European agricultural settings, thereby enhancing the transferability of the inferences drawn from the findings. While the empirical focus is therefore geographically situated, the dynamics analysed and the policy challenges identified extend well beyond this specific context, reflecting broader patterns affecting mobile agricultural workers across several EU contexts.

The study employs a multi-sited qualitative design, based on semi-structured interviews with 169 farmworkers (67 in Huelva, 61 in Morocco and 41 in Romania) and 44 diverse stakeholders (40 in Huelva and 4 in Morocco). Fieldwork in Huelva included interviews with workers from all the three described main profiles, as well as with trade unions, NGOs, public officials, and employers. Complementary fieldwork in Morocco and Romania involved interviews with current, former, and prospective workers, along with institutional actors, allowing reconstruction of recruitment trajectories, expectations, and health-related experiences across sites. This was crucial to understanding the background conditions that shape migration pathways in the two principal countries of origin for Huelva's strawberry workforce.

Overall, the findings show that migrant farmworkers' health, safety and wellbeing cannot be separated from the labour regimes and migration policies governing agricultural enclave. Focusing on the specific case-study, it is argued that temporary contracts, spatial segregation, racialisation and irregular or precarious legal status produce structurally vulnerable lives: bodies absorbing the costs of intensive production and biographies marked by constant risk of losing work, housing, legal status or healthcare. By foregrounding workers' accounts and situating them within Huelva's political economy, the report offers empirically grounded evidence for debates on labour rights, OSH and migration policy in European agriculture.

The report is structured as follows: the next section contextualises the Huelva (Spain) case-study, presenting its main characteristics that need to be acknowledged. Then, the methodological approach is outlined, explaining it is based on a multi-sited qualitative design that integrates perspectives from both destination and origin. After that, the findings from the fieldwork in Huelva are presented, identifying the main health, safety and wellbeing risks

faced by farmworkers related to labour organisation, mobility regimes, and the institutional and power structures shaping the enclave. This description draws primarily on workers' accounts and is later complemented by stakeholder perspectives.

The findings from the Morocco and Romania fieldworks are then examined to contextualise and deepen the Huelva results by shedding light on workers' backgrounds and migration rationales; the Romanian case also provides a comparative perspective on alternative EU agricultural settings between which intra-European labourers choose. The discussion and conclusions integrate these findings and reflect on their implications for understanding OSH challenges among inter- and intra-EU mobile agricultural workers. The report concludes with policy recommendations at EU, national and local levels, aimed at addressing the structural drivers of vulnerability identified. While grounded in a specific case-study, these recommendations target dynamics common across migrant-dependent agricultural contexts in the EU and are intended to inform broader policy debates.

Contextualisation of the case-study

Huelva is a Spanish province located in Andalusia, an autonomous region with the highest agricultural production in the country—and mainland Spain's southernmost area. Since the 1980s, export-oriented production under plastic tunnels on increasingly specialised farms has expanded rapidly, transforming the province into one of Spain's—and Europe's—leading agro-enclaves (Reigada, 2022). Just-in-time pressures from European supermarket chains further reinforce cost-cutting strategies and the demand for a flexible, segmented labour force (Molinero, 2020a). The enclave concentrates land, capital and labour while externalising the social and environmental costs.

The incorporation of migrant labour has long been a defining feature of the sector. Labour shortages began to be filled by the first North African workers in the 1990s, and the migrant presence has continued to grow ever since. Today, migrants account for more than 75% of all annual agricultural contracts in the province—and an even higher proportion if one considers only manual labour in the industrialised strawberry-growing areas, or includes those working without a contract (Molinero-Gerbeau, 2025). In total, approximately 120,000 agricultural contracts are issued each year in Huelva, of which around 95,000 correspond to migrant workers. Moreover, about 80% of all contracts are concentrated in just seven of the province's eighty municipalities—the main strawberry-producing localities (Defensor del Pueblo Andaluz, 2021).

A key element in the large-scale incorporation of foreign workers has been the deployment of the hiring-at-origin scheme. This recruitment system, governed by specific national

regulations (the GECCO Order) and bilateral agreements with countries of origin, enables employers to recruit workers while they are still in their home countries, bring them to Spain for periods of up to nine months a year, and return them once their labour is no longer required. Under GECCO rules, hired-at-origin workers hold work and residence permits only for the duration of their contract; once it ends, they must either leave the country immediately or fall into an irregular administrative situation (Molinero-Gerbeau, 2020b).

Huelva's strawberry production is highly seasonal, with most harvesting concentrated between February and May. The GECCO scheme therefore aligned closely with the sector's labour demands and has played a major role in shaping its workforce. At certain points it accounted for the majority of workers; today it covers around 20%. Recruitment initially centred on Eastern European labour (from Poland, Romania and Bulgaria). Once these countries joined the EU and no longer required permits to work in Spain, recruitment under this programme shifted towards Morocco, particularly targeting Moroccan women with children in their home country—considered the group least likely to overstay and lose access to this income source (Reigada, 2022). More recently, smaller Latin American contingents from Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Paraguay have been incorporated, involving both men and women, alongside the larger cohort of Moroccan women.

Eastern European workers—especially Romanians—have nonetheless remained a substantial component of the workforce. Although EU mobility rights remove legal barriers to working, residing and accessing services in Spain, research shows that they too frequently face poor labour conditions and substandard housing. Following the decline in the permitted quota of GECCO recruitment—driven by a national-government attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to promote the hiring of native workers after the 2007 economic crisis—they became the largest group in the sector. Their numbers have since fallen considerably, and they now represent roughly another 20% of the workforce (Molinero-Gerbeau et al., 2021; Molinero-Gerbeau, 2025).

The remainder of the workforce—amounting to roughly half of all migrant labourers in the sector—consists almost completely of African workers from both the Maghreb and the Sahel, principally Morocco, Senegal and Mali, who are not part of the GECCO system. They are mostly men, although a significant minority of women—largely Moroccan workers who exited the hiring-at-origin scheme and subsequently fell into irregular administrative status—are also present. Most initially join the sector in irregular situations marked by acute precarity and vulnerability, from which their subsequent trajectories vary considerably. Residents in Huelva's informal settlements tend to be workers from this broad group (García-Mora et al., 2023; Castillero, 2022; Molinero-Gerbeau, 2025).

A strong working hypothesis for this investigation has been that these profiles correspond to distinct configurations of health, safety, and wellbeing. Therefore, identifying and

comparing the distinct experiences of these groups—and analysing how their specific intersections of legal status, national origin, racialisation, and labour market insertion shape their health, safety, and wellbeing—is a central analytic axis across the report.

Methodology

The study followed a multi-sited qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews with migrant farmworkers in Huelva's strawberry sector and with key stakeholders in Huelva, Morocco and Romania. The interviews explored core dimensions of work, OSH, and broader social determinants of health, including experiences of workplace risks and their perceived impacts; risks associated with migration and mobility; type of contract and degree of employment stability; and perceptions of the attractiveness or undesirability of agricultural jobs.

At the same time, the flexible, open character of the interviews allowed new axes of analysis to emerge inductively. In Huelva, these included racism and discrimination in labour and housing markets, mental health and substance use, workplace violence and harassment, and municipal policies towards informal settlements. In Morocco, additional attention was paid to irregularities and perceived arbitrariness in access to the hiring-at-origin programme. In Romania, a salient theme was the decision of some farmworkers to abandon mobility to Spain and redirect their labour trajectories towards other European countries, and how those decisions relate to their assessments of working and living conditions in different destinations.

Given the report's focus on migrant farmworkers' lived experiences, interviews with workers constitute the primary methodological strategy for accessing and documenting these experiences. Workers' testimonies form the core empirical material of the study and serve as the main reference point for the analysis. The findings presented throughout the report are therefore grounded first and foremost in workers' own accounts, which are treated as the principal source for understanding how health, safety and wellbeing risks are experienced, interpreted, and navigated in practice. In interviews with farmworkers, the emphasis was on eliciting first-hand accounts of work, housing, health and everyday life, and how those elements have fluctuated through the person's biographical trajectory.[2]

[2] The interview guide on which these interviews were based is included in the annexes at the end of this report. In practice, however, the guide was applied flexibly, and each interview varied considerably from the others and from what was originally envisaged in the guide.

Interviews with other actors play a secondary, complementary role. Their value lies in the contextual and interpretative insight they provide, without aiming for systematic coverage of all positions within each group. They are used to capture some of the ways that key stakeholders position themselves in relation to the issues identified, rather than to exhaustively represent all perspectives. In some cases, they also help contextualise, nuance or clarify findings from workers' accounts.

Therefore, when doing these interviews three main objectives were pursued: to gather expert and aggregated views on migrant farmworkers' situations; to understand stakeholders' discourses and stand-taking in relation to those situations; and to document, as concretely as possible, the practices and interventions they carry out with or around migrant farmworkers (such as advocacy, service provision, recruitment, inspection or management), and how these may mitigate, reproduce or intensify the conditions described by workers.[3]

Fieldworks, sample and contacting

Fieldwork in Huelva was conducted between April and May 2024, during the peak of the spring strawberry campaign, when both production and the number of farmworkers in the area are at their highest. In total, 67 migrant farmworkers and 40 key actors were interviewed. The worker sample included hired-at-origin workers (Moroccan and Latin American), non-GECCO African workers (Maghrebi and sub-Saharan) and Eastern European farmworkers, recruited so as to reflect diversity in gender, age, length of stay in Spain and employment status. Key actors included trade union representatives, staff from civil society organisations (both large, professionalised NGOs and grassroots activist organisations), public officials, and employers. The main socio-demographic and occupational characteristics of the Huelva sample are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Outline of the Huelva (Spain) fieldwork sample

Migrant farmworkers sample			
Country of origin		Gender	
Morocco	23	Men	38
Romania	13	Women	29

[3] No equivalent interview guide is included for stakeholders, as no single template was used. Given the wide diversity of profiles involved, interview guides were developed ad hoc for each case. While tailored to the specific interviewee, all shared three core aims: to gather expert knowledge on workers' situations, understand the interviewee's position, and learn about their work with or in relation to agricultural workers.

Senegal	12	Employment/contractual status	
Mali	7	GECCO	20
Honduras	3	Unstable employment	18
Colombia	3	Stable employment (non GECCO)	22
Côte d'Ivoire	2	Retired	7
Western Sahara	1		
Ecuador	1		
Poland	1		
Nigeria	1		
Stakeholders sample			
Trade unions	10 people from 5 trade unions		
Civil society organisations	10 people from 3 large, professionalised NGOs and 5 grassroots activist groups		
Public administrations	3 delegates of higher governments levels in Huelva (2 regional, 1 national), and 11 civil servants or workers from 4 municipalities		
Employers	6 people (owners, managers or HR staff) from 4 companies		

Farmworkers in Huelva were contacted through four main channels. First, researchers approached people in public meeting places commonly used by this population, such as roadside bars near farms, streets and squares in towns with a high concentration of ethnic businesses, points near farm gates where informal vending takes place after work, and busy areas of shantytown settlements. Second, the team travelled through the rural areas between farms and approached farmworkers encountered on foot, by bicycle or waiting for transport. Third, local researchers, NGOs and other community-based actors who work regularly with migrant farmworkers helped connect the team with potential participants. Fourth, snowball sampling was used, with interviewed farmworkers recommending and introducing others from their networks. In all cases, participation was entirely voluntary and interviews were arranged in places chosen by the participants, prioritising locations they perceived as safe and comfortable (for example, cafes, public spaces in another town, or neutral offices made available by trusted organisations).

It should also be acknowledged that recruitment through workers-frequented public spaces, NGOs, and snowball sampling may have facilitated access to individuals with particular profiles, including those more connected to support organisations, more willing to articulate grievances or least socially isolated. Conversely, workers with entirely positive experiences, as well as those subject to the highest levels of employer control or isolation, may be underrepresented in the material.

Fieldwork in Morocco was conducted in July 2025. Preparatory discussions with experts identified the Gharb–Loukkos region in north-western Morocco—between the cities of Larache and Rabat along the Atlantic coast—as the most suitable location. This area: (1) contains a significant and dynamic agro-industrial enclave historically associated with strawberry production; (2) has, on several occasions, hosted GECCO recruitment processes; and (3) is more broadly a point of origin for substantial migration flows and transnational networks linked to southern Spain, owing to its geographical proximity and historical ties.

The region was therefore ideal for capturing, within a single site, both focal dimensions of the study: GECCO labour migration from an origin perspective and the characteristics of the local agro-industry—particularly the strawberry sector—as the main alternative available to workers who later decide to migrate seasonally to Huelva. It also provided access to local women agricultural workers connected to both contexts. Given the far greater anticipated difficulty of gaining spontaneous access to workers in Morocco—due to linguistic, cultural and sociopolitical factors—fieldwork was designed and carried out entirely in collaboration with social organisations, both local and Huelva-based that maintain transnational links.

Fieldwork in Romania was conducted in 2024–2025, following a research design developed within SafeHabitus to capture the experiences of seasonal agricultural migrants at origin. Participants were first contacted through the researchers' professional and personal networks and via key actors in local communities who could facilitate access to households with experience of seasonal agricultural work abroad. Sampling then proceeded through snowball dynamics, progressively incorporating new villages and towns as further migrants were identified. A total of 41 interviews with seasonal farmworkers were undertaken, seeking variation in destination country, gender, age, status (active or "retired" seasonal worker), and length and diversity of migration paths, as displayed in Table 2.

Fieldwork was conducted in two regions—central and southern Romania—identified in the literature as major sources of intra-European seasonal agricultural labour. The study targeted people who had worked seasonally in Spain and/or Germany. This broader focus proved necessary once it became clear that Romania's role as a country of origin for Huelva is rapidly declining: work in Spain has lost comparative attractiveness, and much of the mobility has shifted towards other European destinations, most notably Germany. Interviewing workers engaged in both circuits enabled a more accurate understanding of the material conditions and subjective experiences underpinning Romania's changing position within the labour flows examined in this report.

Table 2: Outline of the origin countries' fieldwork samples

	Fieldwork in Morocco	Fieldwork in Romania
Farmworkers' sample		

Basic description	57 workers in the strawberry sector alongside other red berries; all work or have worked in the local enclave (Gharb-Loukkos Region), some also work or have worked in Huelva; all pick fruit, and a minority have also worked in packing warehouses.	41 intra-European seasonal migrant agricultural workers who travel, or previously travelled, to Spain or Germany, in some cases combining agricultural work with seasonal employment in other sectors such as the meat industry or construction.
Gender	57 women	25 women, 16 men
Age group	22 aged 18 to 39; 35 aged 40 to 59; 0 aged 60+.	13 aged 18 to 39; 23 aged 40 to 50; 5 aged 60+.
Labour migration profile	29 current and 12 former participants in the GECCO scheme, 16 workers in the local strawberry sector	11 migrants to Spain and 30 to Germany; 22 active and 19 retired migrants
Stakeholders' sample		
Profiles	2 mayors of prominent strawberry producing municipalities in the Gharb-Loukkos Region where selection processes for enrolling local workers in the GECCO programme have taken place in occasions in the past; 2 ANAPEC (Morocco's public employment service) employees.	

Interpreters were used when necessary, including throughout the fieldwork in Morocco and for farmworkers in Huelva with limited knowledge of Spanish, particularly Moroccan women hired at origin. In Romania, interpretation was not required, as the fieldwork was conducted by a local, native team. Interview duration varied, with a minimum of 30–40 minutes to

ensure sufficient depth but often extending beyond an hour and occasionally reaching two or even three hours when participants were willing and circumstances permitted. Almost all interviews were audio-recorded on mobile devices and subsequently transcribed. In the small number of cases where participants agreed to be interviewed but did not wish to be recorded, detailed handwritten notes were taken during and immediately after the conversation; these were then incorporated into the analysis in the same way as full transcripts.

Ethical considerations

Fieldwork was conducted with careful attention to ethical considerations, given the high levels of vulnerability characterising many participants, including legal dependency, precarious or irregular administrative status, gendered exposure to violence, unstable housing and limited access to institutional protection. Ethical safeguards were therefore designed to minimise risks, address power asymmetries and ensure voluntary, informed participation across all research sites. Informed consent was obtained in all cases, with procedures adapted to local contexts and participants' capacities; oral consent was used where appropriate, particularly when literacy constraints or fear of formal documentation could generate discomfort or risk.

Participation was entirely voluntary, interviewees could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time, and recruitment and interviewing were conducted independently of employers or supervisory structures to avoid coercion or retaliation. Specific precautions were taken when addressing sensitive topics, particularly experiences of harassment, violence and abuse. Interviews were conducted in settings chosen to maximise privacy and safety, and questions on sexual or gender-based violence were introduced cautiously, allowing participants to control the depth and direction of disclosure. Interviewers were trained to recognise distress and to suspend or redirect conversations where necessary; no participant was encouraged to recount traumatic experiences, and no follow-up was pursued beyond what interviewees themselves chose to share. Where appropriate, information about available support resources was provided, while avoiding any form of intervention that could raise expectations or expose participants to further risk.

Data protection and confidentiality were treated as central ethical priorities. All interviews were recorded only with explicit consent, securely stored on encrypted, access-restricted platforms, and fully anonymised during transcription. Access to raw data was limited to authorised project members under formal data co-responsibility agreements, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

Ethical oversight was ensured through approval by the relevant university ethics committees and/or expert legal teams, and through ongoing coordination with partner organisations and local civil society actors. Consistent with the worker-centred approach of the study, ethical management was understood as an ongoing process prioritising participants' safety, dignity and agency. At the same time, ethical considerations necessarily limited access to some of the most controlled or isolated workers and constrained the depth of inquiry into certain experiences, a trade-off deemed necessary to avoid harm and ensure responsible research practice. In particular, the ethics committee from Comillas University (the Task Leader) gave the full approval both to the design of the research and ethics protocols and to their practical implementation throughout fieldwork in an Official verdict issued on December the 9th 2025.

Analytical approach

The empirical material generated through the interviews was examined using a predominantly descriptive thematic analysis. Coding was conducted through a combination of inductive and deductive strategies. On the one hand, an initial set of analytical codes was informed by the objectives of the SafeHabitus project and, more specifically, by the research focus defined in Task 5.4. On the other hand, the coding process remained open to themes that had not been anticipated in the original research design but emerged clearly during fieldwork, subsequently shaping both the continuation of data collection and the analytical focus of the study. In addition, new codes were progressively developed inductively during the analysis itself, particularly in its early stages, when the review of initial transcripts highlighted previously underexplored dimensions that proved to be analytically significant and warranted systematic attention.

When presenting its findings, this report does not quantify the frequency of specific problems in the empirical material. This choice reflects the qualitative research design and its objectives, which prioritise analytical depth and contextual understanding over statistical representativeness or estimates of prevalence. The analysis focuses on reconstructing workers' experiences, meanings, and trajectories in detail, and on identifying issues that were not fully anticipated in the research design and that are difficult to capture through quantitative methods. Accordingly, attempting to infer statistically accurate percentages of occurrence in the wider population from a sample of this nature—limited in size and not based on strictly random sampling—would be methodologically inappropriate and unrealistic.

Consequently, reporting percentages or numerical frequencies would therefore be not only methodologically inappropriate but also potentially misleading, as it could imply that patterns observed in the interview sample reflect their real-world distribution. Instead, the

analysis relies on thematic saturation to assess whether an issue appears as isolated or recurrent across a diverse set of interviews, covering workers with different genders, origins, legal statuses, contracts and experience in the sector. Recurrent themes are treated as saturated and indicative of common features of agricultural work in the context studied, while less widespread issues are included to document the range of risks and situations present, without assumptions about prevalence.

The analysis also explores how risks and constraints relate to specific worker profiles defined by characteristics such as gender, migration status, form of labour insertion and country of origin. Qualitative methods allow for acutely exploring and identifying patterned associations between analytical categories, capturing all the nuance and ramifications on their relation. In this study, it was prioritised to reconstruct the association between farmworker intersectional profiles and particular OSH experiences and/or forms of vulnerability, again through saturation rather than statistical frequency. Given the report's descriptive focus, these associations are presented as empirical observations rather than developed into full explanatory models. Only where workers' own accounts consistently point to clear causalities are tentative explanations offered, occasionally supported by brief references to relevant regulations or external data used solely to provide essential context.

On the other hand, in line with the methodological approach, objectives and analytical framework that has been outlined, each of the report's empirical sections and subsections presents the full set of relevant findings yielded by its specific segment of associated fieldwork, even when parts of the social reality examined overlap across samples and research sites and therefore, sometimes, generate convergent testimonies. Such convergences—whether between workers and some stakeholders interviewed in Huelva, or between Moroccan seasonal workers interviewed in Spain and those interviewed later in Morocco—are not treated as redundancies to be removed but as analytically meaningful recurrences that strengthen the evidentiary basis of the study.

In particular, agreements between workers who are unconnected to one another and reached through different routes and research phases constitute an additional layer of triangulation, consistent with the logic of saturation discussed earlier. At the same time, each of the three fieldworks—in Huelva, Spain, in the Gharb-Loukkos region, Morocco, and across Romanian regions—constitutes a self-standing piece of scientific inquiry, with its own specificities and interpretive keys. Therefore, for reasons of methodological transparency and internal validity, and to allow their independent reading, each section must therefore report the entirety of its significant findings while also contributing to the integrated analysis developed at large in the subsequent discussion and conclusion sections.

The following sections present the core findings of the report: first, Section 4, which sets out the results of the fieldwork conducted in Huelva; and second, Section 5, which examines the fieldwork carried out in the main countries of origin.

Health, safety, wellbeing and their occupational and social determinants: Huelva's strawberry sector as a case-study

Farmworkers' experiences

Mobility, arrival to Huelva and migration trajectories

For hired at origin farmworkers—both Moroccan women and Latin American men and women—the journey to Spain holds little prominence in their accounts. Travel is organised by the employers' organisations (and, for the outbound trip, also paid by their employers), using conventional and safe transport such as buses, ferries, and planes. Interviewees provide almost no detail, suggesting that the journey is not perceived as a significant element of their migration experience; in what is reported, no health or safety risks are identifiable.

A similar pattern appears in interviews with seasonal farmworkers from Eastern Europe. Their travel to Spain usually takes place by road, typically by bus, and by definition within the Schengen area. Those with longer migration histories often first arrived through the hiring at origin scheme before Romania or Poland joined the EU. The only reported risk or impact is minor and relates to joint discomfort caused by the four-day bus journey from Romania to Huelva. Discussions highlight that cheaper bus companies do not schedule rest stops, whereas more expensive services do, producing a trade-off between financial cost and physical wellbeing. Beyond this, no further concerns are mentioned.

In interviews with African farmworkers not participating in GECCO, migratory journeys from their countries of origin are often described in detail and are perceived as defining episodes in their lives and in their trajectories as migrants and farmworkers. The movements they recount constitute, in most cases, a traumatic experience involving extreme risks to their health, physical integrity, and even their lives.

A common pattern is the account of entering the Iberian Peninsula through irregular maritime routes. For those from sub-Saharan countries such as Senegal, Mali, or Côte d'Ivoire, this is preceded by long, segmented journeys across the Sahara, crossing multiple Sahel and Maghreb states, where prolonged stays may occur. Each phase of travel is marked by cumulative risks: violence and corruption at borders, hunger and dehydration in the desert, and extreme physical danger at sea, described by some as horrific and near-fatal. Many report witnessing the deaths of fellow travellers—people of similar age and background who shared the journey and the aspiration to reach Southern Europe and seek opportunities in its labour markets. This initial suffering is not portrayed as a distant memory but as a biographical imprint that appears to shape mental health and perceptions of vulnerability long after arrival.

Once in Spain, they do not report travelling directly to Huelva. Initial periods in the destination country usually involve stays in NGO reception centres, phases of solitude and severe hardship, and movements across the national territory in search of personal support networks and accessible work opportunities under conditions of administrative irregularity. In many cases, however, these stages last only a few months before reaching Huelva or another major agro-industrial enclave. Information circulates quickly within personal networks, indicating that such areas offer the most feasible prospects for employment, often informal.

During their first years, many do not settle in any specific location but move continuously between Spanish agricultural enclaves throughout the year. Although routes vary, these agricultural circuits commonly follow crop calendars: the spring strawberry harvest in Huelva, summer stone-fruit campaigns in Lleida, and the winter olive harvest in Jaén. Reported risks relate primarily to pronounced instability and social uprooting, economic precarity, and limited access to adequate housing and living conditions in places where stays are temporary. This adds another layer of exhaustion and strain to their bodies, in addition to the OSHrisks discussed in the following sections.

Among the interviews with younger farmworkers (pertaining to this group of non-GECCO Africans) with only a few years in the Spanish agricultural sector, these interprovincial circuits remain the dominant pattern. In interviews with older farmworkers with longer trajectories, some continue in this dynamic, but many have gained access to more permanent agricultural employment in Huelva, a key milestone in their stories of gradual, partial integration and reduction of precarity. Although the spring strawberry campaign represents the peak demand for labour, farms maintain a range of year-round roles that a minority manage to secure, allowing them more stable employment. Also, similar interprovincial patterns, with comparable characteristics, are also identified among a small number of interviewed Romanian farmworkers, typically young men with unstable labour trajectories.

Focusing again on African farmworkers outside GECCO, the first years in Spain are heavily shaped by irregular legal status, perceived as an omnipresent barrier. Accounts from those who have lived or still live without residence and work permits describe this condition as the principal impediment to stability. Access to the formal agricultural labour market is effectively blocked, confining them to the informal economy, where abuses are common, channels for redress are scarce, and employment is sporadic and unpredictable. Barriers to public and health services are numerous—linguistic, administrative, and linked to limited knowledge of institutional procedures. This administrative, labour, socioeconomic, and geographical instability extends across all areas of life, generating what many describe as profound psychological distress.

Among farmworkers hired at origin, irregularity is not experienced directly but functions as a constant threat. They understand its implications and are acutely aware that remaining within the programme—and complying with its requirements—is what separates them from that situation. Even so, they sometimes encounter conditions typically associated with irregularity. Multiple accounts describe employers confiscating passports upon arrival at the farm and holding them for the duration of the stay, using this as a means of control. This renders them indistinguishable, in the eyes of public and private service providers, from people in irregular situations, creating serious obstacles for routine administrative or commercial procedures. Some even report fear of being on the street without documents, worried about being mistaken for irregular migrants and detained. A further, frequent issue is the failure to receive the health card to which they are entitled under GECCO regulations or receiving it only after long delays. This results in an almost insurmountable barrier to accessing healthcare services.

Overall, migratory trajectories are a key social determinant of wellbeing, socioeconomic position, and physical and mental health operating at multiple levels. From the trauma of the initial journey to the administrative and linguistic barriers to integration, and the legal precarity that facilitates labour exploitation, being a migrant shapes experiences in which access to a healthy and safe life is systematically obstructed. Irregular status, or the constant provisionality of temporary permits, becomes a risk factor in its own right, eroding farmworkers' physical and mental health and perpetuating their structural vulnerability within the strawberry sector.

Tasks, working conditions, work environments and their OSH impacts

A consistent finding in interviews with migrant farmworkers in Huelva is that their work is described as an activity defined by heavy physical demands and a material environment that directly affects their bodies. The central task for most—the harvesting of strawberries, often combined with other berries and even other fruits within increasingly diversified

companies—is invariably portrayed as work that requires remaining bent over and in forced postures for many hours. This static strain is combined with repetitive movements that place significant stress on the joints, such as constant twisting of wrists and arms to cut and deposit the fruit.

As a result, musculoskeletal pain, particularly in the lower back, is the most frequently reported condition. Virtually all interviewees, regardless of origin, age or gender, mention suffering back (and, to a lesser degree, knee and shoulder) pain that extends beyond the working day and becomes a permanent affliction. In some cases, this is accompanied by additional impacts such as joint swelling or falls and similar accidents occurring when muscles momentarily give way under pain.

Other empirical findings, while not as unanimous, reinforce the seriousness of this issue: numerous accounts indicate that pain appears and becomes very severe already within the first days, and stays the same for as long as you keep working with strawberries; several young farmworkers (including those under 25) report severe, disabling back pain that persists into rest periods; and some older or retired farmworkers describe having developed lasting back injuries such as herniated discs. The conclusion is straightforward and difficult to express otherwise: strawberry picking is painful, the pain is intense and sustained, and over time it can leave more serious marks on farmworkers' bodies.

Alongside the physical strain of posture, the environmental setting is also identified as a risk factor in its own right. Strawberry cultivation in Huelva has been carried out for decades under plastic greenhouse structures: semicircular, long, tunnel-like plastic rows, deployed over equally long rows of plants in the floor, that farmworkers must walk through as they empty the plants of fruit. It is common for farmworkers to describe the intense heat inside these poorly ventilated tunnels—themselves exposed to the considerable spring temperatures of southern Spain, which they increase—as another constant element of their experience of berry-picking work. Temperatures can at times become so high that continuing to work is difficult, occasionally causing dizziness or fainting.

Another relevant environmental element is exposure to agrochemical products used in the crops. A significant number of testimonies link work to dermatological problems. They describe skin rashes, blisters, intense itching, and, in some cases, depigmentation or peeling, which they attribute directly to contact with the plants and exposure to pesticides and herbicides. As this pertains to self-perceived health, it is generally difficult to identify anything beyond the workers' own accounts, according to which these reactions stem from touching, inhaling, or simply being exposed to "the liquids". In most cases, it is not possible to determine exactly which product causes the symptoms, how much exposure accumulates before they become detectable, or to distinguish between allergies and the expected effects of prolonged contact with certain substances. There are, however, some cases in which

farmworkers describe—and in one instance showed, during the interview—eruptions so aggressive and immediate that they were clearly allergic reactions.

This specific risk may be significantly exacerbated by company practices regarding personal protective equipment (PPE). Experiences vary depending on the role performed. In most accounts, farmworkers directly responsible for fumigation tasks report receiving the necessary protective gear from the company—facial, ocular, or full-body protection, as required. A small minority of cases, however, indicate that such equipment is not provided, creating not only an almost certain risk of severe health problems but also a clear violation of OSH legislation.

For farmworkers engaged in harvesting, by contrast, and specifically regarding gloves—the main PPE relevant to their tasks—the most common situation is that they are not only not provided but actively prohibited. Reportedly, employers justify this on the grounds that gloves increase the risk of damaging the fruit or affecting its appearance. In a minority of testimonies, gloves were allowed, either because the company provides them or, more commonly, because labourers buy them themselves, generating a transfer of costs that is frequently criticised. Yet the most commonly described company policy is to forbid their use, effectively prioritising the protection of the commodity over the protection of the farmworker.

In theory, this risk should be limited, as standard and legally required practice dictates that, after a row of plants is fumigated, one or more days must pass before the fruit is harvested, thereby reducing or eliminating exposure to toxic substances. Most interviewed farmworkers confirmed that this preventive measure was followed in their workplaces. However, the effectiveness of this measure encounters clear limitations. In cases of allergy or marked skin sensitivity, the reduced amount of residue remaining on the plants after the waiting period has been proven, on several occasions, to be sufficient to trigger a reaction, making gloves necessary. Other farmworkers describe situations in which the measure is applied minimally: only the fumigated rows are left to rest, while harvesting continues on adjacent ones, and they report noticing the product reaching them.

There are also instances—a clear minority, but present in our sample nonetheless—in which the measure is simply not respected, and harvesters work on recently fumigated plants. Otherwise, concerning other preventive measures such as mandatory breaks to reduce heat stress or guaranteed access to drinking water, testimonies are mixed. Some farmworkers mention rest periods every three hours and water being provided, while others, in approximately similar numbers, state that breaks are not respected, access to water is not ensured, or that they are directly prevented from stopping to drink at all whilst at work.

Despite this variability, a dominant perception is that preventive culture is weak, with the protection of the final product and the maximisation of productivity consistently taking

priority over farmworker health and safety. This leaves many exposed to risks they often regard as an unavoidable part of working life. Alongside these widespread impacts, a smaller but noteworthy group of testimonies mentions additional long-term perceived consequences. Some farmworkers with long trajectories express concern about possible severe illnesses—such as chronic pulmonary problems or even cancer—which they observe with high incidence around them and suspect may be linked to work and, specifically, to the inhalation of agrochemicals.

There are also isolated yet serious accidents, such as falls from unstable ladders while carrying weight, or incidents involving light machinery. These latter cases are more frequently associated with other crops, such as oranges, where large, dangerous scissors are used; however, they remain relevant for understanding the experiences of some strawberry farmworkers, as in various cases, their strawberry-picking experiences cannot be truly separated from those in other harvests, whether because the same company employs them for multiple crops or because they survive through precarious labour trajectories involving constant movement between different farms and companies with different crops. In those cases, being (occasionally) an orange picker is an integral part of being a strawberry picker.

For the minority in the sample—usually women and/or farmworkers from Eastern Europe—who work in the packing warehouses of the same agricultural companies (or of larger cooperatives to which most small and medium-sized companies belong), the physical environment is different but similarly harmful. They describe many hours-long shifts spent standing almost motionless, in the very cold temperatures of the large refrigeration chambers that those warehouses actually are, combined with fast-paced, mechanical work to classify and package the product. The risk of accidents and/or severe health impacts is substantially lower in these industrial warehouses—and that is part of the reason why they are generally preferred to picking in the farms—, but a certain level of exhaustion and physical discomfort is almost guaranteed.

OSH and labour conditions

Beyond the physical demands inherent to agricultural work, farmworker testimonies emphasise that labour conditions sharply intensify risks to health and wellbeing. Work organisation, effective wages, insufficient rest allowed, hierarchical labour relations on farms and, for many profiles, employment precarity combine to produce an environment that amplifies the risks described above. Bodily harm becomes normalised and, when it occurs, is rarely addressed adequately or in time.

Certain hiring practices function as a constant source of stress and enable further breaches. Most interviewed farmworkers do work under contract. Only a small number, all non-EU

farmworkers with irregular status, report occasionally working without any contract. Yet even with fully legal contracts, employment can remain unstable and precarious, with short and unpredictable contracts (months, weeks, even days) interspersed with periods without work. In such contexts, simply having work and income—necessary for subsistence and to sustain migratory objectives—is perceived as a vital opportunity to make the most of, leading farmworkers to accept any conditions and to work long, exhausting shifts without rest.

In our sample, this pattern is reported mainly among the group of mostly male African (both Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan) farmworkers, and particularly those with relatively short labour trajectories in Huelva's agricultural sector, though some remain trapped in this dynamic after many years or even decades. Companies commonly maintain a stable core workforce but rely on farmworkers with these profiles only during production peaks and strictly for the duration of those needs. For those forming this informal pool of sporadic labour, this practice generates deep uncertainty and drives them into dynamics that, blending exploitation and self-exploitation, impose an unsustainable level of strain on their bodies.

At the same time, having a stable contract with a single company does not always lessen workers' vulnerability and may have the opposite effect. Among farmworkers hired at origin—both Moroccan women and Latin American men and women—there is a widespread awareness of complete dependence on the employer. The threat of not being called back the following season, or of being expelled and, therefore, deported by their employers for any inconvenience, is a recurring one, silencing complaints and forcing acceptance of perceived abusive conditions whenever they may arise.

Many report not being informed that, in principle, based on the GECCO regulation, they have the right to request a change of employer. Even when aware of this right, lacking knowledge of other companies, having no local contacts, and no access to the relevant institutions renders it an empty promise. Significantly, no interviewee reported being aware of any secure, trusted and effective channel through which they could communicate this type of demand, or being provided with any complaint mechanism more generally. They appear to be constantly exposed to infantilising language, which many partially internalise and reproduce. They speak of needing to "behave well" to be called back, or of the constant fear of being "punished" (referring mostly to suspensions without pay), reinforcing their dependence and limiting their capacity to assert rights.

Paradoxically, this dependence on a single employer produces effects similar to the permanent instability described in the previous group: minimal bargaining power and the need to accept whatever conditions are imposed. Intermittent rhythms also reappear here: periods of exhausting work without rest alternated with weeks without work or income. Some farmworkers hired at origin report that when the company has less fruit to harvest, they are temporarily dismissed and, unable to seek work elsewhere, remain isolated within

the farms, spending the savings brought from home quickly, due to the much higher cost of living in Spain, which can be experienced as a highly stressful, frustrating situation.

This type of practical instability even for workers holding permanent contracts arises from the interplay of legal and customary specificities in Spanish agriculture. Employers frequently assert that the sector operates under a distinct labour regime that allows them not to pay permanently contracted workers on days when no work is offered, citing a supposed "Régimen Agrario"—and farmworkers themselves often reproduce this idea. In fact, labour law contains no such exception. What does exist is a Special Agricultural System within Social Security, under which contributions are calculated only for *actual days worked*. This system emerged as an institutional adaptation to long-standing customary practice in the sector, where payment was traditionally tied to the days and hours physically worked rather than to a stable employment relationship. Now this logic appears inverted: the Social Security exception is presented as evidence that labour law itself requires day-by-day payment, when it was custom that originally shaped the exception.

The consequence is that many workers with permanent contracts—often living on company premises and available at all times—are still paid solely for these "real days". This creates the familiar pattern described by farmworkers with permanent contracts, particularly those hired at origin, of waiting days or even weeks for work while earning nothing and spending savings brought from home. It also provides employers and supervisors with a powerful disciplinary tool: withholding work (and therefore pay) for one or more days in response to perceived poor performance, inconvenience or misbehaviour—used across all worker groups, not only GECCO recruits.

Farmworkers from Romania, as EU citizens with full citizenship rights and freedom of movement, are generally not exposed to these forms of extreme dependence. However, a minority report accessing work in Huelva through intermediary companies and/or informal networks that contact them back in their country, transport them to Spain, place them with local employers, and then keep them in complete isolation from the surrounding society. Some do not even know the name of their Spanish employers after months of work. Among these cases, dynamics of dependence and the imposition of abusive conditions closely mirror those experienced by participants in the hiring-at-origin scheme.

Regarding wages, the vast majority of farmworkers report receiving the sectoral minimum established by the collective agreement, though with important caveats. A small minority—generally non-GECCO African farmworkers with precarious social, labour, and administrative status—state that they earn clearly and openly below the legal minimum due to arbitrary employer decisions, while no cases were found of farmworkers earning above the minimum, as companies appear to treat the legally defined minimum as a de facto maximum, or a legally established wage, and paying more is not even contemplated.

Most farmworkers are aware of the wage set by the collective agreement (€57.95 for a 7-hour shift, as of 2024 when fieldwork was undergone) and generally claim to receive it. However, deductions of a few euros per day for accommodation, electricity, or water are reported, including among hired-at-origin farmworkers despite the GECCO regulation specifically prohibiting it. Partial or total non-payment, although not the majority experience, is recurrent enough to warrant attention. This mainly affects socially or administratively precarious farmworkers but also, to a lesser extent, other profiles. Such cases typically occur subtly, through the undercounting of hours or days. Workers sometimes report noticing it by chance, when checking their earnings and comparing to their own counting of worked time, raising the likelihood of widespread undetected cuts. Explicit, full non-payments are very rare and typically occur as retaliation during open conflict with employers.

Overtime warrants separate consideration. Although all interviewees report performing extra hours, none receive the legally mandated overtime rate, which should be substantially higher than the ordinary hourly wage: in 2024, under the provincial sectoral agreement, ordinary hours were paid at €8.91, the first overtime hour at €11.14 and subsequent hours at €15.60. In practice, short extensions of 15–30 minutes are usually neither recorded nor paid, and when overtime is counted by the hour it is typically remunerated at the ordinary rate. In a small minority of cases, overtime is paid slightly above the standard rate, but never at the level required by law.

The combined effect of these mechanisms is that, despite holding contracts that nominally guarantee the legal minimum, many farmworkers ultimately receive less, often without full awareness due to the subtlety of the practices involved. This silent dispossession not only falls short of standards of decent and transparent work—frequently crossing into illegality—but also contributes to the reproduction of socioeconomic vulnerability and increases the pressure to accept long, exhausting workdays with minimal rest.

Workplace environment and day-to-day labour relations also emerge as direct sources of psychological and, at times, physical suffering. All companies appear to have supervisory roles (“manijeros” and “encargados”, the former overseeing pickers directly and the latter operating at a higher level, intermediating with employers). They accompany farmworkers during harvesting to ensure consistently high productivity. In a very significant share of the testimonies, these supervisors are portrayed as aggressive figures who enforce output through shouting, insults, and degrading treatment. Significantly, several Moroccan women hired at origin, with limited Spanish language skills, were found to know a small set of Spanish words, many of which were insults and strong words, as these are heard daily at work.

In some cases, this is reinforced by public performance rankings listing which farmworkers have collected the most—and especially the least—crates or kilos each day. Sometimes this

was reported to have economic incentives associated, while in other cases it was merely to allow supervisors to be fully aware which workers needed more and less pressure to reach the desired productivity level. This fosters competition and stress, increases accident risk, and worsens musculoskeletal problems by discouraging necessary breaks.[4] A related and frequent complaint concerns the lack of sufficient rest during the working day.

Degrading treatment and excessive pressure are recurrent complaints in a substantial number of interviews. In many cases, farmworkers accept or even consider the strictly material conditions (wages, working hours, and accommodation) satisfactory relative to expectations, yet describe the interpersonal treatment as unbearable. They report being denied basic respect and subjected to constant shouting, insults, and verbal humiliation, and in some instances even more serious forms of violence.

The two farmworkers in the sample who openly engaged in union activity in their company recount particularly hostile responses: repeated attempts by the company to falsify union elections, pressure to stop their organising, and intimidation of colleagues to prevent them from interacting with them. They describe a situation in which co-workers greet them normally in the village yet refuse to speak to them inside the farm. Crucially, this case of anti-union mobbing occurred not in a small or partially informal operation, but in a leading, modern, well-known company, fully embedded in European export markets, operating across several Spanish provinces and employing several hundreds of seasonal farmworkers in Huelva at peak season. Comparable acts of intimidation appear in several other cases—more numerous in the sample—where a farmworker sought support from independent, grassroots NGOs after experiencing rights violations, or simply needed help with basic matters the employer failed to provide, such as transport to medical appointments.

A particular labour union, well-known throughout Spain and nominally prominent in this context, is consistently mentioned only to express distrust or bad experiences. Many farmworkers perceive it as aligned with employers. Several accounts describe fraudulent union elections in which workers were unaware voting had taken place, with a single list belonging to that dominant union presented, composed of relatives or individuals hand-picked by company owners. In fact, in the aforementioned testimony of union repression, the company's efforts focused on preventing any list from competing with this majoritarian union. Additionally, there was just one interviewee linked to this specific union, who even

[4]A similar function and effect is attributed to piece-rate work, "a destajo" in local vernacular, in which payment is based on the quantity harvested rather than time worked. Although frequently mentioned in interviews, it is almost always in relation to other crops such as citrus, in the cases already described of farmworkers who, for various reasons, are compelled to circulate between different crops. Only in very exceptional instances is this system mentioned in connection with strawberries—or indeed with any berries.

formally acted as a workers' representative on its behalf in his company's works council. When asked about it, he seemingly was mostly unaware of the functioning of the union and the council, and declared having played no role in the voting process, and having been called to join the union and its electoral list by the company's human resources department.

While firm conclusions in this regard cannot be drawn from this sample alone, the evidence strongly suggests widespread electoral fraud in favour of a specific union perceived as employer-aligned, alongside repression of engagement with other unions or independent pro-migrant and pro-labour NGOs. This further amplifies farmworkers' vulnerability, eliminates meaningful bargaining capacity, and indirectly increases exposure to excessive physical strain and other occupational risks.

A small number of testimonies report direct physical violence by supervisors or employers, including slaps, pushes, and grabbing by the clothing, as well as cases of sexual harassment in which sexual favours are demanded in exchange for permits, work shifts, or simply to avoid retaliation. One farmworker describes how, in her company, the supervisor carries a long wooden stick and, as part of productivity-driven harassment, pokes the workers picking the strawberries more slowly in the flank with the stick while also insulting them. It is important to note that, although constant pressure, shouting, and verbal mistreatment, and even anti-union or anti-NGO intimidation, are mentioned across all farmworker profiles, these more severe or explicit forms of violence appear exclusively in accounts from Moroccan women hired at origin, whose particular combination of dependency, isolation, and racialisation places them in an especially vulnerable position.

Barriers to medical attention, treatment, and restorative rest form the culmination of a system that prioritises production over health. When a farmworker is injured or falls ill, many reportedly encounter a series of obstacles. A common, although not universal, response to injury or pain is reprimand, accusations of exaggeration, or, if the worker insists, sanctions in the form of days without work or pay. Knowing this, some ignore symptoms and continue working at the risk of allowing the ailment to grow worse or reach the point where it causes an accident. Other accounts—particularly among farmworkers hired at origin or others similarly living on farms without private transport—describe situations in which workers request assistance to reach healthcare services and the company refuses to help.

Intercultural mediators deployed by companies or employer associations are frequently portrayed as actors who block rather than facilitate access to healthcare. One intercultural mediation service in particular—well known in the province due to its large staff and its organisation by one of the main employer associations in the sector—appears repeatedly in the interviews. Its mediators operate not only in companies belonging to that association but also in many others that contract their services. Testimonies describe how these mediators dismiss farmworkers' requests for assistance, question the credibility of any

symptoms reported, treat them aggressively, and attempt to persuade or intimidate them into avoiding any action that might create problems for the company. Overall, they are portrayed as a mechanism of control and discipline over the migrant workforce, frequently blocking access to the healthcare services that farmworkers seek.

Once a farmworker succeeds in reaching medical services, either public healthcare in nearby towns or employer-contracted insurance providers, additional barriers commonly arise, from linguistic to administrative. A recurrent pattern in public healthcare involves the absence of a health card, which under the Spanish system is needed for booking appointments, forcing workers to seek emergency care, the only service they are given access to due to their legal situation. Once in there, they are denied assistance on the grounds that the issue is not sufficiently "urgent" to qualify for emergency care. Some farmworkers also report racially motivated mistreatment in health centres, either from staff or from other patients—a problem that was directly observed by the research team when accompanying interviewees to these medical facilities.

Across many interviews, there is a shared perception of a consistent tendency among all gatekeepers—farm supervisors, companies, intercultural mediators, and healthcare staff—to respond with default suspicion to symptoms, aches and discomforts expressed by migrant farmworkers and to minimise or deny the assistance provided. As a result, combined with the labour and socioeconomic dynamics described earlier, many workers have been found to continue working without medical care despite suffering ailments like joint swelling, persistent allergic reactions, (more severe than usual) musculoskeletal pain, or respiratory problems without access to required medication.

Even when a diagnosis is obtained and medical leave is issued, employers sometimes refuse to pay it, pressuring the farmworker to return to work. In some cases, Moroccan women hired at origin who fall ill are dismissed quickly and therefore automatically deported. When this is not possible, either because the worker has already contacted a pro-labour, pro-migrant, or women's organisation offering support, or because the case has become public, employers may offer financial compensation in exchange for repatriation. This requires the worker to renounce treatment and leave the company's premises, effectively removing the problem from the employer's view. Immediate economic necessity sometimes leads these women to consider accepting the offer, even though they know that back in Morocco, the availability of healthcare services, and therefore, the options for recovery, will be limited.

Taken together, this constellation of precarious working conditions—instability, abusive working hours, extreme pressure, mistreatment and denial of healthcare—not only has its own impact on mental health, such as severe stress, anxiety and trauma, but also acts as a multiplier of the physical risks inherent in agricultural work, creating a cycle of deterioration

where the bodies and minds of migrant workers are the weakest links in a production chain that thrives on their vulnerability.

Inhabited spaces and their impacts on health and safety

Housing conditions are another key determinant of migrant farmworkers' health and wellbeing in Huelva. Testimonies show that living environments systematically create or worsen some of the aforementioned risks and introduce additional hazards linked to habitation. Three main types of accommodation emerge, ordered from highest to lowest precarity: shantytown settlements, collective farm-based housing, and rented dwellings in towns. Each corresponds to different profiles in terms of origin, social position, and place in the production system.

At the most precarious end are shantytown settlements, associated exclusively in our sample with irregular or highly precarious sub-Saharan and Maghrebi men. Their descriptions are consistent: makeshift dwellings, locally referred to as "chabolas", constructed from pallets, cardboard, and plastic sheeting; no access to running water, electricity, or sanitation; and entire settlements composed of clusters of these dwellings, sometimes by the dozens or even the hundreds in a few cases. Conditions are extremely unhygienic. Municipal waste collection is systematically denied, rubbish accumulates between the huts, and rats reportedly often make their way into the dwellings, consuming stored food.

Although some farmworkers live alone, others report severe overcrowding in the shacks, sometimes linked to municipal demolitions of huts that force additional people into the remaining ones. Another reported consequence of these demolitions is the sudden production of homelessness among particularly precarious workers. A small but significant group of non-GECCO African interviewees—mostly, though not exclusively, very young Sub-Saharan men recently arrived in Spain—described living in tents pitched along the roadside on the outskirts of a particular town in Huelva. As a result of municipal "chabola" demolitions, they no longer had access even to that informal housing model, leaving them in conditions of greater physical strain and poorer prospects for night-time rest than before.

Fire risk is high and recurring. Several farmworkers report losing all belongings (including vital documents needed for regularisation) in fires that destroy these fragile structures. Arrival in a settlement is often described as a traumatic shock, with many stating that they had never imagined living in such conditions, or that this is the worst aspect of their personal situation in Huelva. Constant exposure to the elements, chronic insecurity, and lack of basic hygiene make life in the shanties a direct threat to physical health and a severe psychological burden. Some testimonies describe spirals of deteriorating mental health, substance use, and increasing social isolation. These trajectories are portrayed as serious but not highly

prevalent: although several interviewees said they knew fellow workers or settlement residents in such situations, only two talked about those problems as a direct personal experience.

At this point, it is important to clarify that these settlements are not spontaneous, pre-existing urban formations into which low-income farmworkers move. Interview testimonies indicate that they are inseparable from the development of industrial agriculture. All residents are reportedly farmworkers, and settlements are sometimes even located strategically beside the very farms where they work. A few long-term workers with around two decades in the area explained that, when they first arrived in Huelva to harvest strawberries, they themselves built some of the earliest shanties.

A further problem is the inability to register on the municipal census ("empadronamiento"), essential both for accessing local public services and for regularisation processes. Although Spanish law grants the right to register wherever one resides, interviewees report systematic illegal denial by local councils. This prolongs irregular status and exclusion from services and is often seen as one of the most serious consequences of living in a settlement. Only one exception appears in our sample: a resident in Lepe reports recent, though still obstructed, access to registration.

For many non-GECCO African farmworkers, shantytowns are the point of arrival when reaching Huelva in irregular and precarious conditions; some move on as their situation stabilises, while others remain for years due to persistent labour precarity. Several testimonies emphasise that living in a shanty is not always due to lack of income: some earn enough to rent a room but are rejected because of racial or ethnic discrimination in the rental market. Interviewees also report other groups living in similar conditions in the settlements—mainly Moroccan women who leave the hired-at-origin programme and thus become irregular, and some Romanian Roma families—though these groups appear to be a small fraction of the population and were not represented in our sample.

The predominant housing model in the sample is not settlements but employer-run accommodation on farms. All interviewed hired-at-origin farmworkers (Moroccan and Latin American), roughly half Eastern European farmworkers, and a minority of non-GECCO African farmworkers reside in these spaces.[5] Although less hazardous than shantytowns,

[5] This pattern likely reflects the broader reality of the sector, in the sense that on-farm accommodation appears to be the most common residential model. At a minimum, virtually all farmworkers hired at origin necessarily reside in these facilities, as GECCO regulations oblige employers to provide housing. Evidence from interviews with farmworkers, other local actors, and our own field observations suggests that these accommodations also host significant numbers from other profiles, while the remaining housing models identified appear to host significant but clear minorities. Altogether, this

testimonies still highlight significant problems. These accommodations are sometimes described as prefabricated plastic or metal modules, and in other cases as small brick units resembling standard houses but considerably smaller, housing significant numbers of people and offering limited domestic facilities. In all cases, they are located inside the farms themselves and managed by employers.

Overcrowding is widely reported: spaces shared by, depending on the case, two, four, or eight people (up to ten in one case), with severely inadequate kitchen and bathroom ratios—often one kitchen per two rooms and similar or fewer bathrooms. This hinders hygiene, coexistence, and rest after exhausting workdays; some workers describe the problem of having to get up hours before work to take turns using this equipment, which further hinders rest. Dangerous practices, such as cooking on the ground with makeshift fires due to a lack of any cooking equipment in the lodgings, increase the fire risk; one metal-module accommodation was reported to have burned down. At least one death due to gas intoxication from a faulty installation in a farm bathroom was reported in an interview. Structural defects, particularly damp and mould, are commonly reported and linked in workers' accounts to respiratory illnesses. Although nominally free in most cases, opaque payroll deductions for water and electricity generate distrust and dissatisfaction.

Many residents—especially women, and above all, GECCO participants—describe the experience of living in these places, marked by overcrowding, a lack of privacy, and occasional insalubrity, as oppressive. Fear experienced during the workday often extends into the residential space, where control by figures such as supervisors and mediators persists. Total dependence on them and/or employers for transport and basic needs, combined with geographic and social isolation, produces extreme vulnerability and exacerbates stress, anxiety, and helplessness. The logic of punishment and incentive, often governing labour relations, also extends to the residential context. Some testimonies recount workers being expelled from accommodation as retaliation, even in the middle of the night. Conversely, one farmworker reported receiving a private room due to a preferential personal relationship with an employer, while others in the same farm slept four to a room.

"Empadronamiento" (getting registered as a resident in local councils' census) appears here with a different dynamic. Seasonal migrants (GECCO participants and some Eastern Europeans) simply do not seek municipal registration, and this is not mentioned in their interviews at all. Permanent residents, however, do, with the obstacle being not municipal discrimination, but employers' control. As property owners, employers are, in most cases, asked to confirm whether the person actually resides there, effectively acting as gatekeepers

points to the predominance of on-farm accommodation not only in the sample but in Huelva's strawberry sector as a whole.

of “empadronamiento”. Several testimonies describe employers informally demanding money—often hundreds of euros, with one case reporting €6,000—to allow registration. While not universally present, this abuse is described as relatively common.

A crucial aspect highlighted in the testimonies is the extreme geographic isolation of on-farm housing. Being located inside farms, distances to towns—and thus to shops, health centres, pharmacies, and other services—are prohibitive. For many, especially GECCO women with restricted mobility and no transport, accessing healthcare or even food requires costly taxis or complex logistics, making consistent access nearly impossible. This enforced separation from community networks and support services deepens vulnerability and as discussed earlier, contributes directly to structural barriers in accessing medical care when needed.

Compared with the severe conditions in shantytowns and farm-based housing, renting a flat in town is described as the main aspiration for many interviewees, signalling basic material security and a degree of stabilisation and integration. Yet testimonies consistently highlight an almost insurmountable structural barrier to accessing formal housing: open racial discrimination by landlords. Numerous farmworkers report being denied rentals for being perceived as “moreno” or “moro”, widespread local racial slurs for, respectively, Black African and Maghrebi. Eastern European farmworkers also mention discrimination, but describe it as milder, less systematic, and easier to overcome. This exclusion from the rental market, combined with a near-total absence of public housing support, is often cited as a primary driver of shantytown persistence and overcrowding in farm accommodations. The housing crisis thus becomes a central obstacle to basic life projects, such as family reunification, and a further source of stress, hopelessness, and health and safety risks.

Two main pathways to formal housing appear in the interviews. First, some of the most precarious farmworkers—the same profile of arrival and/or chronic high precariousness that abounds in the shantytowns—access shared rental flats by renting a bed in shared rooms within flats occupied by many unrelated farmworkers. This overcrowding, plus limited domestic equipment, and poor maintenance conditions of the space, while having to pay a significant rent (of around 150€ per person, which is low for average Spanish standards, but can be seen as high related to these workers earnings and expectations) make this housing model to be perceived as scarcely better, if at all, than shanties or on-farm lodging.

The second pathway involves securing a private dwelling for one’s household, with adequate living conditions. This is the model many interviewees aspire to, and the few who have achieved it are the only ones who report no significant problems or risks linked to their housing. In our sample, this group includes roughly half of Eastern European farmworkers (with a clear, though not exact, correlation with having long trajectories in Huelva and in the agricultural sector), none of the farmworkers hired at origin—who, as mentioned, according to GECCO regulation must reside in employer-provided housing—and only a very small

number of non-EU farmworkers outside the programme, all of whom having decades-long, fully stabilised trajectories in the local agricultural labour market. The only housing-related problem expressed by some of them is that of access to "empadronamiento": some landowners can either block municipal registration or informally demand money for allowing it, similarly to what happens regarding employers and on-farm accommodation.

Taken together, the testimonies underscore that inhabited spaces are not a neutral backdrop but a central axis of vulnerability for migrant farmworkers in Huelva. Housing conditions—whether in shantytowns, employer-run farm lodgings, or the unevenly accessible rental market—shape exposure to physical risk, constrain mobility, and reinforce dependence on employers. These environments mediate access to healthcare, affect rest and recovery, and profoundly influence psychological wellbeing. The combined effect is a housing landscape that not only reflects existing hierarchies within the agricultural regime but actively reproduces them, embedding differential risks and limiting the possibilities for safety, stability, and integration.

Actors' perspectives

Trade unions' perspectives

Interviews with trade union representatives operating in Huelva's strawberry sector strongly corroborate, expand, and contextualise the accounts provided by migrant farmworkers. Their testimonies portray a labour system in which exploitation, precarity, and physical and psychological harm are structural rather than exceptional, embedded in a production model driven by relentless pressure for output and facilitated by weak enforcement mechanisms and profound power asymmetries.

A central theme in trade union analysis is the organisation of work within large farms and cooperatives—some of them actually suggesting that, from their perspective, these big operations can be more exploitative towards their workers than smaller companies, where alongside the economic calculus there also can be a component of personal relationship mitigating its harshest extremes. Union representatives report widespread cases of excessive working hours. Both representatives of one of the unions claim to know frequent cases where the work in the warehouses where the fruit is packed stretches 10, 12 or even 16 hours a day, without breaks (and even having the minutes used for using the restroom discounted in terms of pay).

Supervisory practices based on constant surveillance, verbal aggression, and punitive control are described as central to daily work in the fields, echoing farmworkers' own accounts. *Manijeros* and *encargados* appear as key enforcers of productivity, maintaining pace through intimidation and public performance rankings. Some union accounts are even

more alarming than workers' testimonies. While most farmworkers report frequent encounters with aggressive or even violent supervisors but also note that others fulfil their role without excesses, this nuance tends to disappear in union interviews. In these accounts, *manijeros*—low-tier supervisors directly overseeing pickers—are portrayed as uniformly abusive and authoritarian. Unions thus reinforce depictions of labour processes that systematically prioritise product preservation and yields over health and safety, normalising exhaustion and physical deterioration.

Alongside this critique, two representatives from a specific union highlight positive legal developments stemming from Spain's 2022 labour reform, particularly the mandatory introduction of discontinuous permanent contracts ("contrato fijo discontinuo") in cases where work is seasonal. They explain that, historically, uncertainty about re-employment from one year to the next has been a major source of insecurity for farmworkers in this sector. Under the new framework, once a farmworker is hired, they have legal priority for recall in subsequent campaigns, provided the number of positions remains stable. Employers can only omit them if the following season genuinely requires fewer workers; they can no longer replace them arbitrarily or withhold recall for subjective reasons. While compliance remains uneven—due to widespread informality and workers' limited knowledge of the reform—unions are already pursuing legal claims on this basis.

They describe the 2022 reform as a meaningful gain: it offers a concrete mechanism to contest unfair dismissals and increases the likelihood that long-term occupational illnesses linked to strawberry harvesting, such as chronic back pain or carpal tunnel syndrome, will eventually be recognised, since continuous employment records will now be easier to document. They also clarify that this reform was integrated into the hired-at-origin system only in 2024, after delays in adapting GECCO regulations, while permanent residents and EU-based workers have been covered since 2023.

Some of them also highlight severe constraints facing labour inspections. Inspectors routinely encounter locked farm gates and cannot enter without the Civil Guard (Spanish national gendarmerie), whose involvement requires bureaucratic procedures that often alert employers in advance. This forewarning allows them to conceal irregularities, limiting inspections' effectiveness. Despite these challenges, inspections do occasionally reveal irregularities like, reportedly, underpayment of wages or substantial unpaid social security contributions running into millions of euros, underscoring both the scale of violations and the weakness of enforcement capacity.

Significant concerns are raised regarding the collective agreements governing agricultural labour in Huelva. The consulted unions argue that the current agreement lowers standards by removing Sundays and public holidays during the strawberry campaign—effectively permitting uninterrupted work from mid-February to early June—reducing travel

compensation, and limiting personal leave rights to permanent workers while excluding the seasonal vast majority, now classified as discontinuous permanent under the new regulation. These setbacks were justified as trade-offs for the substantial wage increase introduced by that collective agreement. However, the unions consulted stressed that the wage level set in the previous sectoral agreement had been well below the national minimum wage established in recent years by the current Spanish government, making it plainly unlawful. The wage rise included in the 2023 agreement was therefore necessary, and cannot be used to justify the significant concessions made at the expense of workers' interests.

Trade union perspectives on occupational health and safety strongly reinforce workers' testimonies. Unions point to extreme heat inside the greenhouses' plastic-covered tunnels and intense, repetitive movements as key causes of widespread musculoskeletal disorders. They describe late spring temperatures reaching 50–60 degrees inside the plastics and consider back injuries and carpal tunnel syndrome to be overlooked occupational diseases endemic to strawberry harvesting. They also report rising accident rates and refer to serious cases—such as strokes and tuberculosis—that often go unrecognised as work-related. According to unions, companies routinely block or delay medical leave and rehabilitation, even though these are essential for recovery. Only in high-profile incidents, such as transport accidents involving multiple workers and/or fatalities—as occurred in a case mentioned by one of the unions—can union intervention secure full wage payments, medication, or psychological support during sick leave. These exceptions highlight the broader systemic barriers to healthcare.

Housing conditions constitute another major area of concern. Union representatives confirm severe overcrowding, poor ventilation, structural problems, and fire risks in employer-provided accommodation, which in some cases houses hundreds of farmworkers within farm perimeters. They add that companies often charge for lodging or utilities through opaque payroll deductions, despite formal prohibitions. Their accounts of shantytown settlements are particularly forceful. They describe these settlements as direct products of the agricultural model and of deliberate, discriminatory exclusion from formal housing markets—an assessment closely aligned with workers' own testimonies. Union representatives recount forced evictions, repeated fires that destroy belongings and documents, and a climate of hostility from local authorities and segments of the local population. Some even suggest that certain fires may have been intentionally set, reflecting extreme tensions surrounding the presence of migrant farmworkers.

Four unionists, from two of the unions consulted, converged in highlighting systematic shack demolitions carried out by several municipalities in recent years as especially violent, troubling, and harmful for workers. One union also emphasises a significant point: several of the main agro-industrial municipalities in the area are also beach tourism hubs, with

thousands of housing units left vacant in spring—the very period when the strawberry season brings in thousands of seasonal workers who end up living in shantytowns or in on-farm accommodation. According to this union, they proposed that one of the main local councils make some of these empty homes available to workers, but their proposal was ignored.

On violence, harassment, and coercion, trade union testimonies paint a stark picture. Particularly regarding Moroccan women hired at origin, some of them describe sexual harassment and abuses as extremely widespread. They argue that these practices are supported by informal internal strategies of intimidation that silence complaints, facilitated by geographic isolation, surveillance, and dependence on employers for mobility and basic needs. They report numerous cases involving supervisors and employers, some pursued through the courts. This strongly suggests that such violence is not incidental but deeply embedded in strategies of control over a racialised and gendered labour force.

Finally, these testimonies, grounded in unions' long-term contact with large numbers of farmworkers, introduce bureaucratic difficulties that did not appear in the workers' own interviews. Union representatives describe cases in which companies hire workers for a short period and fail to deregister them from social security, creating false records of prolonged employment and generating large debts that only surface when workers receive official notifications. Although legally perplexing, two members of one union insist they have supported multiple workers facing such debts over the years. They also report the spread of intermediaries who charge excessive fees for simple administrative procedures, taking advantage of migrants' limited familiarity with Spanish institutions. This bureaucratic layer, they argue, further undermines trust and deepens vulnerability, particularly for those in irregular situations.

Overall, the trade union perspective both validates and enriches the accounts provided by farmworkers. It portrays a labour regime in which abuse is systemic, reinforced by organisational structures, regulatory failures, and socio-legal marginalisation. While unions can occasionally secure improvements, their role remains largely reactive within a model that structurally depends on the vulnerability of migrant farmworkers.

Civil society organisations' perspectives

Interviews with civil society actors reveal a broad consensus regarding the structural precarity experienced by migrant farmworkers. Both large, professionalised NGOs and grassroots social or activist organisations describe labour regimes characterised by intense physical strain, systemic rights violations, hazardous and insecure housing, and persistent dynamics of coercion and violence. Their analyses differ mainly in scale and vantage point:

large NGOs emphasise structural and policy failures, while grassroots organisations foreground immediate experiences observed during daily presence in farms, settlements and emergency support work. Together, they offer a composite view that closely aligns with farmworkers' own testimonies and situates individual harms within wider systems of exclusion.

Every civil society actor consulted described physically punishing work that inflicts cumulative damage on the body. Coinciding with farmworkers' own accounts, tasks performed bent over, repetitive movements, and exposure to agrochemicals are consistently identified as sources of chronic pain and long-term injury. Large NGOs underline the absence of recognition of these conditions as occupational diseases and report widespread shortcomings in the provision of protective equipment. Grassroots groups supplement this with detailed accounts of workers presenting blisters, dermatological reactions, intolerable pain relieved only temporarily before returning to work, and injuries or ailments that lead to dismissals—and therefore, to evictions from employer-provided housing, or even deportations in the case of hired-at-origin workers. The shared diagnosis is that labour processes deplete the bodies of migrant farmworkers and that injury is sometimes more likely to lead to replacement than to rest or treatment.

Housing emerges as another major axis of deprivation. Several organisations report that, in their experience, racism in the local rental market is real and widespread. In addition, a staff member from one of the large, professionalised NGOs notes that this racism is compounded by other dynamics: rising housing costs in strawberry-producing municipalities that also function as holiday destinations—sometimes resulting in prohibitive prices, out of reach for farmworkers—and a profound distrust among property owners, who assume that migrant tenants will damage the dwelling or be unable to meet rental payments. Regarding informal settlements, these professionalised profiles agree on expressing alarm for the living and health conditions there, while also showing concern that some of them have evolved into de facto parallel "neighbourhoods" or "cities" [sic], housing hundreds of people and even hosting informal bars and shops. The recurring fires, they add, involve an additional problem: different institutional levels deny responsibility, to the point that none ultimately assumes responsibility for the situation of those affected.

Grassroots organisations provide vivid accounts of the material conditions that they sometimes find in employer-provided on-farm accommodation: warehouses where people cook and sleep in the same room; workers' living spaces that until recently stored toxic agrochemicals, whose visual and olfactory traces remain clearly detectable; places where people sleep on a mattress directly on the floor; and common areas with roofs made of long-

banned hazardous materials such as asbestos.[6] These organisations also report cases of farm-based accommodation where rent is charged before salaries are paid.

Grassroots organisations stress the destructive impact of municipal demolition campaigns targeting shantytown settlements. The views of one of the interviewees, the president of a local diasporic association from a specific Sahelian country, the vast majority of whose members are farmworkers in the local berries sector, are particularly meaningful regarding this point: He argues that municipalities' concern for their public image (and the reputational damage that the presence of settlements may cause) can never be a good enough reason be to simply demolish the shacks. Municipal councils, he insists, must assume shared responsibility for the situation of these people, who are just struggling to get a better life, and need and deserve decent material conditions. If authorities wish these settlements to disappear, they must provide dignified housing through social rental schemes. Additionally, he further notes that an often-overlooked aspect of the problem is that the vast majority of these workers do not own a vehicle. Therefore, if the aim is for them to stop living in unhealthy conditions near the fields where they work, there must be public transport routes connecting those workplaces, where thousands are employed, with the nearby towns.

Access to healthcare is consistently described as fragmented, obstructed and shaped by fear. Large NGOs report that many conditions remain untreated due to the combined effect of linguistic barriers, administrative exclusions, and the structural disincentive created by employers' power to dismiss workers placed on medical leave. They note that specialised services, such as mental health care, are scarce or saturated. Grassroots organisations provide an account of everyday mediation work: accompanying workers to clinics, translating, helping schedule appointments, and intervening when serious injuries do not interrupt work because employers threaten dismissal. They stress that, despite dedicating an enormous part of their time and resources to these tasks during the harvesting season, their limited capacity prevents them from reaching the majority of those in need. Across organisations, health appears as a right that is theoretically guaranteed but substantively curtailed by the precarity of employment.

Severe mental health deterioration acquires much greater prominence in the discourse of these civil society actors than it did among farmworkers themselves. With the latter, this topic appeared in some interviews but was totally absent in many others, and even when it emerged, it was normally described as something alarming but affecting just a few people. Some non-profit organisations, nonetheless, viewed these types of psychological problems as widespread and intensifying, linked to isolation, poverty, traumatic migration trajectories

[6] In fact, in addition to the interview accounts, members of the research team were able to verify all of these conditions occurring simultaneously in one case, when accompanying one of the consulted grassroots activist groups on a visit to several of its users—all of them Moroccan women hired at origin.

and exposure to violence. In particular, large NGOs describe a near-total absence of institutional responses except in extreme cases. Grassroots accounts identify specific symptoms—severe anxiety, depressive episodes, psychological distress linked to violence in farms or settlements—and report increasing numbers of crises requiring urgent intervention. Both perspectives converge on the idea that mental health is eroded by living and working conditions that exceed the capacity of existing support systems.

In relation to violence, coercion and control, NGO analyses are particularly stark. Large NGOs highlight systemic forms of administrative violence, such as the obstruction of municipal registration ("empadronamiento"), which, as mentioned, denies access to basic rights and entrenches irregularity. They also describe economic exploitation by employers and compatriots who charge new arrivals for accessing work. Grassroots organisations, working in closer proximity to daily emergencies, document more direct forms of violence: doors locked from the outside in facilities where workers are temporarily accommodated to prevent them from interacting with NGOs; prevented access to sick workers; explicit threats of premature repatriation; de facto confinement enforced by supervisors and intermediaries; physical aggression; and roadside abandonment.

The president of other of these grassroots groups report several episodes where they were called at night by threatened or ill farmworkers to rescue them. One of the cases she reports involved a Moroccan woman hired at origin who was expelled of the facilities, even though it was the middle of the night and it heavily rained, after an argument with the owner's son. The young man pursued her on a motorcycle, pushed her into a ditch and left her there, where the activists found her a while later. While organisations note that not all companies behave this way, the mere existence of such cases demonstrates the conditions of impunity and extreme power imbalance structuring Huelva's strawberry sector. Multiple organisations also emphasise that sexual harassment and assault, particularly targeting Moroccan women hired at origin, are widespread and, often, undetected and silenced.

Finally, NGOs underline the central role of bureaucracy as a mechanism of exclusion. Large NGOs describe migrant farmworkers' limited understanding of opaque administrative systems governing contracts, social security, registration, and rights. They report that many municipalities use the systematic denial of "empadronamiento" as a tool of exclusion, with severe consequences for health care access, schooling and legal regularisation. Grassroots organisations show how administrative marginalisation translates into labour exploitation: undocumented workers hired informally, unpaid wages, and financial extortion by intermediaries.

Overall, NGO perspectives validate and deepen the diagnostic picture emerging from workers' testimonies. Large, professionalised NGOs map the structural architecture of exclusion, while grassroots organisations reveal its concrete manifestations in daily life.

Together, they highlight a coherent system in which labour exploitation, inadequate housing, restricted health access, violence, and bureaucratic disenfranchisement combine to produce chronic vulnerability among migrant farmworkers in Huelva.

Public sector perspectives

Public administration perspectives on migrant farmworkers' living and working conditions in Huelva partly converge with, yet also diverge in significant ways from, those of farmworkers, unions and NGOs. Institutional actors broadly recognise the same issues—precarious housing, labour abuses, exclusion and deteriorating health—but tend to frame them as less severe, more exceptional, and more amenable to ongoing solutions than suggested by those personally exposed to them (and those working directly with the population).

On housing, institutional interviewees are almost entirely silent about employer-run accommodation on farms. They do not mention overcrowding, control dynamics or poor habitability, and when such lodgings are referenced, they are presented as dignified spaces that should be expanded. This model is framed as central to resolving what institutions identify as the primary or exclusive housing problem: shantytown settlements. By contrast, they describe shacks as spaces with "zero salubrity", linked to extreme exclusion, and acknowledge long-standing administrative and sectoral neglect.

The sample included 5 municipal and regional actors involved in shantytown "eradication" policies—that is, the systematic campaigns of demolition of shacks referred to in all the previous sets of interviews. They, nonetheless, stress a reformist narrative about these policies: ending decades of indignity through censuses[7] of dwellings and residents, bans on constructing new shacks, demolitions of shacks only after they are abandoned and, in some cases, the creation of municipal shelters for seasonal farmworkers. They highlight reported reductions in the number of shacks as evidence of progress. Yet even among these officials, assessments differ markedly: interviewees form some municipalities claim near-elimination of settlements, while those from others report no true progress and no capacity to prevent new constructions; regional officials describe the approach as promising but inconclusive. This variability suggests a fragmented landscape in which shantytowns and their residents' social and health problems may be displaced, not resolved, potentially concentrating this reality in specific points rather than reducing the model and its associated risks.

[7] These census generated within the framework of anti-shatytown policies are completely unrelated to the aforementioned "empadronamiento" from which, as was explained, settlements' residents tend to be excluded: the rationale here is to heuristically count, identify and monitor shacks and their inhabitants, not to officially recognise them as residents and give them access to regularisation and social services.

Several institutional accounts agree on recognising a problem of discrimination in the rental market. One municipality in particular, reportedly, created a subsidised rental platform guaranteeing landlords against non-payment and damage, yet only seven or eight dwellings were offered in three years—despite a large stock of empty tourist housing. This reinforces the inference regarding the centrality of racism, rather than lack of reassurances for landlords, in racialised farmworkers' access barriers to formal accommodation.

A fourth housing model, municipal residences for seasonal farmworkers, was documented only through institutional interviews. On rural land outside consolidated urban areas, either in the fields between farms or at the very edge of towns, replicating the spatial pattern of shantytowns and preserving geographic isolation. Material conditions are generally better than in shacks, though not necessarily superior to many farm lodgings: dwellings may be modular or brick-built, with variable thermal insulation; rooms are always shared (usually by two or four people); and kitchens and showers are shared between multiple rooms, reproducing some of the access and scheduling tensions described in employer accommodation.

Institutional regulation over residents life is substantial, with fixed entry and exit times, strict control over who may access the premises, and, in some cases, scheduled use of kitchens and showers. Particularly where Moroccan women hired at origin reside, some managers employ an openly infantilising language that suggest authoritarian day-to-day dynamics: emphasising obedience and "good behaviour" or expressing satisfaction that they are "under control" and "do not make a sound". In the accounts of institutional interviewees, these residences are justified as tools to prevent shantytown formation rather than as part of a broader continuum of housing options. Overall, the living conditions they create resemble those of most employer-run accommodation facilities, although avoiding the harsh forms of insalubrity or lack of basic equipment found in the worst among them.

On labour conditions, institutional respondents recognise the existence of abuses but characterise them as isolated cases, which can even be not exactly infrequent in some cases, but which in any case constitute the exception against a norm of decent conditions and labour law-compliance. In that sense, concern is often equated with obvious illegality: conditions are implicitly acceptable unless regulatory thresholds are clearly crossed. Conflicts are attributed mostly to either workers' ignorance or unreasonable behaviour, or to the personal cruelty of individual supervisors, not to employer practices or to the way the strawberry sector is economically structured. In one case, a central-level respondent concedes that abuses might be more widespread but argues that, if farmworkers do not file complaints—framed as a matter of their personal willingness—little can be done, without addressing structural barriers to denunciation or workplace cultures of fear.

Regarding farmworkers hired at origin, the GECCO framework is highlighted as enabling enhanced oversight. When serious abuses surface, the Provincial Sub-Delegation of the national government can transfer affected farmworkers to alternative employers. These transfers appear to be effective, swift and discreet, minimising public scandal; whether subsequent sanctioning follows depends on the case.

On healthcare access, regional and national representatives contribute little beyond noting the absence of systematic data—this does not seem to be an issue of prominence in their agendas and, although asked in their interviews, they did not elaborate much. Municipal staff directly involved in shacks eradication and/or residences management, however, recognise the challenges and describe hands-on accompaniment to health centres and hospitals, while acknowledging the fragility of such support due to discontinuous contact—offering, regarding this specific point, an account comparable to that of grassroots social organisations.

A strong convergence emerges around worsening mental health and addiction. Several interviewees voice alarm at the rise in mental health and substance use problems and acknowledge that no support systems are in place. Municipal technicians, in particular, corroborate this by recounting specific cases of severe pathology—including psychosis, emerging schizophrenia, aggression, escalating social marginalisation and isolation, and even the death of a man in his shack after a long, unaddressed deterioration involving several of these issues. While institutions thus recognise the extent of psychosocial decline, their framing partly diverges from that of NGOs and trade unions. Exclusion is acknowledged, but addiction is assigned a particularly decisive role, often depicted as the driver of other dimensions of the problem. It is frequently narrated as deviant behaviour requiring corrective intervention—a discourse that also helps to legitimise shantytown eradication by portraying these spaces as sites of chaos and self-destructive practices. In doing so, responsibility is shifted onto residents and their presumed failings of character, portrayed as needing external guidance.

On violence and control, institutional narratives emphasise formal mechanisms—such as cultural mediators contracted by employer associations or regional authorities and translated prevention manuals—as evidence of protection. In direct contradiction to the lived experiences described by farmworkers, these intercultural mediation services are presented as positive tools that facilitate communication and safeguard migrant workers; their very existence is used to counter depictions of harsh working conditions.

The only explicit acknowledgment of problems lies in identifying intermediate managers—particularly those who are themselves migrants—as a problematic link. Here, too, there is partial convergence with other actors in recognising that supervisors sometimes commit abuses. Yet such incidents are again portrayed as exceptional and attributed to individual

character flaws of cruelty-prone supervisors, rather than understood as connected to corporate strategies or productivity-driven forms of control.

In summary, administrative perspectives acknowledge many vulnerabilities faced by migrant farmworkers but consistently moderate their severity, emphasise ongoing institutional measures and shift responsibility downwards towards workers and supervisors. Shantytowns dominate institutional concern, reinforcing support for eradication policies, while problems in other residential models—particularly employer-run housing—remain largely unaddressed. The resulting narrative recognises structural issues in abstract terms but underestimates the embeddedness of exploitation, precarity and harm within Huelva's agricultural production system.

Employers' perspectives

Employers' accounts offer the most discordant perspective within the wider constellation of actors interviewed. Whereas unions and civil society organisations broadly corroborate farmworkers' testimonies—and in some cases even emphasise more than them the structural nature or wider prevalence of the harms described—employers tend to deny, minimise or ignore the range of problems identified in other interviews. Their narratives largely present an agricultural sector functioning with normality, legality and mutual satisfaction, in stark contrast with the cumulative evidence of exploitation, health risks and structural vulnerability provided by other sources.

A defining feature of all employer interviews is the near-total absence of any acknowledgment of workplace-related health problems. None of the companies interviewed mentions accidents, occupational diseases, allergic reactions, or musculoskeletal disorders as issues occurring within their operations. The largest enterprise in the sample—with its fruit-picking workforce ranging well over 1.000 on occasions, and sizeable human resources and compliance departments—stated that it would never prevent workers from using protective equipment such as gloves and that provisions are made whenever such items are requested. Other employers did not express themselves as clearly on this point.

When employers do mention bodily impacts of work—such as back pain caused by stooping or the intense heat inside plastic tunnels—these issues are framed as unavoidable aspects of a demanding job rather than as occupational health risks requiring preventive action or structural mitigation. Mental health is not mentioned in any employer interview, nor are barriers to accessing healthcare. When the topic is raised indirectly, employers typically state that farmworkers in need of assistance are always transported to medical services, when necessary, with one notable exception discussed later.

On labour conditions, employer narratives present the strawberry sector as one characterised by legality, compliance, and stability. All claim that labour rights are fully respected, contracts are in order, and no particular vulnerability or exposure to abuse exists beyond what might be found in any other industry. The implication is that the sector operates within a frame of "full normality", and that allegations of exploitation are exaggerated or unfounded.

The same narrative extends to housing where employers focus exclusively on on-farm accommodation, which they portray as legally compliant, hygienic and safe. They report housing not only for those hired at origin, but also most other farmworkers, reinforcing the inference—also visible in worker testimonies—that on-farm lodging has become the dominant residential model. Employers emphasise that providing accommodation is a burden they assume out of necessity: the labour force arrives from outside the region during the spring season, have no alternative housing, and might not even arrive without company-provided lodging. This narrative casts housing provision as an onerous imposition rather than a structural component of their labour-management strategy.

Despite this general insistence on normality, employers frequently, although often implicitly, engage with public criticisms of the sector, seeking to refute or reframe them. Several defensive strategies are notable. First, some assert that the company's' need to retain a stable workforce creates a direct incentive to treat people well. Within this argument, the idea that they would do anything that makes labourers unhappy is illogical because they would not want to come back next year, causing multiple management difficulties. This utilitarian reasoning appears more obviously or explicitly in interviews with larger companies.

Second, a recurrent refrain across all employer interviews is: "we are not an NGO". This expression is invoked whenever questions arise concerning social needs, vulnerabilities, or workers' rights that extend beyond strict legal compliance. For instance, one employer used it to justify not providing transport to town for workers hired at origin; another to dismiss calls for improved habitability in on-farm accommodation. It is important to note that these statements were made by highly successful and profitable companies, employing hundreds of workers and operating with substantial export capacity—including one that explicitly explained, with concrete figures provided to the researchers, that the difference between annual income and expenditure amounted to several hundred thousand euros. The underlying logic is clear: fulfilling legal obligations and offering the minimal concessions required for business continuity are deemed sufficient, while anything further is dismissed as an unwarranted act of charity.

Third, employers acknowledge that some supervisors (*manijeros* and *encargados*) engage in abusive behaviour, yet they fully detach this from organisational responsibility. Such abuses

are attributed to personal flaws, temperament, or the supposed inherent cruelty of certain individuals—who, employers often note, are themselves migrants. This frames abuse as a matter of individual (and sometimes ethnicized) character, rather than as something structurally incentivised by productivity targets and managerial pressure.

In this regard, when asked about abuses by *manijeros*, the large company acknowledged the possibility of such problems and linked their detection to the anonymous complaint mechanism they operate. The manager interviewed explained that they do receive workers' submissions, that many refer to misconduct by supervisors, and that the system is viewed internally as a key tool for identifying and containing emerging abuses on their part.

This indicates, on the one hand, that some companies not only have these mechanisms in place—as legally required since 2023 for firms with more than 50 employees—but also actively inform workers about them in ways that encourage their use. But, on the other hand, it highlights clear limits: as long as management is the body receiving the complaints, workers are likely to report only the misconduct of *manijeros* acting beyond their remit, and not abuses they may associate with the company itself; or, if complaints concern both the company and individual supervisors, the latter may be the only ones that actually prompt a response. In either scenario, the mechanism allows the company—as illustrated in the interview—to present itself as a neutral guardian committed to preventing abuses by rogue (often migrant) supervisors, while not addressing the broader organisational conditions that benefit them but enable such practices.

Fourth, employers advance a strong narrative of persecution. They portray themselves as besieged by multiple forces: criticism from the media and public opinion—especially from outlets they regard as progressive and therefore "manipulative" in their portrayal of agricultural working conditions; growing competition from Morocco's strawberry sector (which, they argue, operates with far lower wages and weaker regulation); growing pressure by investment funds trying to accumulate land and controlling shares of agricultural operations in the area; increasingly demanding European supermarket chains; and what they perceive as tightening labour, housing, and environmental regulations.[8] Several report an increase in labour inspections over the past three to four years, interpreting this not as legitimate oversight but as an excessive burden and a form of unjustified persecution.

One employer claims that delays in issuing temporary work permits push companies towards irregular hiring: if prospective workers lack regular status and approval takes months, the harvest window closes before they can be legally employed. This narrative casts

[8] SafeHabitus D5.2, produced under Task 5.2, analyses these dynamics in depth. It examines, as described here by the employers interviewed, how the actions of other actors within the value chains shape the functioning of the chain itself and, ultimately, influence workers' living and working conditions.

both employers and farmworkers as victims of external pressures and implicitly positions employers as protectors, rather than producers, of worker precarity.

Additionally, although employers deny, dismiss, or dispute most criticisms, their interviews contain moments that indirectly corroborate central concerns raised by farmworkers. Several employers describe recruiting large contingents of workers hired at origin for periods that extend well beyond the peak of the spring strawberry season, even when production needs are uncertain and they already know continuous work will not be available. They justify this by emphasising the usefulness of maintaining a large labour force permanently on hand for whenever demand arises, while paying only for days actually worked—making it cost-free for companies to keep workers on standby for months. This aligns closely with farmworkers' accounts of being confined on farms for days or weeks without work and unable to seek alternative income.

One employer also openly expresses a preference for migrant labour, arguing that Spanish workers have entitlements and alternative options and are therefore less willing to accept unstable offers, whereas migrants "say yes to anything". This explicitly illustrates the structurally exploitative advantage gained from employing highly precarious workers. Another one contributes with new, more detailed information about strategies for fostering productivity, when he explains that in his company all berry pickers were an electronic bracelet which automatically register the volume of fruit collected.

Regarding the extent to which employers' interviews confirm or even expand the claims raised by farmworkers, the most revealing case is that of the smallest enterprise in the sample. Employing around 200 farmworkers and lacking any formal human-resources structure, or indeed any white-collar staff, this company is, by the standards of Huelva's strawberry sector, a relatively modest operation, though still well integrated into European export markets. The owner speaks with striking candour, offering insights that shed light on everyday dynamics of control, discrimination, and informality.

He described, and indeed showed to the researchers, multiple WhatsApp groups used by local employers to alert one another to forthcoming labour inspections, enabling companies to conceal irregularities. He also recounts his firm's use of a fraudulent system of union representation. Despite being the de facto owner and never having held genuine union elections, he appears on paper as the company's workers' representative, affiliated with the influential and controversial union referenced in several farmworkers' testimonies. He is able to commit this fraud because he is formally registered as an employee (an unusually well-paid, management-level employee) while one of his elderly parents, long removed from any involvement in the business, remains the sole official owner. In this way, the possibility of genuine representation and negotiation is displaced. His account even suggests that

senior figures within the union's provincial structure were fully aware of, and colluded in, the arrangement. These practices closely reflect irregularities identified in workers interviews.

In discussing on-farm accommodation, the same employer reveals a complete absence of personal space and privacy. He reports entering workers' lodgings without notice, regardless of whether they are present, and even drinking items from their refrigerators without asking permission—presented during the interview as proof of a relaxed, trusting relationship. The implications for workers' sense of security and dignity were not addressed.

Housing allocation also follows racialised and highly personalised logics. Moroccan women are housed eight per lodging (four per room), while Romanian women are housed four per module (two per room). The employer attributes this to differences in group size and the undesirability of mixing groups, rather than considering the possibility of rearranging the number of lodgings assigned to each group in a more equitable distribution. A few long-term Romanian workers with whom he has formed a closer personal bond may receive rooms they do not have to share, whereas Moroccan women occupy rooms of the same size shared by four.

Administrative support and transport to town are likewise distributed selectively as rewards for personal affinity and perceived good behaviour. He also stated that he kept close watch over the movements, comings and goings, and personal lives of female workers in particular. Although he acknowledged employing a small number of men, he did not describe applying such practices to them at all. He recounted situations in which he publicly confronted young female workers for having gone out the night before and, once they admitted it, sent them back to their lodgings without work or pay for that day.

One of the most alarming statements concerns a Moroccan woman hired at origin who became seriously ill. The employer explains that he dismissed her so that she would be deported and thus removed from his premises, explicitly invoking the recurring principle that he is "not an NGO". This decision was taken despite, according to his own account, medical staff warning him that returning to Morocco would almost certainly deny her adequate treatment and severely reduce her chances of survival.

Taken together, employer perspectives diverge sharply from those of all other actor groups. Employers depict a fundamentally different reality—one in which they are not powerful actors dominating and extracting value from the workforce, but victims of unfair structures that leave them little room to act otherwise. They largely deny the abusive or inequitable dynamics described by farmworkers and other stakeholders, while at times inadvertently confirming them.

Within this general pattern, the smallest company in the sample revealed most openly the intertwined dynamics of informality, paternalism, racial hierarchy, and discretionary authority that often shape migrant farmworkers' daily lives and health risks. Larger

companies, with more formalised administrative departments focused on human resources and sustainability standards, instead invested heavily in projecting professionalism, legality, and reputational management, sometimes highlighting specific measures taken to distance themselves from certain forms of poor practice. Although such distinctions cannot be generalised across all firms of similar size, the contrast shows how resource levels, institutional scrutiny, market integration, and managerial culture shape employers' incentives and capacities—and, consequently, workers' experiences. Across these different configurations, however, a consistent structural pattern persists: employers minimise harms, shift responsibility elsewhere, and frame vulnerability as either individual failure or unavoidable circumstance, rather than as a product of the labour regime that underpins their profitability.

Perspectives from origin

Morocco

Experiences as hired at origin farmworkers in Huelva, recounted back in Morocco

Labour and migration trajectories between Morocco and Huelva

According to the workers interviewed in Morocco, and coinciding with the testimonies previously collected in Spain, the migration trajectories of Moroccan women workers in the red fruit sector in Huelva are in many cases marked by precariousness and uncertainty. As explained before, they tend to be women of rural origin, with family responsibilities, selected through the hiring at origin system[9], which gives priority to women with children and residence in the countryside. On paper, this scheme should guarantee regular and predictable rotation; in practice, the workers describe discontinuous and fragile trajectories, strongly conditioned by external decisions that they hardly understand and over which they cannot exert any influence.

The workers describe a high degree of arbitrariness in the management of the lists, both in Morocco and in Spain: women with many years of campaigns stop being called without explanation. COVID-19 reinforced this pattern—since the 2020 campaign was largely

[9] The GECCO Order regulates recruitment in origin within the framework of circular migration for seasonal campaigns in Spain (for example, with women workers from Morocco and other countries). Since the 2024 season, these recruitments are generally classified as permanent seasonal contracts, meaning that return in subsequent campaigns depends on an employer's call-back in accordance with the applicable criteria and the existence of available work.

brought to a halt, many were left "on hold" and, after that break, a significant proportion of those who had migrated regularly stopped being recruited. Some have not travelled to Huelva since 2018 or 2019 and perceive that losing the contract is equivalent to being left out of the circuit, with no effective channels for complaint or review.

Trajectories are interrupted for multiple reasons: early departures for family or health reasons, return in order to care for children or sick relatives after signing voluntary resignations that were induced or deceitful, and pregnancies during the campaign or before travelling. In all these cases, even when they are promised reinstatement after one or two years, the women do not receive new offers and end up being excluded on a permanent basis.

Another source of rupture are conflicts arising from the strict control over the mobility of the workers. Some have been administratively classified as "absconded" because of occasional absences, even on rest days or on brief visits to relatives, despite having informed about their movements. These records as "non returned" have a devastating effect, since they automatically block any subsequent recruitment at administrative level. There are testimonies from women with more than a decade and a half of campaigns who, after an incident of this kind, tried for years to have the error corrected without success, despite having acted with the informal approval, or even following the instructions, of the corporate intercultural mediation services, whom, as discussed at large in previous sections, are supposed to be a source of support for this workers but are often found to act strictly in the employers' interest, even when that may mean blocking the workers' access to different rights.

Early departures also occur when there is barely any work on the farm for weeks, which, as farmworkers in Spain already explained, is experienced as a highly frustrating, unfair, counterproductive (as they are spending their money, instead of earning) experience. Faced with the prospect of remaining without wages[10], some seasonal workers asked to return to Morocco on their own and, by doing so, were likewise marked as "absconded". In all these cases, those affected agree that information flows in a unilateral way: companies communicate decisions that have already been taken, but the women have hardly any formal avenues for appeal.

Taken together, this set of experiences gives rise to a sustained feeling of helplessness. Many workers avoid complaining, even when they feel that their rights have been violated, because they fear that any protest will translate into non-renewal of the contract. They are concerned

[10] As already explained in the previous sections, under Spain's Special Agricultural System, social security contributions are calculated based on "real working days", meaning each day of work that is actually performed and reported; when there is no work, those days do not count as real working days and, as a rule, do not generate wages.

both about their physical performance and about maintaining an image of "docility": falling ill, questioning an order or asking for a change of task can turn them into "problematic" and expendable workers, a perception that is reinforced in each campaign when they learn of cases of colleagues who disappear from the lists after labour conflicts or health problems—a dynamic that mirrors what workers themselves repeatedly described during the fieldwork in Huelva, reinforcing the consistency of these findings across sites.

Even so, most state that, if they could choose, they would still prefer to work in Huelva rather than in the Moroccan countryside, mainly because of the higher wage and the idea that in Spain there is a broader framework of rights, even if it is not always fully realised. The income obtained makes it possible to support the family, pay off debts, improve housing and finance education or small economic projects, and the organisation of work and the treatment on many Spanish farms are perceived as somewhat less harsh than in Morocco. In practice, economic need, the lack of alternatives and the expectation of a higher wage weigh more than the accumulated negative experiences.

Tasks, work organisation and working environments: impacts on health and safety

In Huelva, the Moroccan women workers interviewed are mainly engaged in picking strawberries, raspberries and blueberries, mainly in plastic greenhouses. Some spend part or all of the campaign in sorting and packing warehouses. Work organisation is strongly geared towards productivity: rows or sectors of crops are assigned, the picking rate is monitored, and the harvesting results are constantly analysed with the foremen, and comparisons are made between workers.

Numerous accounts describe intense pressure to work quickly and without breaks. On some farms the newcomers are urged to keep up with the pace of the most experienced workers, with explicit threats of punishment if they fall behind. Punishments usually consist of changes of task that are considered degrading or being sent back to the accommodation without wages that day. There is a case in which a worker was temporarily promoted to forewoman with the explicit mandate to impose discipline and increase her colleagues' pace; when she refused to exercise that role aggressively, she herself ended up being punished. These kinds of situations not only generate tension within the teams, they also have clear effects on mental health: some women report episodes of anxiety, constant nervousness, insomnia and the feeling of not being able to sustain the level of demand—a pattern that closely echoes what women described during the fieldwork in Huelva, triangulating again the findings across research sites.

In terms of working time, many point out that, in general, the formal daily schedule fits what is stipulated in the contracts (around 6 to 8 hours), but they stress that the number of days actually worked does not always match what was promised. When production drops or there

is little fruit, they are ordered to stay in the accommodation, which implies loss of income without compensation. In particularly bad campaigns there are groups that have had almost no work and have returned to Morocco with much less money than expected. At times of peak production, by contrast, working days are extended with overtime; the seasonal workers interviewed consider that overtime is not paid at the rate it should be.

The impacts on physical health are very significant. As was also consistently reported by the women interviewed in Huelva, the work requires spending many hours bent over or in forced postures, lifting weights and repeating movements with hands and wrists, so that most of those who have been through several campaigns suffer chronic pain in their backs, shoulders and legs. Greater mechanisation in Huelva (for example, trolleys for boxes) does not eliminate this postural strain. Added to this are high temperatures, especially in plastic greenhouses, with extreme heat and humidity that cause dizziness, heatstroke and fainting in the middle of the field.

Occupational accidents are also not exceptional: deep cuts from scissors or other tools, falls, sprains and other incidents are mentioned. In line with what was already documented in the Spanish fieldwork, in one case a worker severely cut her hand with a rusty pair of scissors, lost a great deal of blood and consciousness, and those in charge only superficially disinfected the wound, without activating appropriate medical care; without sick leave or pay, she returned to work after a few days out of necessity. Heatstroke is also frequent, and sometimes it is the workers themselves who arrange the journey to the hospital by taxi in the face of managers' passivity, as they play down symptoms or simply recommend resting, without formally recording the accident.

Prevention practices are very uneven between companies. During COVID-19 some seasonal workers lived in overcrowded conditions, without distancing, worked without masks and shared water containers, and only when inspections were announced were masks distributed, water supply improved and hygiene protocols displayed. On other farms more systematic measures were implemented, such as daily temperature checks and the distribution of gloves and hand sanitiser. Access to health care is further limited by the lack of a Spanish health card in many cases, despite being registered with Social Security, and by the language barrier. This makes it difficult to obtain care for dental problems, injuries and common illnesses, forces them to resort to accident and emergency services or to buy medicines without follow up, and means that communication often depends on finding someone who is bilingual or on going accompanied by a colleague who speaks Spanish.

Taken together, the combination of intense physical demands, insufficient prevention, obstacles to accessing health care and fear of losing their job if they fall ill generates great vulnerability. Women tend to minimise their ailments and continue working despite pain or

discomfort, and this self-demand, shaped by precariousness, affects both their physical health (chronic injuries, exhaustion) and their emotional well-being.

Working conditions, contracts and social protection

As mentioned earlier, the red fruit campaigns in Huelva fall within a hiring-at-origin scheme that provides for the temporary relocation of workers under a previously endorsed contract. These contracts, generally lasting between three and six months, are tied to a specific employer and theoretically include registration with the Spanish Social Security system, accommodation and transport to or from Morocco, as well as the wage established in the collective agreement for agricultural work in the province of Huelva.

In practice, the workers' experiences show only partial compliance with these conditions. From the wage perspective, they all agree that daily pay in Huelva is far higher than what they earn in Morocco, and they mention indicative amounts in line with the agreement in force. Echoing several patterns described in Huelva, however, several report problems such as partial non-payment, repeated payslip errors or deductions they do not fully understand. In some cases, they state that certain supervisors appropriated part of the women's wages by taking advantage of their intermediary role. These episodes undermine confidence in the payment system and reinforce the feeling of lacking control over their own income.

The issue of social protection stands out because of the gap between what the regulations provide and what workers actually receive. Although hiring at origin entails registration with the Spanish Social Security system, many of the interviewee's state that they have never had a health card during their stays, despite having accumulated several campaigns. This results in difficulties accessing health centres, especially for non-urgent but painful issues such as dental problems or chronic pain. Some tried to resolve this on their own, handling administrative procedures without support from the company, which revealed a significant lack of knowledge about their rights and the relevant procedures.

Regarding temporary incapacity, testimonies coincide that paid sick leave was not processed. Women who experienced accidents or illnesses during the campaign report that days off work were simply treated as unpaid absences, without activating the occupational insurance provider or the mechanisms for recognising an occupational accident. As repeatedly observed as well in the Spanish fieldwork, in the most serious cases, such as health problems that prevented them from continuing or situations like giving birth during the campaign, the usual company response was to bring forward their return to Morocco through an organised trip, without clear information on associated rights or possible benefits. Once outside Spain, the affected women were disconnected from the Spanish social protection system and left without tools to claim their rights.

The labour mediation service promoted by the agricultural employers' association in Huelva, which should function as a support mechanism for seasonal workers, appears in the accounts as an actor that is ineffective or openly aligned with business interests. Women explain that when they approach this mediation service to raise issues related to health, paperwork or conflicts with supervisors, they usually receive responses aimed at minimising conflict and preserving business continuity rather than defending their rights. There are cases in which, following an accident or heatstroke, the mediation service pressured the worker to accept repatriation with an oral promise of being hired again the following season, a promise that never materialised. There are also accounts of situations where problems at the immigration office, due to biometric or administrative errors, were not properly processed, ultimately preventing women with long trajectories from accessing new contracts.

Although coverage for occupational accidents and occupational diseases exists legally, the seasonal workers have barely seen it applied in their favour. None report having received a temporary incapacity benefit linked to an accident suffered in Huelva's fields. The business strategy described involves minimising the formalisation of incidents: minor cases are resolved with informal unpaid rest; serious cases, with permanent return to Morocco. This dynamic reinforces the idea that falling ill or getting injured in Huelva often means being discarded from the programme.

Finally, accommodation and certain basic services are part of the employment package, but they also appear linked to opaque practices. Some women have noticed payslip deductions under generic categories (cleaning, utilities, miscellaneous services) without receiving a clear breakdown of what they are being charged for. In other cases, they report that when they were repatriated early, they were handed an envelope with money supposedly corresponding to their final settlement, without explanations or documents allowing them to verify whether all amounts due were included—a pattern that directly recalls several situations already described by interviewees in Huelva and thus reinforces the robustness of those findings. Overall, combining both sets of empirical evidence, working conditions in Huelva appear to fall somewhere between a relatively protective legal framework and practical implementation that leaves major gaps in terms of effective protection.

Living spaces, housing and everyday mobility

According to the interviewed women, the everyday life of Moroccan seasonal workers in Huelva unfolds almost entirely in spaces managed by the companies: the fields and warehouses where they work, the housing provided by employers and the collective transport organised for their movements. This configuration significantly limits their autonomy and their ability to decide how and where to move during the campaign.

Upon arriving in Spain, the workers are housed in dwellings or modules located within the farms or in rural settlements near agricultural operations.[11] As was likewise highlighted in the Spanish fieldwork, they share accommodation with other women, often in large groups, which implies communal dormitories, shared bathrooms and very limited privacy. Material conditions vary greatly depending on the company: some accommodations are relatively equipped, while others present significant deficiencies in infrastructure and utilities. There have been documented situations in which water and electricity are cut off after certain hours in the afternoon or evening, a practice that complicates basic tasks such as cooking, washing or communicating with family, and is particularly burdensome during Ramadan.

Geographical isolation is another central factor. Many farms are located far from urban centres, without access to public transport. Seasonal workers depend on company vehicles for grocery shopping, medical appointments or administrative procedures—a reliance that closely echoed accounts gathered in Huelva and thus reinforce the recurrence of this structural constraint. They report being taken in groups to supermarkets or nearby towns at times set by the company, with little room to organise independent outings. This dependency reinforces the feeling of being confined in a circuit in which work, accommodation and mobility form part of a single system controlled from the farm.

Control over physical presence extends to movements outside working hours. In some cases, lists and headcounts are conducted at the entrance and exit of the buses, and any absence not formally notified can be interpreted as abandonment of the post. There have been situations in which a brief visit to relatives in another town led to the worker being marked as unjustifiably absent, affecting her chances of future recruitment. Although in some instances these errors were corrected thanks to the direct intervention of an employer, the overall message the women receive is that their movements are under constant surveillance.

The transport back to Morocco at the end of the campaign is also organised collectively. Companies coordinate buses that take groups of seasonal workers to the ferry and then to different points in the country. Women whose contracts end at the same time as those repatriated due to illness, pregnancy or other reasons often travel together, which means that some who are unable to work must remain in the accommodation until a sufficiently large group is assembled. During these journeys, incidents such as theft of luggage and belongings have occurred, which workers attribute to people involved in organising the trip. The perception that those who complain are not hired again reinforces the fear of reporting such incidents.

[11] The GECCO Order sets the minimum conditions that must be met by the accommodations where programme participants reside, but it leaves some relevant elements as recommendations or voluntary commitments, which limits their enforceability.

In the workplaces, rest infrastructure and basic services are often insufficient. Consistent with multiple accounts previously gathered in Huelva, it is common for there to be no canteen or suitable space for lunch breaks; the workers bring their food from their accommodation and eat it directly in the field, on the ground or sitting on boxes, during a very short break. Access to fresh water, shade and adequate toilets is not always guaranteed. Accounts mention unsanitary toilets, lack of soap, absence of toilet paper and cleaning that intensifies only when inspections are expected. These shortcomings force many women to minimise bathroom use and endure discomfort that affects their health. Life in collective housing, lack of privacy and mobility restrictions add to the physical exhaustion of the workday. Free time is reduced in practice to the hours needed to eat, rest and carry out shared domestic tasks.

With their campaign savings, some women have financed language courses that have given them some autonomy to communicate and, in some cases, facilitated their promotion to roles with greater responsibility within the farm. Paradoxically, when a former seasonal worker becomes a supervisor or team leader, other companions perceive that she tends to align herself with the company and distance herself from the group's needs.

In summary, everyday space in Huelva is strongly structured around work: one lives near the farm, leaves the accommodation to work and returns to it under the employer's organisation. This spatial and organisational arrangement was described in remarkably similar terms by the women interviewed in Huelva itself, who stressed that the layout of housing, mobility and daily routines effectively fused the spheres of labour and life. The convergence between both sets of accounts implies that this configuration is not circumstantial or farm-specific but a recurrent feature of the seasonal employment model, shaping workers' autonomy and social experience in comparable ways across sites. This centrality of the company in all spheres reinforces dependency and limits the possibility of an autonomous life during the campaign.

Rights, violence and collective action

The presence of these women workers on Spanish territory is framed by a legal system that, compared with the Moroccan one, offers stronger labour guarantees and formal mechanisms of oversight. There are sectoral agreements, minimum wages, legal limits on working hours and inspection structures. However, the accounts of seasonal workers show that real access to these rights is partial and unequal, and that they remain exposed to various forms of labour and gender-based violence, although with characteristics different from those they describe in Morocco.

The women interviewed in Morocco tend to not clearly recount open sexual assault episodes in their experience in Huelva. In many cases, most immediate supervision is carried out by

women (forewomen or supervisors), which limits certain forms of harassment. Nevertheless, this does not mean the absence of violence. A central dimension is verbal and psychological violence: disparagement, offensive comments about their ability to work, hurtful remarks about their status as migrants or as "older" women—forms of denigration that closely mirrored experiences recounted in the Huelva fieldwork, reinforcing the cross-site consistency of this dimension of workplace violence. Seasonal workers experience these humiliations as a denial of their dignity and of the economic contribution they make, both to the companies and to the Spanish social security system.

There is also a type of organisational violence in which disciplinary rules include very harsh penalties, such as days without pay, punitive task changes or early return, for behaviours that the workers consider accidental or justified: a drop in performance due to illness, an isolated absence or a complaint about conditions. Classification as "absconded" or the mere threat of not being called back operate as coercive mechanisms that make them internalise that asserting rights, asking for explanations or reporting abuse may jeopardise their continuity in the programme, generating strong dynamics of self-censorship. Added to this are abuses of power by certain Moroccan middle managers, sometimes supported by family networks within the farm, who exercise tight control and demand personal loyalties, favours or particular benefits in exchange for more lenient treatment. Those who refuse usually face worse conditions, symbolic punishments or the lack of recommendation for future campaigns. In at least one case, a group of women collectively decided not to work again for a company as long as a particular person remained in a managerial position, a gesture of collective refusal with economic and labour costs.

Various forms of economic violence add to this picture: unpaid wages or unacknowledged discrepancies, appropriation of part of their salary by middle managers, theft of belongings during return journeys and unjustified deductions on payslips. As was equally evident in the interviews conducted in Huelva, the fear that filing a formal complaint could entail exclusion from the programme further reduces their willingness to report and facilitates the persistence of these practices. Collective action capacity is generally very limited: none of the interviewee's report having participated in strikes or organised mobilisations during the campaign. Their status as temporary foreign workers, the language barrier, isolation on remote farms, dependence on the same employer for future campaigns and lack of knowledge about union or associative channels exacerbate this difficulty. Faced with this scenario, most opt for individual survival strategies: complying with rules, keeping a low profile, working as well as possible and avoiding conflicts that could lead to non-renewal of their contract.

External protection mechanisms have not met these women's expectations. As noted, they have a critical view of the labour mediation service, which they consider closer to employer interests than to the workers. They also report a lack of effective support from the Moroccan

Consulate in Spain when they have sought help to correct unjust administrative situations or migration status problems. Spanish social organisations and trade unions have intervened in some cases, but their day-to-day access to accommodations and farms is limited[12], and usually depends on workers taking the first step to report, something few dare to do while they depend on the programme.

At the same time, more discreet but relevant forms of mutual support have developed: networks among co-workers who recommend certain employers considered more respectful, WhatsApp groups where information about working conditions or regulatory changes is shared, and specific projects that seek to recognise the efforts of these women once they return. Among them is the Wafira[13] initiative, which has offered financial assistance and entrepreneurship training to former seasonal workers to support small businesses in their home communities. These resources, although limited in scope, help strengthen their decision-making capacity once outside the strictly agricultural migration circuit.

Taken together, the Spanish-side experiences recounted by the women interviewed in Morocco closely mirror the patterns already documented in the Huelva fieldwork, providing strong triangulation for the main findings: dependence on employer-controlled spaces, constrained mobility, economic and organisational pressures, and recurrent forms of verbal and structural violence. At the same time, these accounts introduce nuances—such as the dynamics of repatriation, the role of intermediary actors and specific vulnerabilities linked to transnational recruitment—that complement and refine the earlier picture. Overall, what emerges is a consistent depiction of seasonal work in Huelva as a tightly regulated labour regime in which formal guarantees coexist with significant gaps in effective protection. The following subsection contrasts these experiences with conditions in Morocco's own agro-industrial sector, the primary alternative employment context from which most of these workers depart.

[12] Including where it states that trade unions may enter the farms.

[13] Wafira is an initiative promoted by Spain's Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, linked to circular migration, which combines temporary work in agricultural campaigns in Spain with training in personal skills, financial education and entrepreneurship, so that seasonal workers can launch income-generating activities upon their return to Morocco, with technical support and, in some cases, financial backing (microfinance) for their business plan.

Experiences as local (or internal migrant) farmworkers in the Gharb-Loukkos Region's strawberry sector

Labour trajectories in the red fruit sector and recruitment for Huelva

Most of the interviewed workers have built their labour trajectories around intensive export-oriented agriculture in Morocco, especially in the red fruit sector. Many began working in agriculture as children or adolescents (around 12 to 15 years old), often leaving school to contribute to the family economy. They come from farming families that depend largely on the income obtained in strawberry, raspberry or blackberry farms, combined with work on small family plots or other temporary jobs.

The strawberry season in Morocco usually runs from late autumn to spring, approximately from November or December to May or June. Once it ends, many women move on to other activities in the agricultural or agro-industrial sector, such as harvesting potatoes or other crops, as well as work in cooperatives and packing warehouses. Despite decades of work, few manage to access stable positions; the norm is a succession of short contracts or informal jobs, with periods of unemployment between seasons. The interviewees repeatedly point out that in their home areas there are practically no economic alternatives outside agriculture.

Recruitment for work in Huelva overlaps with these local trajectories. Through public calls in rural municipalities, women are invited to participate in the recruitment-in-origin process. Candidates go to town halls or other designated points, carrying documentation proving their family situation and agricultural experience. The selection processes bring together hundreds of women per locality.

However, from the workers' perspective, the way these selections are actually managed is often perceived as non-transparent. Several recount that, after being informed that they were preselected, they stopped receiving news without any explanation. Others even received contracts from Spanish companies and travelled to Casablanca to complete visa and embarkation procedures, only to be told at the last moment that their contracts were cancelled. Such situations have become especially common in recent years and mainly affect women who are new to the programme. They also describe list changes, collective cancellations of contracts and a lack of clear information about the reasons.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, workers feel that certain dynamics of uncertainty have intensified. The near cancellation of the 2020 season and the reduction of quotas in 2021 and 2022 excluded many women who expected to be hired, including those who had been travelling regularly for years. Some have still not managed to re-enter the circuit to Huelva. At the same time, the multiplication of offices and administrative units in different territories is associated, in their accounts, with an increase in local discretion and greater difficulty keeping track of files.

Alongside official channels, the workers describe the emergence of informal intermediaries who take advantage of the expectations generated around migration to Huelva. In some cases, these intermediaries organise groups of women, promise to facilitate access to contracts or speed up procedures, and demand upfront payments, only to disappear without completing any process. There have also been documented scams in which public spaces (such as town halls or courthouses) are used as stages for supposed procedures in order to confer an appearance of legitimacy. These experiences fuel distrust and represent significant economic losses for families who, in many cases, go into debt or sell belongings to cover the costs.

Despite all these difficulties, many of the workers who have participated in the Huelva programme express their desire to do so again. When they compare strawberry work in Morocco and in Spain, they emphasise that the physical demands are similar, but the wage differential in Huelva is decisive. Most state that they prefer to work in Spain because, although not all rights are respected and the experience can be hard, the income allows them to achieve goals that would be unattainable with Moroccan wages. Some report having used those savings to improve family housing, finance their children's education, buy land or start small businesses.

Participants mention a recent trend: the increase in male migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa in red fruit farms. In their account, because this is a highly vulnerable workforce, they sometimes end up accepting more precarious conditions and, in some cases, have accommodation near the fields provided by the company. They stress that the problem does not lie with these workers, but with the possibility that some employers may use their vulnerability to push conditions downward or replace those who demand improvements, including Moroccan women.

On the other hand, some former Huelva seasonal workers who have been permanently excluded from the programme have tried to leave local agricultural work by starting small businesses (shops, milk-selling ventures, etc.), sometimes supported by projects such as Wafira, mentioned earlier, while others have returned to agricultural work in other crops after failing to find sustainable alternatives.

Tasks, work organisation and working environments: impacts on OSH

In the Moroccan red fruit fields, the working conditions described by the labourers are extremely demanding and have serious consequences for their health. Tasks range from planting and caring for the plants to harvesting, selecting and packing. Although the legal working day should be around eight hours, the workers note that in practice, during peak production periods, the schedule extends until all ripe fruit has been picked, meaning a

working day with no time limit. In the warehouses, for example, some have worked late into the night to process the day's production.

Work organisation is structured in crews led by a crew leader who supervises dozens of workers. During high production periods, piece-rate pay becomes widespread: a number of strawberry boxes that each woman must pick is set; those who exceed the quota can work additional hours and increase their wages, while those who do not meet it see their income reduced. This system reinforces competitiveness among co-workers and leads many to sacrifice breaks, hydration and food intake to avoid falling behind. When production declines, pay returns to a daily wage system, but the physical conditions of the task, with forced postures, high pace and heat, remain unchanged.

Ergonomic conditions are especially harsh. For years, many workers have picked fruit while bent over, carrying boxes on their backs held by a rope. In some farms, trolleys with wheels have been introduced to relieve part of the weight, but the prolonged bent posture remains the norm. Almost all interviewees report chronic pain in their backs, hips, knees and joints. Moreover, openly expressing these ailments can be interpreted as a lack of capacity, with the risk of losing days of work without pay or not being called back the following season, so many choose to silence their pain.

Exposure to chemicals is another major source of risk. Seasonal workers describe pesticide fumigations taking place while they are still working in the rows, without being removed from the field, involving direct inhalation of toxic substances and skin contact through the wet leaves. Generally, they are not provided with adequate PPE beyond simple gloves. The women associate these exposures with respiratory irritation, skin problems, headaches and dizziness, and they fear long-term health effects that are very difficult to document.

Extreme heat, especially in plastic greenhouses, worsens the situation. Temperatures inside can be very high and lead to heatstroke, with frequent reports of dizziness, severe headaches and fainting. Protection against these conditions is very limited: often there are no shaded areas or regulated breaks for rest and rehydration. Although some farms are starting to introduce occasional measures, the general feeling is that the priority is not to lose fruit, even at the expense of the workers' health.

Practices related to rest, hydration and food during the working day are also problematic. Several women explain that they leave home at dawn to reach the field before six in the morning and begin working without breakfast; the first break can be delayed several hours and depends on the crew leader's decision. Lunch breaks are usually very short, and many shorten them even further to continue filling boxes and avoid wage reductions under the piece-rate system. Water is mostly the responsibility of the workers themselves, who bring it from home or resort to unreliable containers. Access to toilets is highly restricted; in some places they are only allowed to go once a day, and delays are penalised through wage

deductions. The combination of dehydration, urine retention and heat has clear consequences for kidney and general health.

When workplace accidents occur, the employer's response is rarely adequate. Accounts include fractures caused by falling pallets and injuries from machinery or internal transport vehicles. Employers may initially take the worker to a medical centre, sometimes to private clinics, but afterwards do not guarantee paid sick leave or reinstatement under proper conditions. In many cases, after the recovery period the worker is simply replaced and is no longer hired, with no compensation or recognition of the injury as occupational.

Transport safety to and from the farms is part of this same risk framework. Historically, labourers travelled in overloaded vehicles without basic safety measures, which led to fatal accidents. Currently, although the presence of minibuses has reduced some of the most extreme situations, they still report serious accidents related to overcrowding and the use of secondary roads in bad condition to avoid police checkpoints. The sense of danger during these journeys remains high.

Overall, the organisation of work and the material conditions in the Moroccan red fruit sector generate a significant burden of disease: musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory and dermatological conditions, extreme fatigue and symptoms of anxiety and depression. The women state that they go to the fields with concern, aware that they dislike the work and that it exhausts them physically and emotionally, but knowing that they have few employment alternatives in their regions.

Working conditions, contracts and social protection

In Morocco, labour relations in the red fruit sector are characterised by extreme contractual instability and very limited social protection. Most workers are tied to companies through short fixed-term contracts, generally lasting three or six months per season, extendable at the employer's discretion. Some chain together six-month contracts with instrumental interruption periods: the company terminates the contract, declares a period of "holidays" and then rehires the same person. From the workers' perspective, this practice aims to prevent them from acquiring rights comparable to those of a permanent employee.

Temporary contracts in the Moroccan agricultural sector effectively limit access to benefits for accidents, illness or unemployment. In the testimonies collected, when a workplace accident occurs, companies rarely process the appropriate coverage. The absence of effective insurance, lack of information about rights and the weakness of control mechanisms allow employers to shirk the costs associated with workplace accidents. Numerous seasonal workers explain that, after an accident, they may be dismissed at any time, without compensation or recognition of the injury.

Added to this precariousness is the issue of language and literacy. Many labourers cannot read or can only read in Arabic, while some contracts are presented in other languages, even in English, hindering comprehension. The women interpret this practice as a deliberate strategy to prevent them from understanding the clauses they sign. At certain times, non governmental organisations have intervened to demand versions in Arabic or French and have offered basic training on how to read contracts. Even so, a significant gap persists between what is stipulated on paper and what happens in the fields, especially regarding wages, working hours and rest periods.

Despite this, workers value having a contract over not having one. They see that formal employment, however precarious, allows them to accumulate contributory days that could be relevant for a future pension, although many doubt they will ever reach the required number. They also perceive that, in medium and large companies, contractual formalisation introduces some degree of external regulation, for example through occasional inspections or requirements from international clients, something practically absent in smaller farms.

The daily wage in the Moroccan strawberry sector is considered low. The labourers mention approximate ranges that place pay at around 100 dirhams [14]per day, with variations depending on the company, seniority and type of contract. A central element of their complaints is deductions: in many cases, the employer withholds part of the wage alleging transport costs, soap for bathrooms, protective material or other concepts, even when these services are poorly provided or simply do not exist in practice. When paid, the women find they receive less than they believed they had earned, but they have few tools to challenge such deductions.

In small or informal farms, by contrast, daily pay may be higher precisely because there are no social contributions or obligations. Some workers explain that they alternate periods with contracts in large companies, which provide a certain temporary stability and contributions, with informal work in smaller farms, which allows them to increase income at specific times. This combination increases their vulnerability but responds to the need to maximise resources in a context of rural poverty.

Social protection for unemployment or illness is practically non existent for most labourers. Although the Moroccan system formally contemplates benefits in such situations, agricultural workers find it very difficult to access them, either because they do not meet the requirements or due to a lack of information and support. Rumours circulate (for example, that women refuse contracts to receive benefits), which they themselves deny: they maintain that they prefer to be employed precisely because, in theory, that gives them more long-term protection options.

[14] Approximately €9.30 per day.

Trade unions play a limited but important role in some episodes. There are accounts of workers who, after discovering they had been paid for fewer hours than they had actually worked, organised themselves and went to a local union. Union intervention, through a call to the company and the threat of a formal complaint, led to the recognition of the error and the payment of the outstanding money. These experiences show that collective action can bring change but also involves risks: women fear being identified as conflictive and losing their jobs.

A prominent role has been played by rural women's support associations, which, according to several interviewees, in previous years offered training on labour rights, safety and health. Thanks to these initiatives, many labourers learned, for example, that transport vehicles have a maximum capacity and that they can refuse to travel in extreme overcrowding, or that they can turn to labour inspection and unions when their rights are violated. However, the workers themselves note that several of these associations have reduced their activity or disappeared from agricultural areas, weakening the external support structure. Once these organisations withdrew, they perceive that some employers felt freer to relax compliance with rules and to increase pressure on the labourers.

Living spaces, housing and everyday mobility

In the Gharb-Loukkos region in Morocco, unlike in Huelva, red fruit labourers do not live in employer-provided accommodation but in their own homes or in family houses in villages and small rural settlements. Their daily life combines the obligations of waged agricultural work with domestic and care work. Mobility between home and farm is a central component of their day and concentrates a significant part of the risks.

Transport to work is usually organised by the companies or by people associated with them. Farm owners have minibuses or trucks with which they pick up workers at designated points. Although these vehicles have an official capacity limit, the women report that overcrowding is common, with many more people than allowed. Stools are placed in the aisles, every available space is used and travel takes place with little ventilation and no seat belts. In exchange, each worker is charged a daily amount for the service, sometimes deducted directly from wages.

Drivers, often crew leaders or other trusted employees of the employer, obtain additional income the more crowded the vehicle is, as they sometimes charge extra for the transport. To avoid police fines, they often use secondary roads in poorer condition, which increases the risk of accidents. Although workers acknowledge some improvement compared to times when they travelled in private cars under even more precarious conditions, they insist that road accidents remain frequent and that each year there are serious accidents with significant injuries and even deaths.

The journeys are not only a physical safety problem but also a space where forms of harassment and gender-based violence occur. Many women say that comments about their physical appearance, sexual jokes and insinuations by some drivers or supervisors begin in the vehicle, on the way to the farm. As it is a closed space with strong hierarchy and no external witnesses, it is difficult to resist or report such behaviour.

Once in the fields, most of the day is spent in the open or in greenhouses, without adequate rest infrastructure. There are no canteens, and shaded areas outside the plastic structures are scarce. Workers leave their belongings in improvised places and eat in the work area itself, under poor hygiene conditions. Drinking water is usually brought from home; in some cases there are containers or water points, but they are not always in good condition. Toilets, when they exist, are precarious latrines or very basic facilities; in many cases, women prefer to hold on until they return home to avoid uncomfortable or humiliating situations, which affects their health.

At the end of the day, they board the same overcrowded vehicles and make the return journey, often at night. In this way, the combination of hours of waged work, transport time and domestic work results in extremely long days, with very little effective rest.

In summary, the daily life of workers in Morocco is characterised by waged work under harsh conditions and dangerous commutes. When the company does not provide accommodation, the costs associated with the daily reproduction of the labour force fall mainly on households, while the company retains the ability to control what is operational for it, such as arrival times, crew organisation and work pace, through transport and internal farm rules.

Rights, violence and collective action

The human and labour rights landscape for red fruit women workers in Morocco is particularly alarming, both because of the intensity of the violations they describe and the difficulty of establishing effective defence mechanisms. Even so, the accounts also show processes of awareness-raising and incipient mobilisation that point towards forms of collective resistance.

Gender-based violence in the workplace occupies a central place in their testimonies. The labourers describe the existence of sexual abuse and assaults on the farms, committed by certain middle managers and, in some cases, by members of landowning families who control several levels of the hierarchical chain. The organisation of work, in which the same family can hold ownership, management and supervisory positions, facilitates situations of impunity: the women explain that when a victim or co-workers try to report these events internally, the usual response is the dismissal or non-renewal of the affected women, while

the aggressors keep their positions. Only in very visible cases, such as pregnancies resulting from these power relations, do cases reach the courts, and even then, the chances of effective sanctions are uncertain.

The fear of reporting is very high. The workers fear the immediate economic consequences of losing their job in contexts of poverty, as well as the social consequences of publicly exposing a sexual assault: stigmatisation in the community, the breakdown of family relationships or distrust towards the victim. Added to this is the perception that the institutions will not provide adequate protection, which reinforces the idea that, in many cases, reporting may worsen their situation. As a result, most opt for silence, trying to avoid risky situations and relying on informal networks of co-workers whenever possible.

Everyday labour violence takes various forms. Shouting, insults and humiliations by some crew leaders or supervisors are common. Talking to a colleague during work, showing tiredness, expressing a complaint about the pace or organisation of the task can be grounds for punishment: assignment to particularly hard tasks, immediate expulsion from the field for the day or even termination of employment. Questioning the supervisor's authority is punished harshly, inhibiting women's ability to express disagreement or propose improvements.

Internal division within the group of workers is another tool used to maintain control. When a woman dares to defend her own rights or those of others, the supervisors, according to the workers' accounts, single her out before the group as a threat to the employment stability of all, suggesting that her actions may put at risk the continuity of the farm or the employer's willingness to keep hiring. This creates pressure among the workers themselves, who face the dilemma of supporting the woman who demands justice or distancing themselves from her to minimise the risk of collective reprisals. In this way, the possibility of organising is eroded from within.

Despite this context, various forms of collective action and resistance have developed. Training provided by rural women's associations and labour rights organisations has had a significant impact on the workers' ability to identify abuses and articulate responses. Many of them state that thanks to these training sessions they have learned to recognise which practices are illegal or unacceptable, to understand the existence of trade unions and to use certain institutional channels to their advantage. In some farms, this new awareness has led to small strikes or stoppages to demand concrete improvements.

Recourse to trade unions, although limited, has proven effective in specific cases, such as recovering unpaid wages or correcting certain abusive practices. Contacts have also been established with human rights organisations that document violence and pressure companies and authorities to adopt measures. However, these actions remain partial and

fragile, and often depend on individual leadership, such as that of women who take part in local associations.

Moroccan (from Gharb-Loukkos region) actors' perspectives

Motivations of the women and the meaning of work in Huelva

The interviewed actors consistently present work in Huelva as a key economic opportunity for rural women. The two *douar* (Moroccan small-size, rural village) mayors who were interviewed for this study describe a before and after in their communities: in the early years of the programme, there were hardly any volunteers because husbands resisted the idea of their wives travelling; over time, once they saw the income brought back from Spain and the visible improvements in housing and family consumption, their perception changed and today it is almost a very appealing option, in the words of one of them.

The central contrast they emphasise is wages. Both mayors place local agricultural wages at around ten euros a day for long workdays, and consider that such remuneration makes it very difficult to support a family. From this perspective, work in Huelva represents a quantitative leap: it allows women to accumulate in a single season what would amount to several years of local work. From there, the narratives revolve around visible transformations: home improvements, land purchases, the opening of small shops or commercial activities, and, in general, an increased standard of living among women who have participated in circular migration compared with those who have never left.

Staff from the employment agency qualify this vision with a more programmatic reading. From their perspective, migration to Huelva has a dual objective: to respond to the seasonal labour demand of Spanish agricultural companies and to generate a positive impact on families and communities of origin through remittances and acquired experience. Hence the selection criteria: priority is given to women from rural areas, with agricultural experience and dependent children, under the assumption that this profile combines high productivity in physically demanding work with a high likelihood of return and reinvestment of earnings in the household and the local economy.

In institutional discourse, women's motivations appear strongly framed by the language of effort and responsibility. The mayors emphasise the search for "strong" and healthy women capable of enduring the pace of the season; the employment agency stresses that criteria such as age, rural residence and motherhood stem from agreements between Spanish authorities and employer associations, intended to guarantee the proper development of the temporary "mission" and the return. The desire to improve their children's wellbeing occupies a central place, presented both as the driving force behind the decision to migrate and as a guarantee of return.

At the same time, these actors project normative expectations regarding the "proper" use of income. One mayor explicitly distinguishes between husbands who manage the money prudently, investing in small businesses or market stalls. In this narrative, the success of migration is measured not only by the income earned, but by the household's ability to translate it into more stable economic projects.

Selection procedures and institutional architecture

The interviews allow us to sketch a complex institutional architecture around circular migration. At the top, according to employment agency staff, are the Spanish and Moroccan administrations, which agree on general guidelines and profile criteria. Then, business associations, especially the organisation representing red fruit producers in Huelva, work with the Moroccan side to specify labour needs and selection parameters (age, number of children, rural residence, agricultural experience). The employment agency describes itself as the link that translates these agreements into concrete recruitment processes: publicising calls, organising selection days in rural open spaces, receiving and reviewing documentation, and assembling lists.

The mayors occupy an intermediate, primarily logistical role. They report receiving instructions from the employment agency or the regional government delegation, spreading the call for applicants through announcements and word of mouth, and collecting documentation from candidates (identity cards, family books, children's birth certificates, marital status, contact numbers) to later deliver it to the agency. They do not take part in defining criteria or making final selections, though they witness the massive turnout of women and the tensions surrounding access to the lists.

A recurring element is the use of multi-year reserve lists. One mayor explains that for years lists have been created with validity extending over several seasons; each agricultural season a number of women are called from that list, but many are never contacted despite having submitted all required documents. At the same time, new lists are drawn up in nearby towns that sometimes are never activated. This "pooling" logic generates uncertainty among women and feeds the sense that access to the programme depends as much on institutional timing as on opaque factors.

The employment agency acknowledges a structural mismatch between the numbers initially requested by Spanish employers and actual needs once the season begins. They describe a scenario in which, for example, a certain number of workers are selected, required to pay for visas, and prepared for travel, but employers later reduce their needs and only part of the group is actually called. The rest, already preselected and having incurred costs, do not travel and remain in Morocco. From the Moroccan viewpoint, this lack of employer planning

is seen as one of the main flaws of the system, but it is framed more as a logistical problem than a rights issue.

Within this architecture, each actor clearly defines its scope of action. The employment agency stresses its limited capacity and its mediating role between Spanish employer demand and the Moroccan labour supply; the mayors emphasise that they have no influence over selection decisions and limit themselves to facilitating logistics and observing impacts in their communities.

Responsibilities for the wellbeing and protection of the workers

When the question of who is responsible for women's wellbeing and protection once they travel to Huelva is raised, a strong pattern of shifting responsibility emerges. Employment agency staff state explicitly that any problems the workers may face in Spain, referring generically to workplace conflicts or difficulties within the companies, must be resolved internally by the companies or, in any case, through the Spanish employer association. They claim that the agency fulfils its function by selecting and sending workers, and that what happens afterwards belongs to the companies and the Spanish context.

This stance contrasts with the fact that the selection process itself, including highly specific criteria related to gender, motherhood and rural residence, is presented as the result of tripartite agreements between the administrations of both countries and employer associations. From a rights perspective, one would expect that such shared responsibility in programme design would translate into shared responsibility for the protection of workers throughout the entire migration cycle, something not reflected in the discourse of the interviewed actors. The agency assumes intense responsibility in the pre-departure phase but disengages from what happens after embarkation, apart from acknowledging that women who do not depart despite having invested in visas and travel costs are left in a problematic situation in Morocco.

The mayors, for their part, delimit their responsibility even more narrowly. Regarding migration to Huelva, they see themselves primarily as administrative intermediaries who help channel documentation and disseminate recruitment calls. When asked about programme impacts, they highlight positive economic effects in their communities, such as improved housing, the opening of small businesses and a higher standard of living.

One aspect that does appear in institutional discourse is the idea of the women's and their families' moral responsibility regarding the "proper use" of the opportunity. When referring to the obligation to return associated with the programme, they insist that those who go to Huelva must comply with return commitments for the system to continue functioning. When discussing community impacts, they stress that income earned in Spain should be invested

"rationally" in projects that provide economic stability. In this way, responsibility is shifted towards the workers and their households, while the obligations of institutional actors are confined to administrating flows and meeting labour demand.

Romania

From origin to destination: motivations for seasonal work abroad, recruitment, mobility patterns and associated risks (Germany and Spain as destinations)

The primary reason for migrating is earning money. "Money" repeatedly appears in the discourse of our respondents. Behind the money, there are several types of needs: the usual, daily needs of their household and the need of small investments or other "big expenses" (like organizing a wedding or covering the costs for dental implants of a member of the family). Most of our interviewees used at least part of the money gained through migrating abroad for surviving. The small investments include buying goods otherwise inaccessible – like a car, making small improvements to the house (like replacing the inside doors). The big aims, such as buying a house/flat or substantially improving the living conditions, are achieved only in many years in seasonal migration and usually with the involvement of more than one member of the household in migration.

The motivation of these people to work abroad cannot be understood in dissociation from the context in which they live. Most of them are low educated (very rarely more than secondary school) and the opportunities for them on the local labour market are limited. In many cases, the offer of (formal) jobs is scarce in their area or the jobs accessible to them, requiring low levels of qualification, are low paid (the national minimum wage) and located in nearby town or cities. Not only the wage, but also the distance to the nearest city/town and the costs (in time and money) of the daily commuting makes these jobs to be perceived as unworthy.

Repeatedly, our respondents mention that, in Romania, the wages, when you have a job, are sufficient enough only to survive from one month to another. Besides these opportunities for formal incorporation on the labour market, generally only other forms of informal labour are available: the daily work, the work in own households (gardening, small-scale livestock farming) or other forms of informal work (in constructions, for example). A season in Germany, in Spain or in other countries offers these people one of the few if not the only chance to accumulate an amount of €3,000 – €4,000 in two or three months. Received at once, at the end of the season, this amount allows covering some high costs which otherwise would be impossible to cover. The season abroad becomes in many cases the only way "to do something", "to advance" in the local social hierarchy.

However, the importance of money *per se* should not be overestimated. People (especially the young ones) are also curious about seasonal migration and get involved in this with the ease of those who have nothing to lose if they leave for a while.

Once the first season completed, working abroad becomes an alternative to the local limited opportunities and people generally keep going with or without interruptions. Ageing persons "doing seasons" raises additional problems. If young people may more easily find a job, not the same can be said about the people aged 50 or more. Moreover, the seasonal migration transforms the life of households and offer them a way of living with which they become accustomed. As one of our interviewees says: "we've gotten used to having money". Under these circumstances, it become obvious that the longer individuals participate in seasonal migration, the harder it becomes to renounce to it for local jobs in cases when these available.

Yet, seasonal migration is not only about money. Its short duration and, more important, its seasonal character allow individuals to adapt the process of earning money abroad to the calendar and specific needs of their household in origin. One example is working only during the summer holiday of the children in Romania (which coincides approximately with Germany's cucumber harvest season). This allows finding more easily an arrangement for the children left behind. However, this flexibility is not the attribute of seasonal migration in one country, but it is rather built by migrant themselves by finding contracts in different countries, allocating the members of the households to different destinations/working periods and working in different seasons.

The exit from repeated seasonal migration is usually linked to changes in the family configuration (e.g. sickness of someone that needs care; no one to look after the children left at home for two or three months), health issues or old age. The replacement in seasonal migration with another member of the household or the long-term migration/migration towards other type of jobs are also other prompts for exiting seasonal work abroad. Rather rarely the households involved in seasonal migration escape "the circle" and are able to develop life arrangements allowing them to abandon the (seasonal) work abroad and simultaneously to keep at the same level their standard of living (including here the small investments). However, attempts to interrupt the cycle are not rare, but many are forced by circumstances to restart the seasonal migration in agriculture as soon as their saving are spent.

In the areas of Romania where we developed the fieldwork, the opportunity to go abroad for a season is easy and at hand. All the interviewees have acquaintances, friends, relatives, or other members of the family doing the same or living abroad, know someone who "arrange contracts," or are aware of the possibilities that recruiting companies offer via the internet. It is not rare to accept the intermediaries (companies or informal intermediaries)

for a clear fee (per season, per month, per day), as it is commonplace to leave the locality together with other acquaintances or closely connected people. Overall, knowing where you are going (country; crop; specific farm), what the conditions and the payment will be, and to stay with someone known are the most important factors.

All the factors discussed above lead to a huge diversity of mobility patterns. Potential migrants are aware of their rights to feely work in the European Union and of the rich offer in agriculture/other menial jobs abroad. They actively search and choose what is appropriate for them in the particular moment of their life when they decide to go abroad. Under these conditions, refusing an offer is not rare, and it is not extraordinary to leave one workplace because the conditions simply do not fit the expectations.

As already stated, there is a great deal of diversity in mobility patterns. At one extreme, there are those people doing their season annually, in the same country, at the same employer, in the same job for many years. At the other extreme there are the people combining destination countries, changing the sectors (but staying in menial jobs), and changing employers. Between these scenarios, there is a myriad of combinations driven by temporary needs in origin, opportunities for work abroad, or simply curiosity. More than migrating to one sector or to one country, these people simply migrate towards low qualified, low paid and temporary jobs. They are in the UK, Portugal, Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, the USA or the United Arab Emirates (n.b. all these destinations are extracted from our 41 interviews).

They are caring for, and harvesting, crops of cucumbers, oranges, strawberries, blueberries, garlic, onion, asparagus, peaches, apples, olives, grapes, carrots, beetroots, pumpkins, courgettes, potatoes, plums, and radishes. They work in factories to preserve these fruits and vegetables while taking care of children or the elderly who need constant care. They process meat in slaughterhouses, help with the preparation of the chocolate or simply deliver parcels. They move with ease within this global market of low qualified jobs, accustomed from their own country with hard work, low payment, informal work, and sometimes abusive employers. Under these conditions, working abroad becomes just a continuation of their working life in Romania or simply the working life, and is rarely perceived as risky.

Working conditions and workplace health: working hours and rhythm, tasks, work experiences, work equipment (OSH issues included)

Working conditions seem to mainly depend on the type of crop, market demand, and the size of the farm. These factors affect the number of hours worked, the time spent in the field,

overtime, the frequency of breaks, the number of days off per week, and whether work continues regardless of weather conditions.

For certain crops, the pace of work is dictated by the perishability of fruits or vegetables (such as asparagus, cucumbers, or strawberries), or by the urgency of vendors' orders. Thanks to their large seasonal cohorts of workers, large farms are better equipped to mitigate the impact of these two factors on workers and to maintain more stable working conditions. There are also exceptions of some small farms which provide good conditions to keep their workers from one year to another.

Similar to a typical day of farmers/farm workers, a typical day for a seasonal agricultural worker starts very early in the morning. If the accommodation is far from the field, then private cars of workers/intermediaries, or vans/buses owned by the farms are used for transportation. Long distances are typically associated with large farms (especially in Germany), or with teams of workers based in one location who travel to work on different crops (especially in Spain), resulting in varying amounts of time spent on the road. Regardless of the distance, however, the workday begins early. When the commute is longer, workers wake up even earlier.

One main break – lunch break that could last between half of an hour and one hour - typically segments the working day. Two other short breaks are usually allowed, and depending on employer, brief pauses for smoking or drinking water are tolerated, if infrequently. The working day may last 8, 10, 12, or even 14 hours, although most commonly it spans 8 to 10 hours. The week may end with one or two days off – typically just one, usually Sunday. During peak season, there may be no days off for up to two months, or Sundays may involve working half a day. Overtime practices vary: some employers offer it as an option (if the worker chooses to work, they may do so), and only rarely is overtime compensated at a higher rate. In many cases, workers are informed prior to departure that they will be expected to work 8, 10, or 12 hours per day for a fixed hourly rate, and they accept these conditions as such.

The time spent working and the days off should be understood not only in relation to the pressures stemming from the employer's interests, but also from those of the workers – which, paradoxically at first glance, often coincide. Workers perceive their stay abroad as a limited period during which they strive to earn as much as possible. Moreover, the isolation of their living arrangements, linguistic barriers, and strong focus on saving render their free time less valuable, except for basic activities such as cleaning, cooking, purchasing essential items (mainly food), and resting. In many instances, our respondents mention that they were willing to work overtime and on their days off.

Workers are usually grouped into smaller or larger teams, depending on the crop, and (sometimes strictly) supervised by a "team leader." Supervisors, who sometimes also work in the field, are typically Romanian or at least speak Romanian, and are perceived as

representatives of the employer, individuals entrusted with the authority to assign tasks, resolve various issues, and look after the workers. Only on small farms do workers engage in direct contact with decision-makers or owners, and even then, interactions are often severely limited by language barriers. In most of our cases, these supervisors are considered responsible for the work pace, and for mistreatment. When workers face situations they find unbearable, the supervisors are the only ones they can turn to, as the foreign employer is generally unreachable – primarily due to the language barrier.

Most of our interviewees describe agricultural work as "hard," but say they are accustomed to physically demanding labour. Compared to similar work in Romania, the only advantage they identify in their home country is the freedom to take breaks or stop working whenever they choose. While abroad, many speak of the pressure to work and the employer's power to enforce discipline: if a worker refuses to work or complains, they may be sent home immediately. This practice appears closely linked to the size of the farm – on large farms, where sizable contingents of workers are employed, individuals are constantly exposed to the risk of dismissal and repatriation. This is just one element in a broader set of control mechanisms that foster worker dependency on the employer. Other common practices include withholding payment until the end of the season and refusing to renew contracts for workers deemed disobedient.

Most workers report having signed a contract, although many do not know what it contains—even if they have a copy of the document. They are aware that health insurance is provided, but they rarely seek medical care unless the health issue is severe. Self-medication is the norm, and most are equipped with medicines brought from their country of origin. In cases of serious health problems, they generally report immediate involvement from the employer and access to specialized medical care.

Our respondents find it difficult to assess the impact of their work on their health. As previously mentioned, they describe themselves as hard workers and say they are used to similar conditions in Romania. However, the weather – rainy in Germany and hot in Spain – poses additional challenges. Some employers make efforts to protect workers by prohibiting work during certain hours in the middle of the day or during heavy rain. Nevertheless, most prioritize profit over protection, requiring workers to continue regardless of the conditions.

Most of workers use some PPE (if required by the employer or deemed necessary by those doing the same work previously). Only a few employers provide this equipment, but workers are usually prepared before departure or purchase the items upon arrival at their destination.

Living conditions and associated issues

The living conditions of seasonal workers are shaped by principles of temporariness and efficiency. As several of our interviewees who have worked in multiple countries point out, "the conditions are the same everywhere." Common features include shared accommodations, with 2, 4, or 6 people per room (only rarely more than 6), and communal bathrooms, showers, and kitchens. Private bathrooms are rare, as are dedicated spaces for leisure. In some locations, refrigerators and cookers are placed directly in the rooms, with a clear allocation of units per number of occupants.

There is always a separation between male and female workers, although recently couples have been allowed to live together. Workers prepare their own meals and manage their own shopping.

Most workers travel to their farm destinations using mini buses provided by intermediaries or employers, or usual transportation by bus and, in some cases, their private cars. In many cases, they are picked up from their villages and transported directly to the farms where they will work during the upcoming season. Only in very rare instances do workers travel by plane—typically only those with extensive experience and at least basic knowledge of a foreign language. Even the most seasoned participants in seasonal migration tend to prefer using their own private cars rather than air travel. Even though the journey may be long, traveling by mini-bus, bus, or car allows workers to bring food supplies and other items they know will be useful at their destination (e.g., blankets, cooking pots, etc.). As mentioned earlier, workers usually travel with someone they know and are generally informed about the place they are heading to. Leaving in very small or small groups enables them to share rooms with familiar people, work alongside them, and sometimes cook together. This facilitates communal living and likely reduces potential conflicts related to shared spaces.

The types of accommodation offered by employers varies, ranging from houses and large buildings ("hotels," as our respondents call them) to housing containers. In many cases, though not always, these buildings or containers are isolated from local communities and located near the fields. This creates specific challenges related to shopping as when stores are far away, employers typically provide transportation to supermarkets or hypermarkets only once or twice a week. Workers receive a weekly amount of money from their salary for shopping, usually €50 or €100, or another amount upon request.

In many cases, employers provide access to washing machines, and more rarely, laundry services. Living costs are covered by the workers, based on rates known prior to departure – usually a fixed daily amount, or in some cases, a percentage of their daily earnings. In general, transportation to shopping locations is offered free of charge.

Our respondents evaluate living conditions very differently. Some are content and say the accommodation is good but complain about overcrowding (especially in relation to bathrooms) and the lack of appliances to cool/heat the bedrooms. However, the evaluations are operated under the idea that these living conditions are temporary and workers tend to be less particular as "living like this" is "only" for two-three months.

Free time is limited and typically spent cooking, cleaning (as workers are often responsible for maintaining their accommodations), doing laundry, communicating with family back home, and resting. The demanding nature of the work leaves little time or energy to explore the surroundings or visit places in the host country. Many of our interviewees struggle to situate their farm within the broader geographic context and often cannot recall the name of the nearest town or city. Contact with the local population is minimal, as most workers do not speak the language of the host country. Only rarely do they interact with migrants from other countries, and even then, language barriers often prevent meaningful communication. Their experience is usually shaped by working alongside fellow nationals, often with others from the same village or small town in Romania.

Workplace-specific OSH education or training received

OSH education and training provided to seasonal workers from Romania who have worked in agriculture in Germany and Spain have been found to be inadequate and poorly organized. Interviews conducted in the country of origin indicate that, in many cases, OSH education is either absent or delivered in a manner that does not ensure sufficient preparation for managing health and safety risks. Moreover, the educational profile of the predominant category of people involved in seasonal work presents additional challenges that any intervention program aiming to improve the situation must consider.

Firstly, most of the interviewees are unaware of the health and safety risks associated with agricultural work. The majority cannot identify any hazardous or risky tasks they performed abroad, nor do they report taking these risks into account in their activities. This issue is further aggravated in those cases when workers involved in this type of seasonal agricultural employment have little to no previous farming experience, exposing them to additional risks – including potential work-related accidents and long-term health consequences resulting from improper ergonomic practices.

Many seasonal workers report that they learned how to perform their tasks and carry out their duties primarily from fellow workers at the farm, without any particular emphasis on health and safety aspects. Even when basic safety concepts are explained by team leaders or supervisors appointed by the employer, most workers cannot specify what information was conveyed to them during these briefings.

The predominant educational profile among those engaged in seasonal work is of individuals with low levels of formal education. In this context, interviews reveal no significant efforts by employers at the destination or intermediaries facilitating recruitment in the country of origin to ensure that seasonal workers understand the risks they face and are capable of managing them. Most of the workers involved do not speak the destination country's language (particularly in Germany) and can only understand work instructions if presented in Romanian. However, those who deliver these instructions in Romanian often lack any specific training in OSH, which undoubtedly affects the quality and comprehensiveness of the information provided—even in the limited cases where it is available.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the only additional measures mentioned by interviewed seasonal workers pertain to the enforcement of mask-wearing in some shared living or working spaces and, in some cases, COVID-19 testing. Nevertheless, the interviews do not indicate that the importance of these measures was explained in a manner accessible and understandable to seasonal workers. This has led to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, and in some cases, to the neglect of rules related to mask-wearing.

In Romania, the interviews reveal that no efforts were made at origin, neither by public authorities nor by other entities, to inform seasonal migrants about farm OSH.

Awareness of workers' rights

Regarding the workers' rights, seasonal workers in Romania appear to be well-informed and interested mainly in net gains and the costs they must pay at the destination for rent and other auxiliary services. Most Romanian seasonal workers are aware of their salary, and how their compensation is calculated, and they pay close attention to ensuring these are respected. With very few exceptions, they consider their wages to be fair, and situations where promised payments were not received are very rarely reported. However, matters related to costs for transportation, accommodation, or other supplementary services are less clear. In this area, there is greater variability, and some workers are dissatisfied with how their rights are respected in these aspects. Rights related to working hours and rest periods seem to be less relevant for them and are usually based on verbal information received directly from supervisors and employers. Most workers state that they had a formal employment contract; in Germany, the situation of workers without a contract seems to extremely rare, but very few of them have read the contract or are aware of the rights it entitles them to (e.g., some are convinced they will receive pension rights for the period worked seasonally in agriculture while others have ambiguous expectations).

Social security benefits and their transferability from the destination country back to the home country remain largely unknown to most Romanian seasonal workers. On one hand,

they do not place much importance on these rights and are more focused on the net amounts they receive for their work. Since they are more interested in the money they will bring back to Romania, they easily accept the idea that other social benefits are not accessible to them, often remaining in a state of confusion. However, some of the interviewees believe that their seasonal agricultural work abroad could be added to their personal employment history providing additional benefits at retirement, while others are convinced that this is not possible and did not pay any attention to this issue. There are also cases where individuals managed to recover income tax paid in Germany through specialized firms offering such services.

The interviewed seasonal workers have not made actual efforts to consult Romanian authorities regarding the transferability of social benefits associated with seasonal agricultural employment. This applies both to those still active in seasonal work and those who have withdrawn from this type of employment. Furthermore, they are unsure whom to ask for such information, and many are uncertain whether they should approach their employer or Romanian institutions to find out if certain social benefits can be transferred.

Effects perceived at individual/household level

There are multiple and complex effects of seasonal work on the individuals involved in this type of migration, as well as on their families/households. The effects of seasonal work abroad among Romanian workers depend on a variety of factors, including the duration of practicing this type of employment, the occupational status at origin of the individual during periods when they are not engaged in seasonal agricultural work, their health condition, and the household's overall situation. The beneficial aspect of this migration mainly reduces to the sums of money earned by these individuals over a relatively short period of approximately two months worked abroad. In Romania, for similar periods of work, potential earnings are significantly lower, and many seasonal migrants highlight this in interviews. Exact quantification of the differences is challenging because wages vary depending on qualifications and the local job market at the origin. Nevertheless, the minimum hourly wage in Germany is €12.80 gross, while in Romania it is approximately €5 per hour. Additionally, tax systems differ, enabling workers in Germany to retain a considerably larger net sum at the end of a month of seasonal work in agriculture.

The impact of the seasonal work in agriculture on the migrant workers' lives is diverse, as evidenced by interviews conducted within the framework of the SafeHabitus project. Primarily, the effects depend on the numbers of seasons worked in agriculture abroad and on what individuals do during the in-between periods in Romania. Some individuals depend entirely on their seasonal work abroad, engaging in no lucrative activities during their time in Romania; the money earned abroad sustains them from one period to another, often

supporting other household members as well. Conversely, the absence of activity for most of the year severely limits their occupational prospects. These individuals do not invest effort in developing their skills, obtaining qualifications, or advancing their occupation trajectories. In many cases, this occurs at a very young age – some persons abandon a normal educational path to go abroad as seasonal workers (for example, youths dropping out of secondary school to work seasonally abroad in agriculture). However, the diversity of the population involved in this type of seasonal migration must be acknowledged. Some individuals use this migration to supplement their income in Romania, managing to work seasonal agricultural jobs without giving up their jobs abroad. For these individuals, their occupational trajectory remains considerably less affected.

Another documented situation reflects combination of social protection benefits in Romania with seasonal work abroad. In this case, there are periods when they do not benefit from social assistance due to bureaucratic hurdles and delays in reactivating social aid after periods abroad. This situation may also have affected their health insurance coverage, which sometimes lapses during these periods, forcing them to pay for medical consultations or investigations if needed.

Regarding the individual health of Romanians interviewed as seasonal workers, several types of effects have been documented. First, intensive and lengthy work periods stress the body during the time abroad, with some effects persisting after their return. The primary direct effects on physical health mentioned in interviews include: physical exhaustion, back pain, joint pain, and fatigue. Naturally, the type of work performed influences the health effects experienced – working in fields of strawberries, cucumber, asparagus, for instance, often leads to these symptoms. In many cases, these health issues are not properly treated; individuals do not consult medical professionals and self-medicate with painkillers of their choice. Over time, many suffer from untreated back pain that affects both their quality of life and their ability to work in Romania. A specific situation involves those who go to seasonal agricultural work despite existing health problems; their conditions tend to deteriorate more sharply. However, because most do not seek detailed medical examinations, it is difficult to precisely quantify the health impacts of seasonal agricultural work and other individual causes.

On the mental health level, separation from those remaining at home, (partners, children, parents) and living in conditions lacking privacy, present challenges for some interviewees, though not for all. Often, they perceive these emotional costs as necessary trade-offs to earn the financial gains from agricultural work.

At the household level, the main effects, frequently mentioned in many interviews with seasonal workers, pertain to the utilization of the earnings gained from migration: covering daily living costs and undertaking home improvement or renovation of their houses. Many

could not undertake such renovations (repainting walls, repairing the roof, replacing windows, purchasing a stove, etc.) without earning money abroad over a two-three month period. For those who have gone annually for extended periods, improving living conditions at home is cited as the primary outcome. These expenses are often related to maintaining the household or supporting other family members (partners, children – including children's education, etc.) and very rarely involve lucrative investments (this was mentioned in situation of combining work abroad with a stable job at origin).

In the long term, this activity model creates challenges that are difficult to calculate for seasonal workers abroad. Many have significant employment gaps and long periods of inactivity, and it is not uncommon for a person around 40-50 years old to have only about five years of recorded work history. This situation can significantly harm their future pension prospects, making them susceptible to receiving minimal pensions from the state under a non-contributory mechanism if they manage to accumulate 15 years of work, or other social protection measures if they do not meet the threshold. However, in Romania, the benefits provided through such social protection mechanisms are very modest. Last but not least, it was observed that many of those interviewed prefer not to think about old age and how their life will be as a mental protection mechanism, as they fear severe poverty and worsening health issues.

Insights for the case-study of Huelva's strawberry sector

Romanian fieldwork, taken as a whole, helps to situate Huelva within a wider European landscape of seasonal agricultural migration rather than as an isolated case. The interviews confirm that seasonal migration remains, for many households, one of the very few viable strategies to secure lump-sum income that cannot be generated in Romania's low-wage labour market. At the same time, they show that Spain in general – and Huelva in particular – has progressively lost comparative attractiveness when set against other destinations, especially Germany.

The wage gap, the perception of more predictable earnings and, in some cases, clearer contractual frameworks elsewhere mean that a growing share of those who once rotated regularly through Spanish campaigns now opt for Germany or combine multiple destinations over time. Spain has not ceased to depend on Romanian labour; rather, it has become one node in more complex, multi-country trajectories in which workers reassess destinations according to pay, recruitment channels, perceived fairness and the cumulative effects of past experiences.

From the perspective of this report, this shift has two main implications. First, it helps to explain the reconfiguration of Huelva's workforce – notably the declining presence of Eastern

European farmworkers and the growing reliance on Moroccan women hired at origin and non-GECCO African workers – as the outcome not only of Spanish recruitment policies and employer strategies, but also of changing opportunity structures and aspirations at origin. Romanian interviewees describe a gradual recalibration of what counts as an "acceptable" balance between effort, risk and reward: long hours and physically demanding work are broadly assumed wherever they go, but the combination of higher wages, more transparent deductions, and a perception of more consistent enforcement of basic standards in places like Germany shifts their cost–benefit calculations away from Huelva.

Second, their narratives highlight that decisions to abandon Spain are rarely about finding a "safe" or "fair" destination in any absolute sense. Rather, they compare relatively harsh regimes and choose the one where they feel less deceived, less exposed to arbitrary treatment, and more able to plan household budgets and projects over time. This has direct relevance for the core questions of this report. It suggests, on the one hand, that many of the risks and harms documented in Huelva are not inherent to seasonal farm work per se, but linked to a particular configuration of labour regime, housing arrangements and migration governance that makes the jobs both physically damaging and socially unattractive.

On the other hand, it underscores that workers' agency and mobility can have feedback effects on the enclave: as Romanian labour becomes scarcer or more reluctant, employers are incentivised to intensify recruitment among more constrained groups (such as Moroccan women under GECCO or irregular African workers), for whom exit options are narrower and bargaining power weaker. The Romania study thus serves as a reminder that Huelva competes within a European market for labour, and that improving health, safety and wellbeing in the enclave is not only a matter of rights, but also a condition for making these jobs genuinely sustainable and attractive rather than relying on increasingly vulnerable populations to accept them.

From origin to destination: discussing the findings regarding workers' challenges and attractiveness of work in agriculture

The findings presented in this report confirm that the health, safety and wellbeing challenges faced by migrant farmworkers are deeply embedded in a broader Mediterranean agro-industrial model that depends structurally on migrant labour under precarious conditions (Castillo-Rojas-Marcos et al., 2026; Checa y Olmos et al., 2023). Analysed through the case of Huelva's strawberry sector, the evidence shows that these challenges are far from being limited to discrete accidents or specific pathologies. Rather, the harms described by workers—and in different degrees confirmed by unions, NGOs and institutional actors—reveal a continuum of risks stretching from migration trajectories to work organisation, housing and access to healthcare. This continuum is not accidental, but reflects how migrant-dependent agricultural enclaves are integrated into global value chains and how labour and migration regimes are designed and enforced (Garcés-Mascareñas & Güell, 2021; Molinero, 2020).

The evidence strongly supports an understanding of OSH as socially determined. Musculoskeletal pain, heat stress, dermatological problems and mental ill-health are not simply "occupational hazards" of physically demanding work but are shaped by production targets, piece-rate logics, weak preventive cultures and a labour regime that systematically undermines workers' capacity to rest, complain, or seek care. The centrality of temporary contracts, employer-controlled housing, constrained mobility, and opaque recruitment arrangements echoes European research that has highlighted how migrant farmworkers sustain an "essential" agri-food sector while remaining "invisible and exploited" (Ruíz Ramírez et al., 2024; Corrado & Caruso, 2022). At the same time, the Huelva case provides detailed evidence of how these dynamics translate into specific bodily and psychological harms in highly standardised, export-oriented agricultural enclaves.

The differentiated profiles of migrant workers in the Huelva case-study—hired-at-origin (GECCO) workers, non-GECCO African workers and Eastern European farmworkers—are crucial for understanding how risks are distributed. The data shows that these categories

tend to be associated to distinct positions within the labour regime (although the correspondence is not always exact), not merely descriptive labels. GECCO workers occupy a legally documented yet highly dependent position: their contracts are tied to a single employer, their housing is located within farm premises and their mobility is tightly controlled. The testimonies documented here reveal how these conditions heighten vulnerability to labour abuses and expose this group to serious risks of mistreatment, abusive retaliation and even sexual violence—particularly in the case of Moroccan women, whose dependence on the programme interacts with gendered racialisation that positions them as simultaneously stigmatised and sexually targeted.

Non-GECCO African workers bear the cumulative effects of irregular or precarious status, unstable employment and exclusion from formal housing, often concentrated in shantytowns. Eastern European workers, particularly Romanians, navigate an intermediate position as EU citizens with formal rights but limited bargaining power. A significant finding in this regard is the fact that, on occasions, their mobility and labour insertion is mediated by opaque intermediaries, positioning them in situations of dependency and isolation comparable with that of the GECCO. These intersections of legal status, gender, race and class confirm intersectional analyses of European agriculture and underscore how specific combinations of attributes produce distinct OSH vulnerabilities (Güell, 2022).

Housing emerges as a central determinant of health and safety, cutting across profiles. Shantytowns represent the most extreme manifestation of socio-spatial exclusion, with fire risk, lack of water and sanitation, vermin, and obstacles to municipal registration producing an environment that is itself injurious and that prolongs irregularity. Employer-run accommodation on farms, while materially less extreme, concentrates power in employers' hands, blurs the boundaries between workplace and living space and often reproduces overcrowding, poor habitability and control. Even formal rented housing, perceived as the main aspiration, is heavily constrained by racism in the rental market and by informal gatekeeping practices around municipal registration. These patterns, documented through the Huelva case, echo broader descriptions of Mediterranean agro-industrial enclaves in which segregated, substandard housing is not an aberration but a routine feature of labour control (Castillo-Rojas-Marcos et al., 2026).

The findings also speak directly to the question of attractiveness of agricultural work. From the vantage point of migrant workers, "attractiveness" rarely refers to intrinsic features of the job; rather, it denotes a relative comparison between different configurations of low-paid, demanding and precarious work. For Moroccan workers, both current and former GECCO participants and local farmworkers in the Gharb-Loukkos region, seasonal agricultural work in Huelva remains attractive primarily because wages far exceed those available in Moroccan agriculture and because Spanish labour law is perceived, despite its gaps in implementation, as offering more rights and possibilities than local options. This

helps explain why many Moroccan women state that, if given the choice, they would still prefer Huelva to local strawberry work, even after experiencing severe pressure, chronic pain and administrative arbitrariness.

For Romanian workers, by contrast, the comparative picture is shifting in ways that undermine the sector's attractiveness. The fieldwork at origin shows that Romania has become a highly mobile society in which seasonal migrants actively combine destinations, crops and sectors across Europe. Huelva is only one node in a much wider market of low-skilled jobs stretching from Spain and Germany to the UK, Austria or the Netherlands. Over time, many Romanian workers have concluded that working conditions, wages and opportunities in other destinations, particularly Germany, are more attractive than in Huelva, leading to a marked reorientation of flows. This confirms European-level analyses that see intra-European migrant farmworkers as embedded in transnational labour markets rather than tied to specific sectors or countries (Ruiz Ramírez et al., 2024), highlighting the risk that exploitative agricultural labour regimes—such as the one documented in the Huelva case throughout this report—may increasingly struggle.

From this perspective, attractiveness cannot be addressed through isolated measures such as improved information campaigns or minor changes in recruitment procedures. The testimonies suggest that what keeps agricultural work appealing to some migrant workers, notably third country nationals, is precisely the combination of higher wages than at home and a labour regime that, despite its (here well accounted for) limits, they might find preferable to the alternatives available to. For others, notably intra-European workers, the persistence of certain undesirable working conditions like long hours, weak enforcement, opaque hierarchies or limited bargaining power pushes them to moving into other European agricultural or low-wage sectors. Any serious attempt to improve the sector's attractiveness therefore requires transforming the underlying labour regime and housing system rather than simply managing reputational risks or tweaking recruitment channels.

Many interviewees describe their experience as a deeply ambivalent form of necessary sacrifice rather than either outright rejection or straightforward opportunity. For most workers, especially the most precarious third country nationals, work in European agriculture is portrayed as something that enables them to begin earning relatively quickly after arrival, but worthwhile only insofar as it supports broader aims such as sending remittances, regularising their status or eventually securing work that is less damaging to their bodies.

Among more stabilised workers, including some intra-EU migrants, this ambivalence appears in more subdued terms, with individuals noting that they have neither become wealthy nor remained in poverty, and that their situation is acceptable. Such reflections convey a pragmatic acceptance of demanding labour and modest gains rather than genuine

optimism. Across all profiles, housing conditions function as a decisive filter shaping how workers assess their lives in Huelva. Those living in shantytowns describe the experience as extremely harsh—so harsh that it colours any positive evaluation of the job. By contrast, moving into a flat in town, especially when not an overcrowded one, is often portrayed as a turning point that allows individuals to speak of their locality of work and residence in Huelva as almost their own town and to imagine a limited sense of local belonging.

Narratives of endurance are common, with workers emphasising their capacity to cope and not give up, and considering themselves fortunate compared with others who have faced more severe abuses. It is frequent in several interviews for workers to minimise unpaid overtime, arbitrary dismissals or humiliating treatment immediately after recounting them, insisting they cannot claim to have had bad experiences because they can compare with others who they know to have suffered more. This pattern suggests that many construct a sense of relative good fortune and normality as a psychological strategy to manage the contradictions of their situation and to preserve dignity and hope within an adverse environment.

The multi-sited design of the research deepens understanding by revealing how workers' subjective ways of navigating adversity in Huelva are shaped by trans-local conditions. Fieldwork in Morocco shows that hiring-at-origin is embedded in long-standing patterns of precarious agricultural labour, gendered recruitment practices, and institutional arrangements that distribute control over the process up and down the chain but rarely towards workers themselves. Women arrive in Huelva already accustomed to long hours, toxic exposures and limited social protection, yet holding expectations of higher wages and stronger rights. Their recruitment experiences—characterised by low transparency, sudden exclusion from lists and a growing involvement of intermediaries—foreshadow the arbitrariness they later encounter in Spain. The Moroccan material underscores that Spain and Morocco's berry regions (saliently, Huelva and Gharb-Loukkos) are two interconnected points within a single production chain rather than separate worlds.

Women report that employment in Huelva generally offers higher wages, formal contracts and, to some extent, better housing than agricultural work in Morocco. Yet these gains are tightly limited by control mechanisms that mirror those in origin. In Morocco, workers recount starting labour at a very young age, in informal settings marked by long days, unsafe transport, no accident coverage and frequent harassment or violence. In Huelva, although legal frameworks exist, dependence on a single employer, the risk of non-renewal and institutional reluctance to confront abuses mean that asserting rights remains dangerous. The threat to one's livelihood—and that of one's family—takes different forms in each context, from immediate dismissal in Morocco to exclusion from future seasons in Spain but operates in both cases as a powerful disciplinary force.

From a health and wellbeing perspective, harms observed in Huelva stem not only from the enclave itself but also from long-term trajectories of precarity and violence in origin, which shape what women consider tolerable and the room for manoeuvre they perceive abroad. Interviews with Moroccan mayors and public employment staff further illuminate how circular migration is institutionally framed. They emphasise the income gains of working in Huelva, the large wage gap with local agriculture and the possibility for women to save or support family projects, factors that help explain persisting demand for the programme and families' growing pride in participation. Yet these narratives normalise the fact that such improvement rests on physically exhausting labour undertaken by women already burdened with care responsibilities, while the lack of decent local employment rarely receives attention.

Institutional actors describe the programme in highly technical terms—list management, document checks, coordination with employers—with little reference to monitoring working and living conditions in Huelva or safeguarding women's rights across the migration cycle. Criteria such as gender, motherhood and rural residence are presented as neutral administrative tools, despite concentrating the burdens of circular migration on women already facing structural disadvantage. Responsibility for making "proper use" of the opportunity is placed on workers and their families, whereas accountability for the multiple institutions involved is scarcely addressed. Read alongside women's testimonies, this contrast reveals institutional perspectives that foreground economic benefits and administrative order while remaining largely silent on health, safety and the capacity to exercise rights without fear of losing future seasons.

Similarly, the Romanian fieldwork shows how seasonal migration is embedded in household economies and life trajectories, and how workers assess Huelva in comparison with Germany and other destinations. In both Morocco and Romania, origins research demonstrates that vulnerability does not begin at the farm gate; it is shaped by long-term trajectories, household strategies and institutional arrangements also in countries of origin.

Romanian interviewees confirm that seasonal migration remains one of the few ways to secure lump-sum earnings unavailable in Romania's low-wage labour market. They also report a clear shift in destination preferences: Spain, and Huelva in particular, are no longer favoured by many who once worked there regularly. Germany, and to a lesser extent other Northern and Central European countries, is increasingly seen as offering higher wages, more predictable income and, in some cases, clearer contractual terms. Rather than leaving agriculture, workers adjust their mobility, combining destinations and weighing each against effort, risk and reward. Findings from Huelva reinforce this trend. Two Romanian farmworkers employed through origin-based intermediation schemes, both of whom experienced severe working and OSH conditions—including one who suffered a serious

allergic reaction and was still denied protective equipment—stated that they had no intention of returning to Huelva and identified Germany as a more attractive alternative.

For this report, two broader implications stand out. First, the reconfiguration of the workforce observed in the Huelva case—marked by declining numbers of Eastern European workers and a growing reliance on non-GECCO African workers, in a context where national authorities have so far not allowed a significant expansion of GECCO quotas—reflects not only Spanish recruitment practices but also shifting opportunity structures in countries of origin. Second, decisions to leave Spain are rarely about finding a definitively "safe" or "fair" destination. Rather, they involve comparative judgements between harsh labour regimes, with workers choosing contexts in which they feel less exposed to arbitrary treatment and better able to plan household budgets. From this perspective, the Romanian material underscores that improving health, safety and wellbeing in migrant-dependent agricultural enclaves, documented here through the Huelva case, is not only a matter of rights, but a precondition for making these jobs genuinely sustainable and attractive, rather than increasingly dependent on ever more constrained and vulnerable groups.

A crucial question for assessing the scope of these findings concerns how they relate to dynamics observed in other parts of the EU, where agricultural sectors operate under markedly different climate conditions, labour market institutions and migration regimes. Such differences clearly warrant caution against any mechanical generalisation. Indeed, as the Romanian material suggests, intra-European workers actively compare destinations and often perceive northern labour markets as offering higher wages, clearer contracts or greater predictability than those found in Southern Europe. These contrasts matter and help explain shifting mobility patterns across the continent.

At the same time, a growing body of evidence indicates that many of the structural dynamics identified in this report are not confined to Southern Europe. Across diverse agricultural sectors in Northern, Western and Central Europe, migrant workers continue to experience excessively long working hours, intense productivity pressures, substandard or highly controlled housing, limited access to healthcare, and significant barriers to voice and redress, even under more formalised regulatory regimes (Ruiz Ramírez et al., 2024). Climate conditions evidently generate differences, but not necessarily in ways that eliminate risk or harm, as illustrated by accounts of severe cold exposure among migrant agricultural workers in countries such as Poland (Fiałkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021).

In contexts where labour informality or semi-formality is more constrained, mechanisms of wage erosion tend to be transformed rather than eliminated. This is illustrated by practices documented in Sweden and the Netherlands, where the use, and misuse of posted worker arrangements to recruit Eastern European or South-East Asian fruit pickers allows employers to apply lower wage levels or social security contributions from countries of origin (Hedberg

& Olofsson, 2022; Siegmann et al., 2022). Practices identified in the Spanish case study analysed in this report, such as non-negotiated or excessive deductions for on-farm accommodation or utilities, appear to be widespread in Germany (Zahn & Vogel, 2023; Bogoeski, 2022).

In both Germany and the Netherlands, migrant farmworkers are also reported to earn substantially less than native workers for the same tasks (Schneider & Gugganig, 2021; Siegmann & Williams, 2020), a pattern largely absent in Huelva. Finally, Germany and the Nordic countries maintain significantly more restrictive legislation on migrant workers' access to social security and social protection than Mediterranean countries in general, and Spain in particular (Molinero-Gerbeau et al., 2025). As a result, some of the barriers to healthcare access identified in Huelva would not arise in these contexts, as many workers—especially those with short stays—are not legally entitled to such services in the first place. What differs, therefore, is less the presence of vulnerability than its specific forms, degrees, strategies, and institutional articulation.

It is also important, at this point, to reiterate that within the Mediterranean agro-industrial model, Spain stands out for its comparatively strong state presence and regulatory density—and that Huelva, within Spain, represents an even more intensively regulated setting, with the consistently salient role of the fully State-driven GECCO programme. In this sense, and with regard to questions of cautious generalisation but meaningful transferability, the case examined here appears less as a stereotypically deregulated or informal context (which might correspond best to parts of Italy or Greece) and more as an intermediate or hybrid case. This allows relevant inferences to be drawn from the Huelva case for a wide variety of European agricultural contexts.

On other respects, nonetheless, the findings documented through the Huelva case largely align with, confirm, and in some respects refine, existing scientific understandings of the Euro-Mediterranean agro-industrial model, including high capitalisation and rationalisation of work processes, and the persistence of a harshly segregated spatiality as a structural component of labour disempowerment and control (Castillo-Rojas-Marcos et al., 2026; Molinero-Gerbeau & López-Sala, 2022). Beyond this confirmation, however, the analysis adds further detail on how these features are currently being reorganised. In particular, it highlights the central role of municipal "eradication" policies in reshaping shantytown geographies; the consolidation of employer-controlled housing as the predominant socio-spatial arrangement in the sector; and the expanding role of corporate intercultural mediation bodies, which operate as internal enforcement mechanisms regulating everyday life and disciplining the workforce beyond working hours, often within employer-provided accommodation.

On the other hand, the voices of unions and civil society organisations further illuminate how formal rights often fail to translate into effective protections. Their testimonies confirm and amplify workers' accounts of underpayment, unlawful deductions, electoral fraud in union representation and intimidation against those who seek support. They also document severe mental health deterioration, and in some cases growing substance use, linked to the cumulative effects of traumatic journeys, chronic precarity, exposure to violence, and the crashing frustration of migratory expectations. These perspectives resonate with broader European research on how migrant farmworkers operate within spaces of exception where labour and citizenship norms are selectively suspended (Corrado & Palumbo, 2022; Ruíz Ramírez et al., 2024). At the same time, they point to concrete levers for change identified through the Huelva case, such as enforcing discontinuous permanent contracts, dismantling employer-aligned union structures and expanding independent support services.

In this context, employers' narratives provide a revealing counterpoint. The repeated "not an NGO" motto, the portrayal of basic legal compliance as burdensome generosity and the tendency to shift responsibility onto supposedly abusive migrant supervisors illustrate how structural inequalities are normalised and how profit-making is framed in moral terms. Most strikingly in the case of the smallest company in the sample, open accounts of racialised housing hierarchies, routine intrusion into workers' private spaces and the dismissal of seriously ill workers, even at clear risk to their lives, highlight the extent to which migrant bodies can be rendered disposable within this type of agro-enclave.

Larger, more professionalised companies use more polished language, report fewer (or no) irregularities, and operate relatively functional complaint mechanisms, yet still minimise harms and depict themselves as victims of external pressures. Taken together, these accounts show that improving OSH and wellbeing cannot be reduced to better information or technical adjustments: it requires confronting the productive logics, and the discursive rationalisations, that sustain current practices.

A further finding emerges when disperse evidence about recent Spanish regulatory and policy changes are considered together. This is especially relevant given that the national government in office since 2019—and particularly the political forces in charge of the Labour and Social Rights Ministries within the current government coalition—has repeatedly expressed concern for the situation of migrant farmworkers in Huelva. Union interviews highlight the 2022 labour reform, noting that mandatory permanent-discontinuous contracts brought immediate benefits, opened new legal avenues and raised expectations regarding future recognition of occupational diseases.

They also mention improvements within the GECCO framework and recent increases in the minimum wage, which later translated into the provincial sectoral agreement. Worker interviews confirm that the new minimum wage effectively sets the pay floor for almost the

entire workforce, except for certain relatively frequent but mostly minor deductions. Employers, meanwhile, describe what they see as a sharp rise in labour inspections under the current government, as well as the 2023 requirement to establish complaint mechanisms. In at least one company, this mechanism appears to function sufficiently to allow some protection against abusive supervisors (though not against company-level abuses).

However, any acknowledgement of positive reform must be balanced against housing policies. Slum-eradication initiatives, although implemented at the municipal level, receive regulatory and financial backing from both national and regional governments. While their design might appear suited to addressing the worst housing conditions in the enclave, testimonies from workers and other actors indicate that implementation has involved irregularities and has produced serious difficulties, deteriorating conditions and even violence for those they were ostensibly intended to support (as illustrated in several cases above). Furthermore, the government's broader failure to tackle Spain's housing crisis disproportionately harms migrant farmworkers, who already face significant structural barriers (administrative, socioeconomic and racialised) to accessing adequate accommodation.

In sum, although some limited but tangible advances can be recognised, the current government's record remains mixed: labour-related measures have produced genuine improvements—most of them modest, though wage-related gains have been more substantial—whereas housing-related outcomes are highly limited or even negative, giving support to poorly executed interventions that ultimately worsen conditions for the most vulnerable workers in the sector.

Many interviews also point to a starkly gendered and racialised pattern of vulnerability. Accounts from Moroccan women hired at origin describe sexual and gender-based violence as a persistent threat woven into everyday life on some farms. They recount a continuum that runs from verbal harassment and degrading comments to explicit propositions and demands for sexual relations in exchange for days off, shifts or the avoidance of sanctions.

A smaller number of testimonies describe more extreme situations, including episodes in which supervisors drove women towards town for shopping, stopped en-route, and threatened physical harm if they resisted sexual advances, or (sometimes while intoxicated) dragged them from their beds at night. Additionally, several interviewees from trade unions and grassroots NGOs reported extensive experience supporting Moroccan farmworkers who had suffered sexual abuse, including in court proceedings. These abuses are described as embedded within broader systems of control: women recount mediators and company staff who downplay or suppress complaints, threaten non-renewal of contracts or

repatriation, and, in some cases, retain workers' passports despite the illegality of this practice.

The isolation of on-farm accommodation—described in some accounts as "worse than prison" because of the combination of confinement and dependence—leaves workers without witnesses or accessible support in such agro-industrial settings. Racialised workers, particularly Sub-Saharan and Maghrebi men, identify overt racism as a major determinant of their living conditions. They report systematic refusals to rent, frequently justified in explicitly racial terms, which push them towards the most precarious housing options, especially shantytowns. Many also describe a constant atmosphere of suspicion and verbal hostility in public spaces, where some of them feel treated as potential criminals by default.

For Moroccan women, these dynamics intersect: they face both racial barriers to adequate housing and the gendered violence embedded in a strongly patriarchal and unequal labour regime. The one Black (Senegalese) woman in the sample highlighted an additional dimension—workplace discrimination—explaining that she was consistently denied access to alternative roles, including those requiring technical knowledge, on the basis of racialised and gendered assumptions about her abilities rather than any assessment of skills or training.

It also demonstrates that workers are not passive bystanders. Intra-EU migrant workers reorient their mobility towards other destinations; third country nationals women develop informal support networks and practices of refusal or build and rebuild their dwellings in the face of systematic housing exclusion and municipal eradication policies; and some workers engage with unions and grassroots organisations despite pressures and fear. By bringing these dynamics together, the report points towards a political economy of OSH in which meaningful improvement will require a rebalancing of power relations within the enclave, rather than merely adapting the current regime through minor technical adjustments.

Taken together, the findings discussed in this section show a lived reality in which health, safety and wellbeing risks are not the result of isolated failures or individual misconduct, but of structurally embedded arrangements linking labour organisation, mobility controls, housing systems and unequal power relations. Documented through the Huelva case and its transnational connections with countries of origin, these dynamics illustrate how OSH vulnerabilities are actively produced and normalised within migrant-dependent agricultural contexts. As such, they cannot be effectively addressed through piecemeal interventions, technical adjustments or information-based measures alone. Instead, the evidence calls for coordinated policy responses capable of intervening in the underlying institutional and regulatory frameworks that shape workers' dependency, isolation and exposure to harm—an approach that informs the policy recommendations developed in the following sections.

Conclusions

This report has examined how the health, safety and overall wellbeing of mobile agricultural workers are shaped by the organisation of contemporary migrant-dependent agriculture, understood broadly to include not only occupational accidents and illnesses but also the social, legal and material conditions of work and everyday life. Based on an in-depth case study of Huelva's strawberry sector in Spain, and multi-sited qualitative fieldwork conducted both at destination and in key countries of origin—Morocco and Romania—the analysis shows how industrial agricultural systems produce and unevenly distribute risks among different groups of migrant workers. These risks are rooted in labour regimes, migration policies and housing arrangements that structurally constrain workers' chances of leading safe and healthy lives.

Methodologically, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with 169 farmworkers and 44 key actors across destination and origin contexts: 67 farmworkers and 40 stakeholders in Huelva; 61 farmworkers (41 of them seasonally migrating to Huelva) and 4 stakeholders in Morocco's Gharb–Loukkos region; and 41 farmworkers in Romania engaged in seasonal migration to Spain or Germany. This design enabled the integration of workers' first-hand accounts of employment, housing, health and daily life with perspectives from trade unions, NGOs, public authorities and employers, while situating these experiences within the origin contexts shaping migration decisions.

Across the report, a clear pattern emerges: physically demanding labour, harsh environmental conditions and weak preventive cultures shape everyday work in migrant-dependent horticulture, as shown in the Huelva case. Berry picking under plastic is widely experienced as exhausting and painful, leading to chronic musculoskeletal problems, fatigue and lasting injuries. Exposure to extreme heat and agrochemicals, together with limited protective equipment, further increases health risks. Warehouse work, though seen as less dangerous, involves long hours in cold and highly repetitive conditions that also generate physical strain, while health problems are routinely normalised rather than treated as occupational harms.

These risks are intensified by labour conditions marked by irregular contracts, unpaid overtime, wage deductions and weak bargaining power, which pressure workers to accept excessive workloads and to work while ill or injured. Supervisory practices based on surveillance, productivity control, verbal abuse and, in some cases, physical or sexual violence operate as key mechanisms of labour discipline. Housing further compounds vulnerability: shantytowns expose workers to extreme insecurity and serious health impacts, while employer-provided accommodation commonly reproduces overcrowding, lack of privacy and relations of control. Racism in the private rental market and limited public

housing mean that only a small minority of more stable workers can access safe and dignified housing.

Access to healthcare constitutes a major axis of vulnerability for mobile agricultural workers. Barriers to municipal registration, health cards and navigating public services are widespread, while intercultural mediators and company staff often act as informal gatekeepers who discourage medical use. As a result, injuries and other health problems frequently go untreated. In the most severe cases, hired-at-origin workers who fall ill are dismissed and repatriated without adequate care, shifting responsibility away from employers and public authorities.

Violence, harassment and coercion emerge as pervasive features of migrant-dependent agricultural labour regimes. Verbal abuse and sustained psychological pressure affect all worker profiles, while physical aggression, threats and sexual harassment are reported most prominently by Moroccan women. These practices are rooted in gendered and racialised hierarchies and reinforced by workers' dependence on employers, housing and recruitment systems. Collective action exists but remains constrained by fear of retaliation and limited access to unions and civil society.

Fieldwork in Morocco and Romania situates the Huelva case within broader transnational labour trajectories. In Morocco, agricultural work involves heavy physical demands, chemical exposure and contractual instability, while seasonal migration is seen as a crucial but opaque opportunity. In Romania, workers pursue highly mobile intra-EU trajectories, increasingly favouring destinations perceived as offering better conditions, especially Germany. This perspective helps explain both continued recruitment into Spanish agriculture and the growing disengagement of other workers, showing that vulnerability and attractiveness are shaped along migration pathways, not only at destination.

Taken together, the findings show that the health, safety and wellbeing of mobile agricultural workers cannot be separated from the labour regimes, housing systems and migration policies that structure migrant-dependent agriculture. Across legal statuses and mobility pathways, workers face unstable employment, spatial segregation and racialisation, producing structurally vulnerable lives. These conditions generate bodies that bear the physical costs of intensive production while remaining exposed to ongoing uncertainty over work, housing, legal status and access to care. From this perspective, the perceived attractiveness of agricultural work, as observed in Huelva, is inseparable from the arrangements that sustain both dependency and harm.

Although empirically grounded in a specific agro-industrial context, these dynamics are not unique to Huelva. They reflect broader patterns across the European Union, where labour mobility, segmented rights and weak enforcement interact to produce persistent OSH vulnerabilities. Addressing them requires policy interventions that go beyond local or sector-

specific measures and engage with the structural conditions shaping work, mobility and living arrangements across governance levels. The recommendations that follow are developed in this spirit: evidence-based, attentive to differentiated worker positions, and oriented towards transforming the institutional frameworks that sustain inequality, dependency and preventable harm in European agriculture.

Policy recommendations

The findings presented in this report demonstrate that the challenges affecting the health, safety and wellbeing of migrant farmworkers are not isolated events or individual misfortunes, but rather structural features of a labour regime that systematically produces and distributes vulnerability. Addressing these challenges therefore requires policy interventions that move beyond the management of symptoms and instead target the underlying conditions that produce precarious working environments and broader unsafe living conditions. Effective policy responses must operate across multiple levels of governance and institutional domains, acknowledging that agro-enclaves like the one studied here are by the interaction between European Union migration and agricultural frameworks, Spanish (or otherwise national) labour, migration and housing policies, and their implementation at the municipal level.

These recommendations are derived, on the one hand, from the findings produced by the multi-sited qualitative fieldwork documented throughout this report: 169 interviews with farmworkers conducted across Huelva (Spain), Gharb-Loukkos (Morocco), and several regions in Romania, complemented by interviews with a range of stakeholders, including trade unions, civil society organisations, public administrators and employers. This empirical foundation makes visible not only the harms experienced, but also the institutional arrangements and power relations through which they are produced. The recommendations that follow are therefore oriented towards restructuring these arrangements, rather than merely mitigating their effects.

At the same time, the recommendations also draw on the accumulated experience of the research team. Through its prior work in this field—including, though not limited to, the trajectory of the SafeHabitus project and the associated research outputs—the team has developed substantial expertise in the regulatory issues affecting the population addressed in this report, as well as in the ongoing debates surrounding alternative policy orientations. The formulation of the policy recommendations presented below is therefore grounded in the integration of this expert knowledge of regulatory frameworks and policy debates with the most up-to-date, comprehensive and context-sensitive evidence on the concrete

problems experienced by these workers, as produced through the present research and report.

A central principle informing these recommendations is that genuine improvement requires the rebalancing of power relations. Whilst employers hold advantages: they control access to work, housing, mobility and - through the threat of contract non-renewal or deportation – essentially can impact their legal status itself, there are many other actors within value chains that can help shape working conditions of both workers, employers. Workers, particularly those hired at origin or in irregular administrative situations, possess minimal bargaining power and face severe constraints on their capacity to exit, voice complaints or organise collectively. Policy interventions that leave these fundamental asymmetries intact will struggle to produce meaningful change, regardless of their formal intentions.

The recommendations are organised across many levels of governance and intervention: European Union frameworks, national policy and municipal implementation. Within each level, specific policy instruments and legal provisions are identified that could support improved outcomes for migrant farmworkers. This multi-level architecture reflects the reality that agricultural labour migration operates within overlapping jurisdictions and that effective action requires coordination across them.

The policy landscape relevant to migrant farmworkers in European agriculture encompasses migration law, labour regulation, social protection, housing policy, public health, anti-discrimination frameworks and agricultural governance. These domains are distributed across EU, national, regional and local competencies, creating both opportunities for multi-level action and risks of fragmentation, gaps and contradictions. The recommendations below seek to identify key leverage points within this complex institutional architecture where targeted interventions could generate systemic effects. In addition, within this context of interdependence and necessary complementarity between institutional levels, maximising positive outcomes for workers would require that reforms undertaken within clearly defined areas of competence be accompanied, where necessary, by broader policy adjustments. Such adaptations should aim to support and align with reforms pursued in the same direction by other levels of governance, thereby fostering coherence and effective coordination across the system.

EU-level measures

Expand the EU Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) framework to address the specific conditions of agriculture and the structural vulnerabilities of migrant farmworkers

The European Union should revise its current OSH regulatory framework to ensure that it adequately reflects the realities of agricultural labour and the conditions faced by migrant farmworkers. Since the adoption of the 1989 OSH Framework Directive (Directive 89/391/EEC), EU OSH regulation has remained largely centred on risks arising at the workplace, during working time, or directly from work tasks. Although subsequent individual directives and strategic frameworks have expanded protections for certain sectors and groups, agriculture has never been addressed through a specific OSH directive, nor has the underlying definition of OSH been substantially revised to account for sector-specific forms of risk.

As demonstrated by both the empirical findings of this report and broader recent academic research, this narrow regulatory approach leaves key sources of harm affecting migrant farmworkers outside the scope of effective protection (Castillo-Rojas-Marcos & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2024). In agro-industrial enclaves such as Huelva, health and safety risks are not confined to the labour process itself but arise from employment-related living conditions, including substandard or employer-controlled housing, spatial isolation, restricted mobility, limited access to healthcare and essential services, and heightened exposure to coercion and violence. These risks are directly produced by the organisation of agricultural labour and migration regimes, yet they are not recognised as OSH hazards under the current EU framework.

The EU should therefore broaden its conception of OSH in agriculture by explicitly recognising as occupational health and safety issues those risks that derive from work-related housing, mobility and isolation when these are intrinsic to employment. This could be achieved through avenues already foreseen in EU law, including the adoption of a specific OSH directive for agriculture or targeted amendments to the 1989 Framework Directive to expand the range of recognised hazards in this sector. Aligning OSH regulation with the lived realities of migrant farmworkers would strengthen Member States' capacity to intervene, address structural drivers of harm, and contribute to more equitable, safe and sustainable agricultural labour regimes across the EU.

Strengthen and redesign Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) social conditionality so it covers migrant-dependent agricultural enclaves and becomes a credible deterrent

The EU should substantially strengthen the *social conditionality* mechanism introduced under the CAP 2023–2027. This mechanism is a recent innovation which links eligibility for certain CAP subsidies to compliance with a defined set of EU labour and OSH rules—most centrally Directive 2019/1152 (transparent and predictable working conditions), Directive 89/391/EEC (OSH framework), and Directive 2009/104/EC (safe use of work equipment)—enforced through payment reductions when breaches are detected. From 2025, application is mandatory across Member States, while implementation and sanctioning are carried out at national level, with limited EU-level counter-mechanisms when monitoring is weak.

While this is a potentially powerful lever, its current legal design makes it poorly aligned with the labour regimes that generate the most severe, structural harms documented in this report. The first and most consequential limitation for enclaves such as Huelva is that, by definition in the current CAP, social conditionality attaches to area-based direct payments. As a result, the fruit-and-vegetable sector (and others like wine, olive oil and beekeeping) is systematically outside its scope, because it is funded through sectoral instruments (including operational programmes) rather than through the payment types to which social conditionality applies. This exclusion is critical: the report's fieldwork documents precisely the kinds of violations and power asymmetries concentrated in fruit-and-vegetable enclaves—excessive and unremunerated overtime, intensified work rhythms and heat exposure, inadequate protective practices during pesticide use, and dependence-enhancing living and mobility arrangements—yet the CAP's flagship social enforcement lever does not reach the core sector where these harms are most frequently found.

A second limitation is substantive. As currently defined, social conditionality monitors a narrow set of obligations and does not cover several of the labour-law domains that are central to migrant farmworkers' health, safety and wellbeing, including wages, working time, and housing conditions. This matters directly for the dynamics documented in this report, where non-payment or underpayment practices often occur through subtle hour/day undercounting, where overtime is widespread but not paid at the legally required rate, and where employer control over accommodation and workers' ability to exit or complain shapes compliance in practice.

A third limitation is that the deterrent effect may be weak in practice. The mechanism sets a minimum reduction of 3% of the relevant CAP payment for non-compliance, with specific rates determined by Member States which typically remain low. Further design choices risk diluting dissuasiveness—such as allowing CAP penalties to be reduced where national fines

have already been applied and maintaining broad exemptions for certain categories of farms and payments.

To make social conditionality relevant to high-risk agricultural enclaves and capable of producing systemic effects, the EU should pursue a reform package with three priorities.

1) Close the structural coverage gap that excludes the fruit-and-vegetable sector. Reform the legal scope of social conditionality so it applies not only to area-based direct payments but also to CAP funding streams that govern migrant-dependent sectors, including sectoral instruments and operational-programme financing. In practice, this requires attaching enforceable conditionality and sanctions to the economic actors that structure employment in these sectors, rather than limiting the mechanism to payment types that bypass them. This is the necessary starting point for any meaningful relevance to contexts such as Huelva.

2) Expand what conditionality can address, focusing on the drivers of harm documented in migrant farmwork.

Retain the existing directive basis but expand the framework so that it can respond to the most consequential forms of non-compliance in migrant-dependent agriculture. At minimum, this should include enforceable coverage of:

- working time and overtime compliance, given the routine normalisation of excessive hours and non-payment documented in the report;
- wage-payment integrity (including protection against manipulative deductions and undercounting practices);
- worker accommodation standards where housing is provided, controlled, or structurally shaped by the employment relation and remoteness (given its centrality to dependency and to health, safety and dignity);
- workplace mistreatment, violence and abusive strategies for maintaining productivity levels.

This aligns with the broader argument that harms in migrant farmwork are often produced through institutional arrangements that extend beyond the immediate workplace, even when they are directly work-derived.

3) Make the mechanism genuinely dissuasive and auditable across Member States. To prevent social conditionality from becoming symbolic compliance, the EU should strengthen deterrence and accountability by:

- constraining the routine use of low-percentage penalties for repeated or serious infringements, and clarifying escalation pathways in cases of recurrence;

- limiting penalty "discounting" where national fines exist, to avoid converting conditionality into a residual add-on;
- requiring robust, standardised monitoring and reporting, including annual public reporting by Member States on penalties applied, infringement types, affected sectors/areas, and corrective measures, coupled with Commission-level review for consistency and under-enforcement;
- adopting sector-specific implementation guidance for sectors employing large numbers of vulnerable workers (including migrants), reflecting seasonal work, subcontracting/intermediation, and the enforcement challenges produced by isolation and dependency.

Directly addressing Work-Derived Health and Safety Risks in Migrant-Dependent Agricultural Enclaves

The findings included of this report coincide with pre-existing literature in identifying migrant farmworkers as a population suffering special vulnerability and exposure to systematic and severe rights violations. It is, therefore, a group that requires special support, protection and provision by public administrations. European institutions should make it a policy priority to deploy targeted funding and programme measures that tackle the *work-derived* conditions shaping migrant farmworkers' health, safety and wellbeing. In migrant-dependent agricultural enclaves, harm is produced not only through work tasks but also through housing, mobility and access to services; policy responses should therefore include interventions with structural, tangible effects in all those areas.

a. Allocate dedicated funding for durable housing solutions in migrant-dependent enclaves.
   Resources should be ring-fenced to replace informal settlements and other forms of substandard accommodation with *permanent, adequate and rights-compliant* housing, prioritising public and social housing instruments over temporary or emergency solutions. Housing measures should incorporate gender-sensitive safeguards, given the specific risks faced by women in isolated and dependency-based living arrangements.
b. Fund safe mobility and transport infrastructure to reduce isolation.
   The EU should support regular, affordable public transport in agricultural areas with high concentrations of migrant labour, connecting housing, workplaces and essential services, either by directly funding those services or by instructing Member States and sub-national governments to do it. Reducing enforced isolation is central to improving safety, access to care and the ability to report abuses. Where work

organisation relies on remote sites, employers should be required to ensure safe transport options that do not deepen dependency.

c. Ensure accessible OSH training and effective provision of protective equipment. Programmes should require OSH training that is linguistically and culturally accessible, enabling workers to understand safety procedures and pictorials in practice. This must be backed by inspections ensuring that appropriate personal protective equipment is provided free of charge, in adequate quantity and on a continuous basis.
d. Guarantee effective access to public healthcare for all migrant farmworkers. EU-level guidance should promote practical access to public healthcare for agricultural workers regardless of administrative status. Member States should be instructed to remove communication barriers in high-migrant areas and ensure that health services account for gendered and work-related vulnerabilities specific to migrant farmworkers.

National-level measures

Substantially reinforce labour inspection capacity in migrant-dependent agricultural enclaves

Labour inspection is an indispensable public policy instrument for ensuring compliance with minimum labour, OSH and social protection standards in agriculture —like in any other sector. The findings of this report indicate that, while agricultural employers perceive an increase in inspection activity under the current administration, this has not been sufficient to counter the persistence of widespread infringements and abusive practices. In contexts such as the Huelva agro-industrial enclave, inspection systems continue to be structurally overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the sector.

National authorities should therefore implement a substantial and sustained increase in resources for labour inspection, with particular emphasis on human capacity. This requires targeted recruitment, specialised training and stable deployment of inspectors in agricultural areas characterised by a high density of firms, large volumes of migrant (and, especially, seasonal) labour, and elevated risks of non-compliance. The need for reinforced oversight is especially acute given the sector's structural features: geographical dispersion of workplaces, remoteness and isolation that produce invisibility and de facto impunity, high labour turnover, and the fragmentation of employment relations. Incremental adjustments are unlikely to be effective in such settings; inspection capacity must be scaled to the realities of the labour regime it is expected to regulate.

In addition, legislative and operational reforms are needed to address the recurrent obstacles associated with inspection access to farms. Fieldwork evidence points to delays, advance warnings and the concealment of infringements linked to the requirement that inspections be accompanied by local law-enforcement agents. National legislation should therefore be revised to reduce dependence on local police accompaniment in agricultural inspections, either by granting labour inspectors the legal authority to compel access to workplaces when justified by inspection needs, or by ensuring that accompanying police officers are assigned from outside the relevant territorial area —as it is already common practice in contexts where risks of collusion or information leakage are structurally high. Such measures would strengthen the effectiveness of labour inspection in high-risk agricultural enclaves and constitute a necessary precondition for the enforcement of any substantive labour or OSH reform.

Reform complaint mechanisms to ensure independence and effectiveness in high-risk agricultural contexts

Complaint and whistleblowing mechanisms are a potentially important tool for identifying and addressing labour abuses in agriculture, particularly in contexts characterised by strong power asymmetries and barriers to collective voice. Since 2023, Spanish law has required companies with more than 50 employees—effectively the vast majority of agricultural firms operating in enclaves such as Huelva—to establish internal reporting systems under Law 2/2023. The findings of this report confirm that such mechanisms are already being implemented in parts of the sector and can, in principle, provide a structured channel for reporting abuses.

However, empirical evidence also highlights a structural limitation in the current legal design of these mechanisms. Because Law 2/2023 requires that complaints be received and managed by an internal company body, whistleblowing systems are more likely to be effective in addressing abuses committed by lower-level supervisors acting beyond managerial expectations—particularly in cases of extreme, individualised misconduct—than in confronting infringements that are embedded in, or tolerated by, the firm's own organisational practices. Where complaints concern wage practices, working time, housing arrangements or other company-level violations, workers may reasonably expect inaction or retaliation, or may be deterred from using the mechanism altogether by the knowledge that the employer itself is the recipient.

One emerging response has been the use of externally managed complaint mechanisms, operated by civil society organisations with sectoral expertise. While these arrangements can improve trust and accessibility, they remain dependent on employer consent and can

be withdrawn unilaterally, limiting their capacity to function as a stable and rights-based enforcement tool.

National legislation should therefore be reformed to ensure that complaint mechanisms in contexts of heightened vulnerability, such as migrant-dependent agro-industrial enclaves, are institutionally independent from the employer. This could be achieved by amending Law 2/2023 to allow, or require, that anonymous complaints in such contexts be channelled directly to a public authority—either the existing Independent Authority for the Protection of the Informant or, preferably, a strengthened labour inspectorate with the mandate and capacity to act upon them. While this would entail a significant increase in administrative workload and require further investment in inspection resources, it would also correct a core design flaw by removing employer discretion from the reporting process.

In high-risk agricultural settings, the potential gains in terms of worker protection and rebalancing of power relations outweigh the costs of greater public involvement. Ensuring that complaints can be raised safely, credibly and independently is a necessary complement to reinforced inspection capacity and a precondition for effective enforcement of labour and OSH standards.

Adopt ambitious housing policies to guarantee effective access to adequate housing for migrant farmworkers in agro-industrial enclaves

Access to housing has become a major structural constraint for low-income households in Spain, driven by sustained increases in housing, especially rental, prices. These trends have disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, while national government policies have remained largely incremental and insufficient to reverse exclusion. In agro-industrial enclaves such as Huelva, these pressures are intensified by the recent arrival of large numbers of migrant, often racialised, workers, who face additional barriers due to widespread discrimination. As shown in this report, the combination of affordability constraints and racial exclusion has led to systematic residential exclusion, informal settlements and severe housing insecurity.

National housing policy should therefore adopt a dual strategy addressing both general market failures and the specific conditions of migrant-dependent agricultural enclaves. First, Spain should implement ambitious structural measures to lower barriers for low-income households, including effective rent regulation and a rapid expansion of genuinely affordable public and social housing. Without a decisive increase in non-market supply, access constraints will persist.

Second, areas with high concentrations of migrant farmworkers should be explicitly recognised as zones requiring special housing protection, comparable to the already

considered “stressed residential market areas”, even where price thresholds are not met. In these contexts, exclusion is driven not only by prices but also by discrimination and structural reliance on migrant labour, warranting differentiated policy responses.

Third, within such zones, a substantial share of public housing should be oriented towards workers facing both affordability constraints and racialised exclusion from the private rental market, where market mechanisms systematically fail.

Finally, housing for migrant farmworkers must meet the same standards as for the native population: permanent, adequate and rights-compliant, prioritising public and social housing over temporary or segregated solutions. Aligning housing policy with equality and stability is essential to effectively address residential exclusion and the vulnerability it generates in migrant-dependent agricultural contexts.

Regulate intercultural mediation services to ensure independence

Intercultural mediation services are often presented as tools to support migrant farmworkers by facilitating communication, access to public services and understanding of work and administrative procedures. In principle, they could help reduce barriers and mitigate vulnerabilities linked to migrant labour. However, this report shows that in agro-industrial enclaves such as Huelva, their current organisation often undermines these aims.

When mediation services are funded, contracted or deployed by employers or employer organisations, they risk operating less as worker support and more as invasive forms of private control or intimidation. Evidence indicates that employer-controlled mediation can discourage workers from seeking independent assistance, including healthcare, and function as an informal extension of managerial authority. Rather than reducing vulnerability, such arrangements reinforce dependency, limit autonomy and exacerbate OSH-related risks.

National regulation should therefore establish clear safeguards to ensure that intercultural mediation in high-vulnerability contexts is institutionally independent from employers. At a minimum, mediation should not be permitted where its governance, funding or deployment is controlled by employing firms or employer organisations.

Ideally, mediation services should be accountable to workers themselves through representative organisations. However, given the limitations identified, a more robust alternative may be to place these services under direct public responsibility or within multi-stakeholder governance frameworks that include independent trade unions and civil society organisations with proven autonomy. The core objective must be to ensure that intercultural mediation rebalances power relations, enables real access to rights and services, and contributes to safer working and living conditions. Without strong guarantees of

independence and accountability, mediation risks becoming counterproductive, deepening rather than reducing vulnerability.

Comprehensively reform the GECCO hiring-at-origin scheme to counter structural dependence, isolation and work-derived vulnerabilities[15]

The GECCO hiring-at-origin scheme constitutes one of the central pillars of labour supply in agro-industrial enclaves such as Huelva and covers a very substantial share of the workforce analysed in this report. Its importance is not only quantitative. GECCO plays a decisive role in shaping the institutional conditions under which work, housing, mobility, access to services and future life prospects are organised for participating workers. Unlike other sources of extreme vulnerability documented in this report—which are often associated with informality, regulatory gaps or weak state presence—the vulnerabilities linked to GECCO are the direct outcome of a public policy that the state actively designs, implements and supervises year after year. This makes the shortcomings of the scheme particularly consequential and places a heightened responsibility on public authorities to address them.

The findings of this report show that, as currently organised, GECCO significantly reinforces workers' isolation and dependence on a single employer, thereby amplifying exposure to labour abuses, OSH risks, barriers to accessing rights and services, and obstacles to effective complaint and exit. While the regulatory framework formally includes references to workers' rights and minimum standards, these provisions tend to be framed in soft, aspirational terms and are rarely supported by the material, administrative and enforcement mechanisms required to make them effective. By contrast, those elements of the scheme that serve migration control objectives and guarantee employers a stable and timely supply of labour are enforced strictly and systematically. A central objective of reform must therefore be to rebalance the scheme, elevating workers' rights and protections to the same level of operational priority.

Several areas of reform are particularly urgent.

1. Make workers' rights within GECCO enforceable rather than declarative. The GECCO framework contains multiple references to minimum standards relating to working

[15] These recommendations specifically addressing GECCO draw on expert input. The proposals concerning conditions at destination benefited from the support of researcher Marta Molina Fernández from the University of Huelva (UHU), and are partly informed by the conclusions of the policy workshop on GECCO held in Madrid on 26 September 2025, jointly organised by the European Horizon projects *SafeHabitus* and *DignityFirm*. The recommendations relating to conditions in countries of origin are partly based on ideas set out in Oxfam Intermón's official organisational position on the Spanish programme for hiring at origin.

conditions, housing, OSH and treatment of workers. However, these are frequently drafted using conditional language ("where possible", "where appropriate") and are not accompanied by dedicated monitoring, inspection or sanctioning mechanisms. As a result, compliance is uneven and often symbolic. Given that participation in GECCO structurally increases workers' dependence and vulnerability, rights and standards within the scheme should be framed as hard obligations, supported by clear enforcement responsibilities, regular inspections and meaningful sanctions for non-compliance. Where a public policy actively generates heightened risk, regulatory protection should be correspondingly strengthened, not diluted.

2. Turn formal mobility and regularisation pathways into real, accessible rights. Recent regulatory changes allow GECCO workers, after four years, to apply for residence and work permits that are no longer tied to seasonal employment or to a specific employer. While this represents a potentially significant improvement, the report shows that, in practice, this pathway remains largely inaccessible. During the initial four-year period, the prospect of future regularisation can intensify workers' dependence, as employers effectively control access to a long-term legal future. More importantly, workers face multiple practical barriers: lack of information about administrative procedures, no independent access to the relevant authorities, and no realistic channels to connect with alternative employers willing to offer the required type of contract.

Public authorities must therefore put in place independent, publicly guaranteed support mechanisms that ensure workers' effective access to administrative procedures and to the labour market beyond their current employer. This should include proactive information provision, direct assistance with applications, and institutionalised channels that facilitate contact with alternative employers, without the current employer acting as gatekeeper. Only under these conditions can both employer changes during the season and transitions to non-seasonal residence and work permits become genuine, exercisable rights rather than theoretical possibilities.

3. Guarantee timely and automatic access to healthcare. The report documents persistent failures in the administrative processes required to ensure that GECCO workers receive their health cards in a timely manner. Delays of several months—and in some cases issuance only after the worker has already returned to the country of origin—severely restrict access to healthcare during precisely the periods of highest occupational exposure. These delays undermine both individual health outcomes and broader public health objectives. Administrative procedures linked to healthcare access should therefore be streamlined, automatic and prioritised, ensuring that all GECCO workers are fully covered from the outset of their stay.

4. Ensure that sanctions on employers do not penalise workers who report abuses. Current regulations allow employers found to have committed sufficiently serious infringements to be excluded from participation in GECCO in subsequent seasons. This is an important safeguard. However, the report identifies a critical design flaw: there is no mechanism to reassign affected workers to alternative employers when such exclusions occur. As a result, workers who consider reporting abuses must weigh the risk that successful enforcement will effectively exclude them from future employment under GECCO, depriving them of a vital source of income. In practice, this means that the harshest indirect consequences of enforcement fall on workers rather than on infringing employers, creating a powerful deterrent to reporting.

GECCO must therefore incorporate procedures that guarantee the continuity of workers' access to employment when sanctions are imposed, including mechanisms for reassignment to other participating employers. Enforcement should reduce abusive practices without placing the burden of sanctions on those who are already most vulnerable.

5. Address vulnerabilities generated in countries of origin through strengthened oversight and rights-based accompaniment. The report's fieldwork in Morocco highlights that vulnerabilities associated with GECCO are not confined to destination contexts. Recruitment processes in origin countries can involve opacity, clientelism, corruption or informal intermediation, and selected workers often receive incomplete or inaccessible information about their rights, working conditions and living arrangements. Public authorities should therefore strengthen and rigorously supervise the institutions responsible for recruitment, ensuring transparent, fair and accountable selection processes.

This should be complemented by the systematic involvement of independent civil society and feminist organisations in pre-selection, information and accompaniment phases, given their demonstrated value in rights awareness, observation and support. Selected workers should receive clear, comprehensible information—adapted linguistically and practically—on contracts, accommodation, rights and procedures, as well as basic preparation (language and functional literacy) that facilitates everyday autonomy in Spain.

In addition, GECCO should incorporate a structured return phase that goes beyond administrative control, enabling the collection of feedback, the lodging of complaints, and the provision of support for economic autonomy through training, mentoring or entrepreneurship initiatives, building on prior experiences such as Wafira. Finally, the scheme should integrate a care-sensitive approach, recognising that the prioritisation of women with dependants generates invisible care deficits in origin communities. Addressing this requires dedicated analysis and the reinforcement of care infrastructures in affected territories.

Taken together, these reforms would help transform GECCO from a mechanism that currently entrenches dependence, isolation and risk into one that genuinely balances labour-market needs with workers' rights, health and safety, and longer-term social sustainability.

Local-level measures

Discontinue shantytown eradication programmes and replace them with rights-based housing solutions

Local authorities should suspend current shantytown eradication programmes as designed and implemented in agro-industrial enclaves such as Huelva. Although framed as inclusive measures to end extreme housing deprivation, this report shows that they often displace rather than resolve exclusion, generating additional harm for migrant farmworkers. These include episodes of homelessness, forced overcrowding and the dispersal of workers into more isolated locations, increasing physical risk, undermining rest and intensifying psychological distress.

Local policy should therefore abandon demolition-centred approaches and shift towards durable, rights-based housing solutions that prevent displacement and reduce dependency. Existing eradication strategies, even when accompanied by public shelters, provide places for only a small fraction of the target population, leaving most exposed to the same or worsened conditions. Pursuing demolition without structural alternatives risks entrenching vulnerability and reproducing the health and safety risks such programmes claim to address.

If municipalities are concerned about the reputational costs of persistent shantytowns, a more effective and rights-based response would be to develop fully habitable residential facilities in non-segregated locations, reducing isolation while ensuring adequate living standards. A concrete counterexample is found in the Italian agro-enclave of Saluzzo, where local authorities created a network of centrally located public accommodation for seasonal migrant farmworkers. Conceived as stable housing rather 108cc emergency shelters, these facilities were embedded in the town's social fabric and functioned as hubs of visibility, access to services, and regulated recruitment.

Evidence indicates that this spatial reconfiguration reduced isolation and dependency, contributing to improved labour conditions and rights enforcement (Uleri et al., 2023). Comparable locally grounded, rights-based housing solutions should replace demolition-based eradication policies in Huelva and similar agro-industrial enclaves, rendering them largely obsolete as voluntary relocation would progressively reduce the size and spread of shantytowns.

Ensure adequate public transport provision to connect work, housing and services in migrant-dependent agro-industrial enclaves

Local authorities should ensure the provision of sufficient, regular and affordable public transport in agro-industrial enclaves with high concentrations of migrant farmworkers. As noted by a civil society actor interviewed for this report, rights-based housing policies remain structurally incomplete without transport networks that effectively connect housing, workplaces and access to public and private services.

In enclaves such as Huelva, agricultural campaigns mobilise several thousand workers per municipality. Many live near isolated rural worksites and require transport to towns for non-work activities, while others must travel daily from towns or other locations to dispersed fields. If a workforce of comparable size but different socio-demographic profile were employed in urban or industrial sectors, the lack of adequate public transport would be unacceptable. Migrant farmworkers should be guaranteed the same standards of safe and dignified mobility.

Expanding public transport would have systemic benefits: it would reduce isolation and dependency, limit reliance on unsafe or employer-controlled transport, and improve access to healthcare and essential services. Transport should therefore be treated as a core element of local labour, health and housing governance in migrant-dependent agricultural contexts, not as an optional or secondary service.

Guarantee access to municipal registration (empadronamiento) for migrant farmworkers

As outlined above, within the Spanish system municipal registration (*empadronamiento*) is the administrative act through which local authorities recognise a person's habitual residence and a key gateway to accessing a wide range of public and social services. For people in an irregular administrative situation, registration is also a crucial step in regularisation processes and, more broadly, in trajectories of social and labour inclusion and the full recognition of rights. The report further identifies an additional layer of economic dispossession affecting some workers in rented or employer-provided housing: in order to obtain registration, they may be informally required to pay extra sums imposed by landlords or employers who control access to proof of residence.

Local authorities should therefore implement two immediate changes. First, municipalities must end the systematic refusal to register residents of informal settlements. This practice is unlawful and directly excludes some of the most vulnerable workers from essential services; registration should reflect factual residence, irrespective of housing type.

Second, municipalities should abandon the default presumption of suspicion applied to migrant farmworker applicants. Requiring confirmation from landlords—or employers where they assume this role—instead of accepting documentation provided by the applicant, as is standard practice for other socio-demographic groups in Spain, enables abusive forms of rent extraction. Aligning registration procedures with ordinary administrative practice would help prevent extortion, protect access to rights and reduce dependency on employers and landlords.

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Annexes

Interview guide for migrant farmworkers

1. Life course and migration trajectory

Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your life before coming to Spain?

What kind of work or responsibilities did you have at that time?

How did the idea of migrating emerge, and what expectations did you have?

Had you worked abroad or in agriculture before?

2. Arrival in Spain and first steps

How were your first months in Spain?

What do you remember as the easiest and the most difficult aspects of that period?

Did you receive any support or help when you arrived?

How did you find your way in terms of work and accommodation?

3. Entry into agricultural work

How did you start working in agriculture?

What factors influenced that decision?

What other job options did you consider at the time, if any?

How would you describe your first contact with the sector?

4. Employment trajectory in agriculture

Since arriving, what types of campaigns, crops or locations have you worked in?

Have you changed employer or area? What prompted those changes?

Are there any jobs or experiences that stand out for you, positively or negatively?

How do you see your work trajectory in agriculture so far?

5. Organisation of daily work

What is a typical working day like for you?

Who organises the work and how is the pace set?

Does the way you work change depending on the stage of the campaign or workload?

How would you describe relations with supervisors and co-workers?

6. Working conditions and contractual arrangements

How would you describe your working conditions overall?

What type of contract do you currently have, or have you had most often?

How do working hours, breaks and pay usually operate?

How much room do you feel you have to raise concerns or disagreements?

7. Housing and living conditions

Where are you currently living and how would you describe that place?

Which aspects of your housing have the greatest impact on your daily life?

How does where you live affect your rest and wellbeing?

Have you experienced difficulties in finding or keeping accommodation?

8. Residential trajectory and mobility

Since arriving in Spain, have you changed where you live?

What reasons have led you to move from one place to another?

How do you usually travel to work or access services?

Do you experience mobility more as a resource or as a difficulty?

9. Health, body and wear over time

How has your work affected your body over time?

Are there any recurring aches, pains or physical problems?

How do you manage fatigue or pain when it appears?

Do you notice changes in your health compared to before working in agriculture?

10. Occupational safety and health prevention

What kinds of safety or prevention measures exist in your workplace?

How are heat, physical effort or chemical products managed?

What usually happens if someone feels unwell during the working day?

How would you assess concern for health and safety in your work environment?

11. Healthcare and social protection

Have you needed medical care since working here?

How has your experience of accessing healthcare been?

What happens if you are unable to work due to illness or injury?

Do you feel supported or unprotected in these situations?

12. Overall assessment and perspectives

Looking at your experience as a whole, how would you assess it?

What aspects have been the most difficult and which the most positive?

How do you see your future in agriculture or in Spain?

What would need to change for this work or this sector to become more attractive to you?

Ethical statement regarding fieldworks conducted within SafeHabitus Work Package 5

1. Vulnerability Assessment and Protection Measures

1.1. Specific assessment of migrant worker vulnerabilities in our research contexts:

In Huelva (Spain), the fieldwork includes both migrant workers who arrive through Spain's official circular migration scheme—the contratación en origen program—as well as others who are not part of this regulated system, including some with irregular administrative status. Women participating in the contratación en origen program face a structural dependency on employers, as their legal status and eligibility for future contracts are contingent upon employer approval and contract completion. Their residence permits are temporary and tightly linked to the duration of the harvest season, limiting their access to broader rights and opportunities for integration. On the other hand, workers outside the program, including irregular migrants, often find employment through informal or subcontracted channels, increasing their exposure to abusive labour practices and reducing their visibility in legal and institutional frameworks.

Across both groups, a set of shared vulnerabilities is evident. These include substandard and often overcrowded living conditions in makeshift or informal settlements, systemic labour exploitation through underpayment and excessive working hours, and persistent experiences of xenophobia and discrimination. Gender-based violence, lack of access to healthcare, and limited institutional protection further deepen the precariousness of their situation.

In Morocco, the assessment centres on three interconnected profiles: women preparing to migrate to Spain for seasonal work, those currently engaged in local informal labour—particularly in agriculture and domestic work—and women who have returned after having worked abroad, notably in Huelva. Morocco remains a country where European standards

of human rights protection are not fully upheld, particularly in rural regions. Women operate within highly patriarchal and often restrictive social environments, where autonomy is limited and access to justice or institutional support is scarce.

Those preparing to migrate frequently face opaque recruitment practices and are often uninformed about their rights or the realities of the work abroad. Many are driven by urgent economic needs and familial obligations, which can pressure them into accepting precarious or exploitative conditions. Women working locally often do so without contracts or social protections, exposed to low wages, long hours, and social stigma. Meanwhile, returnees who previously participated in seasonal migration reflect on experiences marked by vulnerability, isolation, and in many cases, a desire not to repeat the cycle due to the hardship endured.

In Romania, interviews were conducted with two main groups: workers who are currently engaged—or preparing to engage—in seasonal migration to Spain and Germany, and individuals who previously worked in the agricultural sectors of these countries and have since returned. A significant vulnerability among these migrants is their dependency on employers, which mirrors the experience of workers in other regions. For many, their contracts are temporary, and they may feel fear of losing their jobs if they denounce their conditions. Furthermore, many migrants are reluctant to share the hardships and exploitation they face in destination countries. This reluctance often stems from a fear that exposing the difficulties might affect their reputation or the chances of future employment opportunities, both in the host country and in their local communities in Romania. Additionally, returning workers frequently encounter a lack of recognition or support upon their return, making it difficult to seek justice or voice concerns about the exploitative conditions they have faced.
The status of European Union citizens and the right to work in other EU member states reduce the level of vulnerability for seasonal migrants in Romania compared to those from outside the EU. In Romania, we considered that seasonal migrant workers in agriculture can be in the category of vulnerable people from an economic or educational perspective (individuals with very low incomes or a very low level of education).

1.2. Detailed safeguards and procedures for protection:

Interviews belonging to Tasks 5.3 and 5.4 have been audio-recorded. The files have been stored in a restricted-access folder on the Microsoft OneDrive cloud platform under a Universidad Pontificia Comillas license, which ensures data encryption and security measures aligned with university standards and Regulation (EU) 2016/679. Access to the data is limited to registered users participating in the project. For this purpose, a co-responsibility agreement on the protection of personal data has been signed between Comillas and Oxfam; thus, only members of the project belonging to both organizations have access to the folder.

All interviews will be transcribed and properly anonymised to ensure that interviewees' personal data is excluded. Once this process is complete, the audio files will be destroyed. For interviews transcribed by a subcontracted company, a data processing agreement will be signed, along with a declaration confirming the destruction of documents upon the completion of the work. Comillas, as the institution responsible for data custody, has been in communication with its Data Protection Officer (DPO) to oversee the process and address any requests from participants to delete any recordings or transcripts in which they participated, should they wish to do so.

In Romania, details about the study are presented verbally and oral consent is requested for participation and audio recording. This approach is preferred because some individuals may be illiterate or have limited reading and writing skills; asking them to sign documents they do not fully understand could cause unnecessary stress.
In Romania, no personal data such as names or phone numbers are collected or stored, and the summary sheets with interviewee information do not allow for the identification of individuals—only categorization by age, gender, and education. Any information inadvertently revealed during interviews is deleted during transcription and data processing. Each interviewee is identified by a code (three components: destination country + a unique number + gender, e.g., DE_2_M) rather than personal details. Audio files and transcripts are stored on password-protected devices and folders.

To address power imbalances and ensure truly voluntary participation in Romania, employers are not involved in contacting or recruiting participants for origin-country fieldwork; no specific employer data (company or individual names) are collected, and no contracts are requested. Recruitment begins via trusted community gatekeepers (e.g., teachers, priests, social workers) and researchers' personal contacts, followed by a snowball technique. Interviews are conducted at locations and times chosen by participants, who can refuse or withdraw at any point without providing a reason.

1.3. Timeline for implementing these measures before research commences:

Since the beginning of the project in January 2023, regular meetings have been held between Oxfam and Comillas to ensure smooth coordination and guarantee compliance with the necessary requirements for the research. In April 2023, a meeting was held with Comillas' legal advisory service to design a plan in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Following this meeting, a data co-responsibility agreement was signed with Oxfam, allowing for the shared access to interviews and transcriptions related to the project in a legal and ethical manner. In January 2024, Comillas contacted its own ethics committee to review the protocol to be followed in the fieldwork. The protocol was approved as it met the required ethical standards for participant protection and research integrity.

Before each fieldwork phase, planning meetings were held between Comillas and the responsible partner for the implementation in each specific context. In April–May 2024, a meeting was held with Oxfam to review logistical and ethical details before conducting fieldwork in Huelva (Spain). In October 2024, a similar meeting was held with ULBS (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu), the partner responsible for coordinating the fieldwork in Romania. Likewise, prior to the fieldwork conducted in Morocco in July 2025, coordination meetings were held between Comillas and Oxfam Marruecos to ensure the appropriate ethical and logistical arrangements were in place. Throughout this process, regular communication has been maintained via email to resolve any doubts and track progress in the fieldwork. Additionally, in September 2024, an additional meeting was held with ULBS members to plan the field activities in Romania, which took place between October 2024 and July 2025. In Romania, data collection only began in the second year of the project, allowing time to attend the SafeHabitus ethics seminar (Prof. Sally Shortall), align methodology with the work-package coordinator and partners, and obtain ethics approval from the university's committee.

2. Ethics Approval Framework

In the case of the fieldwork carried out in Morocco. Since the inception of the project, Oxfam Morocco (OM) has been actively and consistently involved in all stages of design, planning, and implementation, in close coordination with Oxfam Intermón (OI). This ongoing collaboration has ensured that all actions carried out in Morocco are fully aligned with Oxfam's ethical and quality standards, as well as with the normative and cultural frameworks of the local context. All strategic, operational, and methodological decisions have been jointly agreed upon between the different levels of Oxfam and the participating partners, ensuring ethical oversight throughout and an implementation based on respect, transparency, and responsibility.

The project has been guided at all times by the institutional documentation that defines Oxfam's ethical framework: the Oxfam Intermón Code of Conduct, the Oxfam Intermón Social Responsibility Policy, the Oxfam International Partnership Principles, and the Responsible Program Data Policy. These documents establish fundamental principles of integrity, equity, accountability, confidentiality, and protection of human rights, and have served as the basis for shaping all procedures—from data collection to stakeholder engagement. In the specific case of Morocco, particular attention has been paid to confidentiality and the ethical handling of sensitive information, which has been identified as the main ethical risk area for the project.

Implementation has involved the collaboration of a Moroccan grassroots organization specialized in social development and community work, as well as a migrant women's organization with expertise in participatory processes and rights protection. Ongoing

coordination was maintained with both, to validate approaches, adapt methodologies, and ensure that the research practices aligned with institutional standards and local realities. Interviews with vulnerable populations—particularly vulnerable women, among other profiles exposed to inequality or discrimination—were conducted in safe and trusted spaces, mainly at the headquarters of local social organizations. This methodological approach fostered a respectful and secure environment for participation, ensuring active listening and protection from any form of risk or harm.

Ethical management of the project has been understood as a cross-cutting and continuous process, not limited to a specific phase or the mere acquisition of approvals. Rather, it has involved a constant review of procedures, adjustments to information collection methods, careful handling of informed consent, and ongoing monitoring of compliance throughout the entire project cycle. All activities have been guided by the institutional documents mentioned above and the operational guidance of OI, OM, and local partners.

Ethical compliance has adhered to both European regulations and the legal and cultural frameworks of Morocco. Regarding the European framework, the project has followed the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), particularly concerning informed consent, privacy, and protection of personal data. These principles are also reflected in Oxfam's Responsible Program Data Policy, which outlines the rights of individuals to be informed, respected, and protected at every stage of the data cycle. In the Moroccan context, actions have complied with the country's legal and administrative requirements, as well as with local customs and social norms—always ensuring that such norms do not contradict internationally recognized human rights standards upheld by the organization.

Lastly, all activities have been carried out based on a framework of shared responsibility, in line with Oxfam's Partnership Principles, which promote relationships rooted in transparency, autonomy, mutual accountability, and complementary objectives. The active participation of local partners—particularly in the design, monitoring, and review of ethical procedures—has been prioritized to build a horizontal, contextualized, and legitimate collaboration. This approach has ensured that ethical compliance is not merely a formal requirement, but a living practice, subject to ongoing improvement, centred on the people involved, and committed to the institutional values that guide Oxfam's work around the world.

In the case of the fieldwork conducted in Huelva, Spain, as previously mentioned, this phase of the project strictly adhered to the ethical protocols approved by the Universidad Pontificia Comillas. These protocols provided the methodological and ethical framework governing all research activities involving human participants, ensuring full compliance with institutional, national, and European ethical standards. Particular attention was given to the principles of

informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' rights and well-being. The procedures implemented in Huelva, therefore, complemented and reinforced Oxfam's own ethical commitments, ensuring coherence and integrity across all field sites of the project.

For Romania, the fieldwork received formal approval from the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (ULBS) Committee of Ethics in Social Sciences, No. 31/31.07.2025. Additionally, an Ethics Compliance Statement signed by Alin Croitoru (31/05/2023) confirms that all data will be anonymised, encrypted, and securely stored, and that oral consent will be obtained from all seasonal migrant worker interviewees.

3. Benefit-Sharing Plan

The fieldwork carried out in the different contexts of the project—mainly in Morocco and in Huelva (Spain)—was guided by an ethical and collaborative approach that understands research as a shared process of learning and knowledge generation. From its initial design, the project prioritized the active participation of local organizations, recognizing their fundamental role not only as facilitators of fieldwork but also as co-producers of the knowledge generated. This principle has been transversal throughout all phases of the project: planning, data collection, interpretation of results, and the subsequent dissemination of findings.

In the case of Morocco, the fieldwork was conducted over a two-week period and relied on the collaboration of Oxfam Morocco, the local organization RADEV, and the transnational organization AMIA, based in Huelva. These entities, with extensive experience in social development, labour migration, and women's rights, played an active role in defining objectives, selecting participants, validating research tools, and contextualizing results. The relationship with these organizations was continuous and horizontal, based on trust, reciprocity, and mutual recognition of knowledge.

The knowledge generated through this collaboration is not the exclusive property of the researchers but the result of a collective process in which local organizations have played an essential role. The findings also belong to them, as they reflect the experiences, needs, and perspectives they themselves helped to make visible. This knowledge is conceived as a practical tool that enables these organizations to strengthen their own strategies for accompaniment, awareness-raising, and political advocacy in defence of agricultural and migrant women workers.

The benefit-sharing plan in Morocco was therefore designed with an emphasis on the active return of results, which included the delivery of accessible reports, summary materials, and spaces for presentation and discussion in collaboration with local organizations. These feedback activities made it possible to contrast interpretations, gather additional observations, and ensure that the final findings responded to the priorities and realities

identified by the organizations and communities involved. Through this process, the knowledge generated was transformed into a useful resource for both community action and strategic reflection on improving the working, social, and living conditions of women workers.

In line with the project's ethical principles, the protection of participants' anonymity and confidentiality was ensured at all times, as well as the cultural and linguistic adequacy of all materials. The dissemination of results was carried out in a non-extractive manner, ensuring that the information shared did not expose participants or exceed the ethical and collaborative frameworks defined with local organizations.

The lessons learned from this phase were not limited to the Moroccan context but also had a multiplier effect within the partner organizations' networks. Thanks to the collaboration between Oxfam Morocco, RADEV, and AMIA, the results obtained will help strengthen strategies for awareness-raising and rights advocacy at both local and international levels. In this way, the knowledge generated will serve not only to document the situation of migrant women workers but also to inform the formulation of public and European policies that promote fairer, safer, and more equitable working environments.

Similarly, the fieldwork conducted in Huelva (Spain) was developed under a framework of close cooperation with local social organizations. In this case, the research was carried out with the support of Oxfam Intermón, AMIA (Huelva), and a diverse group of community organizations and associations supporting migrant workers, all of which played a central role both during the fieldwork phase and in interpreting the results. These organizations not only facilitated contact and built trust with the women workers but also provided essential knowledge about local dynamics of vulnerability, working conditions, and the institutional structures that affect participants' lives.

In Huelva, the knowledge generated is also conceived as a shared asset, the result of collaboration among researchers, social organizations, and participating communities. The organizations involved did not merely receive the final results; they were part of the knowledge-generation process, actively participating in identifying key themes, validating information, and formulating proposals for improvement. The research findings are therefore also theirs, as they reflect the realities they have been documenting and defending for years through their daily work of support and advocacy.

The benefit-sharing plan in Huelva includes the return of results to collaborating organizations through several actions integrated into the project's stakeholder engagement strategies. These actions aim to strengthen local organizations' capacity to use the findings as a foundation for their social work, training initiatives, and advocacy efforts. In addition, the knowledge generated is intended to foster dialogue with other local actors, such as public administrations, trade unions, and agricultural sector representatives, with the goal

of promoting a shared reflection on improving labour conditions and encouraging more responsible practices.

Overall, the benefit-sharing plan has been conceived as a continuous process of collaboration, feedback, and shared responsibility. The knowledge produced through the different fieldwork phases does not belong exclusively to the research team but is recognized as a collective asset, shared among all the parties involved: local organizations, participants, institutional actors, trade unions, and entities committed to improving the conditions of migrant workers.

This ethical and participatory approach ensures that the project's results go beyond the academic sphere and contribute in a tangible and lasting way to strengthening local capacities, promoting social dialogue, and advancing toward fairer models of labour migration and sustainable rural development—both in Morocco and in Spain.

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