

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## Irregular work in agriculture -Humus Job (Italy)





## 1 Implications for policy and farming support

### 1.1 The Challenge & Needs – What is the situation?

Illegal hiring has strong negative economic and humanitarian implications.

On the first point, unfair competitions against regular businesses, which aim to reduce costs in order to increase profits, inevitably jeopardize public finances. Tax evasion leads to a reduction of governmental revenues. Moreover, undeclared workers are excluded from any form of social protection and retirement's contributions (they weigh on public finances by reducing taxes and social security revenues).

Although we must consider regulatory and administrative costs that companies have to deal with when trying to counter the illegality: *"One concept must be clear - underlines Francesco Mutti, CEO of Mutti Spa (Italian company specialized in preserved food, particularly in the tomato sector) - striving for legality does not make the economic level of agriculture unsustainable, but the exact opposite is true. It is in the presence of illegality that costs increase, in particular those that must be borne by companies that operate in fairness. Legality is above all an ethical and moral prerequisite, but it is also a prerequisite for healthy competition."* (La Repubblica, 2020).

The phenomenon of caporalato also entails a humanitarian problem, especially at community level, and consequently at national one too. We are witnessing to the modern face of slavery and the spreading of slums in rural areas where hundreds, thousands of foreign people live (depending on the harvest periods), with inevitable implications in terms of socio-economic degradation, cultural heritage loss, sanitary implications and risk of contracting diseases for employees. We know that Italy's agriculture is heavily dependent on regular and irregular foreign workers; this dependency has become even more evident when seasonal workers were blocked due to movement restrictions in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, tipping the agricultural sector over the edge and jeopardizing the sowing and harvesting periods (Il Fatto Alimentare, 2020).

Not to mention moral implications. The use of illegal labour destroys the civil and social sense; the normalization of the phenomenon, the toleration of irregularities and the violation of human rights (use of corporals and low-skilled and low-paid workers as a practice) have a decaying and demeaning effect on social equity.

#### Extract from a farmer's opinion

One of the farmers we had the chance to get a talk with told us that although acknowledging that Humus Job is an appreciable reality, he would not be interested in joining a network "born to tackle problems and obstacles that as an entrepreneur he had





already solved by himself to survive and be economically sustainable in the long run". In short, he does not see any crucial reasons to join Humus Job. Furthermore, he talked about potential decrease in identity of a farmer and of his farm that could occur by joining Humus Job. Also, he mentioned, more generally, the individualism that farmers always tend to preserve, including himself. Indeed, lack of cooperation culture among farmers is a bottleneck that prevent the social innovation to grow and expand throughout Italy. In terms of the legal environment, one of the experts we interviewed argues that Humus Job has provided itself with tools that would allow the achievement of what it aims: the posting of manpower (job-sharing) in fact guarantees that the worker can turn to several subjects for the satisfaction of the credit, therefore it induces solidarity also in the employers' parties related to the network. She added that promptness and a capillarity action from Humus Job would help the social innovation overcome contexts fragmentation throughout the territory, then make it able to meet different needs among farmers.

Costs for entering the network represent a bottleneck, as the network gradually grows, the costs might gradually decrease.

### 1.2 Support framework – What is needed?

The main goal of Humus Job is to promote and boost ethical and sustainable work in agriculture in Italy, by creating new connections among companies, and by intersecting job supply and job demand between workers and farms. It offers farm businessmen a network to cooperate among each other and to legally recruit trained workforce by sharing costs for employment, investments, risks and equipment. Humus Job allows farmers to benefit from a greater continuity of regular employed (trained) workers throughout the year and, at once, it ensures workers regular contracts and the possibility of greater job continuity. Furthermore, Humus Job offers its farms the possibility to get the "100% Ethical work brand", hence a showcase and other dedicated channels for their products.

### 1.3 Recommendations – What needs to be done to realise the support needed?

To help expand the Humus Job's network, existing farmers organizations such as Coldiretti could create a partnership with Humus Job or incentivize companies to join the network. Specialised support organisations could experiment with pilot projects by spotting virtuous farms. So far, no specific agreements have been finalized but information about the social innovation proposed by Humus Job has been presented to key Coldiretti figures dealing with contractual aspects in the agribusiness sector for them to consider possible synergies.

The 100% ethical label could become an acknowledged label at institutional level similarly to the Network of Quality Agricultural Work, that is the first and concrete initiative aimed at developing positive actions to fight illegal work and caporalato in agriculture. The goal of the Network is therefore to ensure some sort of quality or ethical certification, giving life to a sort of white list of farms that are considered ethical and responsible. This white list would allow





companies to sell their products to large-scale distributors. In a smaller scale, Humus Job seeks to reach the same goal. Recognising the 100% ethical label of Humus Job at the same level as the Network of Quality Agricultural Work would contribute to publicize the social innovation then expand the network. Suggestions for steps / lessons learned to achieve such an outcome to (1) specialised support organisations and/or (2) policymakers.

