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COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS? HOUSING CONDITIONS OF IRREGULAR MIGRANT WORKERS IN SPANISH AGRICULTURAL ENCLAVES

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The development of industrial agriculture in Spain has been accompanied, in recent decades, by an itinerant, recurrent and temporary mobility of immigrant workers between different productive enclaves. Although this group presents a wide internal diversity, an important segment of it is made up of workers in an irregular situation who participate in the seasonal circuit and who reside temporarily in some of these intensive production geographies. Their employment in conditions of informality makes them highly susceptible to extreme forms of labour exploitation, and to widespread difficulties in gaining access to a non-precarious legal status, which has turned their lives into an overlapping succession of chronic forms of social and labour exclusion. Additionally, the lack of political will, along with institutional and social racism has condemned many of these migrants to extreme forms of housing exclusion that has led them to reside in abandoned buildings, and spatially segregated informal settlements. In this article, we focus on this housing dimension, analysing the intersections between having an irregular status, performing agricultural work, and experiencing a subaltern spatial – residential situation. However, far from aiming to reproduce a passive vision of this issue, we analyse how migrants themselves have tried to respond to this situation. Recently, they have channelled a mobilization around the right to live in dignified conditions that has integrated demands for regularization, demands articulated around labour rights, and demands for the right to decent housing in the enclaves where they reside, thus contesting a deeply rooted policy of indifference that extends to the host societies.

Keywords: immigrant workers; agriculture; housing; irregularity; activism; quality of life; Spain.

INTRODUCTION

For at least three decades, the agricultural labour force in Spain has been undergoing a progressive and sustained change in its national composition. As a

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result of the conversion of the country's primary sector into one of the most dynamic ones in the EU, which was followed by the adoption of an industrial food production model, a growing salaried workforce, composed of migrant workers, has been required (Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone 2018). The incorporation of foreign workers, however, did not occur without problems, as it engendered extremely precarious labour and housing conditions, as shown by numerous studies (Avallone 2014).

Although labour exploitation and substandard housing conditions generally affect all groups of migrants working in the various agricultural enclaves in Spain, there are certainly differences between them, being those with irregular status among the ones enduring worse conditions. Problems such as the proliferation of shantytowns (FECONS 2017) or vagrancy (Achón 2014) have become chronic also because of the little effort directed by the public administration and employers to improve this situation. In addition, the breakout of the pandemic has only worsened conditions that, in addition to being subhuman, have contributed to the spread of contagions among these precarious workers.

The link between irregular status and employment in arduous and poorly paid jobs is such that migrants in this situation are pushed to live in marginalization. This state of affairs directly affects the quality of life of this group of people whose living and working conditions violate the most basic human rights (Molinero-Gerbeau 2021).

The aim of this article is to shine new light on the housing situation of migrant workers, by analysing the intersections between having an irregular status, being employed in agriculture, and experiencing a substandard spatial – residential situation. However, far from aiming to reproduce a passive vision of this issue, we will investigate how migrants themselves have tried to respond to this situation, focusing on the most recent struggles in which they have involved.

This article begins by pointing out the historical link between the development of the Spanish agricultural productive scheme and the incorporation of migrant labour into it. Next, we will delve deeper into the housing issue, giving an account of the main problems affecting irregular migrant agricultural workers. We will then report on some of the most relevant actions taken by the migrants themselves to denounce and reverse this situation. Finally, we will close with a series of conclusions on how the Covid-19 crisis may be an opportunity to improve this context.

AGRICULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN SPAIN

Although Spanish agriculture had been characterized until the 1970s by its peasant and family nature, establishing itself as the country's main employing sector (Mata Romeu 2018), the introduction of technological innovations, together with a general modernization of the national economy, implied structural changes

in its productive scheme. Following the model put in place in California, large business conglomerates oriented towards the production of fruits and vegetables in an industrial manner soon began to emerge (FitzSimmons 1986), with the aim of supplying the growing national and international demand for fresh produce (Langreo and Germán 2018).

Industrial agriculture has been characterized by breaking with local market-oriented or subsistence production to implement, in certain territories, over large areas, real industries reproducing the Fordist production scheme, this time applied to the countryside (Caruso 2016). The concentration of production in these areas would not be limited to harvests, but would involve the entire process, including packaging, giving rise to the emergence of highly specialized enclaves aimed at massively exporting production (Moraes et al. 2012). In 2021, after half a century of progressive transformation of the sector, Spanish agricultural income, according to data made available by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, reached 28.36 billion euros, demonstrating the high productivity of this economic segment.

The changes introduced by the production scheme of industrial agriculture have transformed both the territories where it is implemented and the societies that inhabit them, as these depend on the attraction of a growing labour force that is impossible to satisfy with the native population. The paradox of needing an unprecedented number of workers while rural areas were experiencing a sharp demographic decline caused, in the 1990s, a major labour problem that, although mitigated, persists to this day (Reigada 2012). The solution to this growing need for workers would come from immigration, as this coincided with a historical moment in which Spain reversed its migratory balance, becoming, as a result of the spectacular growth of its economy, one of the main destinations for migrant workers in the world (OECD 2008).

Agriculture, compared to other sectors, offered arduous and poorly paid employment, which made it difficult to attract the remaining resident labour force that preferred to opt for other types of jobs. However, for newly arrived migrants, this employment would not only represent a first opportunity to settle down, by allowing them to start receiving remuneration, but being a sector with a high rate of informality, it would also constitute a “refuge” (Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone 2016) for those who were in an irregular situation.

In this way, two phenomena, such as the industrialization of the countryside and the growing arrival of immigrants, converged to, on the one hand, sustain what would later be considered “the orchard of Europe”, and, on the other hand, settle in certain territories a population whose irregular status marked great difficulties for their socioeconomic integration. The intersection between agricultural work and irregularity is not exclusive to Spain, as it has sparked off an intense debate at the European level (especially in contexts such as in Italy) around the issue of whether the creation of this model of agricultural production promotes the arrival of

irregular migrants, or whether, on the contrary, they are inserted into the agricultural scheme in the absence of better opportunities (Corrado 2018).

Decades of research on the subject have tended to reinforce the second idea, indicating that, although people in an irregular situation do not tend to migrate with the aim of working in agriculture, those who end up joining this sector do so because of its high level of informality, which makes it easier for them both to obtain remuneration and to potentially access future regularizations (Rye and O'Reilly 2020; Rye and Scott 2018; Corrado et al. 2017; Gertel and Sippel 2014).

Despite the lack of precise data, between the 1990s and 2000, the number of migrant workers in an irregular situation employed in Spanish agriculture was notable (Calavita 2005). The widespread precariousness coupled with low wages formed a “cocktail”, together with the irregular status of the workers, which gave rise to the proliferation of shantytowns throughout the national agricultural enclaves. In addition to the poverty and marginality to which many people were condemned, we have to add growing sentiments of xenophobia (fed by aporophobia), whose culmination was the massive riots against immigrants that took place in the town of El Ejido, in Almería, in 2000 (Martínez-Veiga 2014).

In order to reduce the social problems linked to irregularity, the Spanish Government resorted, in the last decade of the 20th century, to four extraordinary regularizations, to which two more would be added in 2001 and 2005 (López Mora, 2008). These measures had a direct impact on the countryside, causing a reduction in the available labour force because of the preference of regularized migrants to work in better paid sectors, such as construction.

In addition to the extraordinary regularizations, two legal instruments were implemented. On the one hand, since 2000, a permanent regularization system known as “arraigo” has been established, allowing, under certain conditions (labour, social or family), access to a residence and work permit (García-Juan 2021). On the other hand, and in response to the demands of agricultural entrepreneurs who urged the government to find a solution to provide a steady supply of labour, the system known as “recruitment at origin” was implemented. This acts as a temporary migration program in the style of the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), allowing, under the limit of annual quotas defined by the Government, to hire foreign workers in their countries of origin, by granting them a seasonal work permit, which implies a mandatory return at the end of the campaign (López-Sala 2016).

The combination between extraordinary regularizations (the last one was implemented in 2005), the “arraigo” option, and the “recruitment at origin” program, has reduced the presence of irregular workers in the Spanish agricultural sector over the last decades. Certainly, twenty years later, Spain does not present such a high number of irregular workers in the countryside as Italy (Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone 2018), for example, but this does not imply an absence of this phenomenon. Fanjul and Gálvez-Iniesta (2020) estimate that in 2020 there

were about 20,000 migrant workers in an irregular situation employed in agriculture in Spain. According to the Economically Active Population Survey (EPA), that same year, around 210,000 foreigners worked in the Spanish agricultural sector, which means that almost 10% would still be in an irregular situation.

The conditions under which this labour force is employed vary according to each enclave, but given their legal status, they tend to have the most unstable and lowest paid jobs. In general, this is an itinerant workforce, which is usually employed on sporadic jobs, during the different agricultural campaigns that take place throughout the national territory. Their mobility, in fact, over the years has informally established these circuits, which are maintained over time, thanks to the transmission of information between those who participate in them.

Certain places such as squares or gas stations have been transformed into informal meeting points between the labour force and the employers, so it is common to see small groups of people waiting to be recruited in certain cities at early hours. Sometimes it is the employers themselves who carry out this recruitment, but in other cases, certain intermediaries act, as in the case of the “furgonetero” (van driver) in Murcia. This is a type of service run by other migrants who offer to provide labour to employers in exchange for a fee (Gadea et al. 2017). In any case, irregular workers tend to be employed in a complementary manner, instead as permanent staff. It is more common for them to be recruited when there is a peak in work or when an employee is on sick leave, since employers see these workers as a quick way to compensate for these imbalances (Márquez Domínguez 2014).

It is possible that in places where there is more work all year round, such as Almería or Murcia, some of the irregular workers enjoy a certain stability of employment, but we have no evidence of this. Sadly, we know that their working conditions are extremely precarious, consisting of a salary often below the legal wage agreement, long working hours, methods of remuneration such as piecework, and a chronic instability, where every day it is decided whether they work or not.

The situation of many of these workers has been compared with “vagrancy” (Achón 2014), because despite having a job, their income is so low that their options of accessing services as basic as renting houses or apartments become impossible. In addition, their irregular status makes it difficult for them to carry out any type of procedure that requires an identity document, such as opening a bank account. Income, therefore, is merely destined to survival, serving to pay for food and to save a minimum to send back to their families in the country of origin; an objective that many workers tend to point out.

If the working conditions of migrants in agriculture are already among the worst in the Spanish labour market (Avallone 2014), those of migrants in an irregular situation transcend the very label of the “precariat” (Standing 2011), by living an experience of complete labour and social subalternity (Caruso 2015).

The stress and fatigue associated with these conditions result in poor physical and mental health for workers who are already subjected to strong structural pressure as a result of their irregular status. There is thus the paradox of being “wanted, but not welcome” (Décosse 2017), as they fulfil an indispensable social function, such as food production, which far from reverting to a commensurate protection, places them in the most marginal corners of society. The damage this causes can even go to the extreme of considering taking their own lives, as happened to Eleazar Blandón, a Nicaraguan worker who died in August 2020 in Lorca, Murcia.

Blandón was an asylum seeker who, fleeing the prevailing political violence in Nicaragua, migrated to Spain in search of a better life. Like so many others, due to his irregular situation, he only managed to find employment in agriculture in Murcia. Following his death, the national press reported that he worked 11 hours per day under 40 Celsius degrees for a salary of 30 euros per day, without even the possibility of drinking water. As his family recounted, in addition to suffering this exploitation, Blandón told them that he was constantly humiliated, stating that “they call me a donkey, they yell at me, they tell me I’m slow. They throw dust in your face when you are bent over. I’m not used to being treated like that” (Martín 2020). These situations, together with the fact that his body was abandoned by those who carried it, on the ground, in front of a health centre, reveal the complete dehumanization to which these workers are subjected, and which legitimizes, in the eyes of those who exploit them, the perpetuation of these living and working conditions (Palacios and Rubio 2004).

Although what occurred to Blandón represents an extreme case, due to its fatal outcome, the working conditions this case revealed are widespread in the Spanish countryside. In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point, putting the public spotlight on workers who went from being invisible to being considered by the Spanish government itself as “essential”, and by the European Union as “critical” (Sajir et al. 2022). The European Parliament, echoing the numerous complaints of violations of the rights of these workers in diverse European contexts, urged the European Commission, in the midst of negotiating the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), to take urgent measures to put an end to the exploitation of migrants in the countryside. The result was the inclusion of a clause known as “social conditionality”, which will oblige Member States, from 2025 onwards, to ensure that farms receiving European funds comply with decent working conditions. The threat of sanctions, among which the loss of millions of European funds stands out, aims to modify the behaviour of those who abuse the structural weakness of migrants, in order to increase their profits.

As a result of these events, the Spanish Government, through the Ministry of Labour, launched an unprecedented special campaign of labour inspections. Started in 2020, during this campaign, 7,137 inspections were carried out in the fields, 42% of which ended in sanctions, 12% corresponding to “irregular work of

foreigners” (García 2021). Consequently, the Council of Ministers of November 16, 2021, approved the “Strategic Plan of the Labour and Social Security Inspection 2021–2023”, which directly set out to “eradicate forced labour, modern modes of slavery and human trafficking” as a structural objective (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2021).

The measures adopted by the Spanish Government and European institutions confirm what researchers and NGOs have been denouncing for decades, while no changes happened. Migrants, for their part, have not ceased to mobilize for their rights, which is also one of the reasons for the activation of this movement. In the following sections we will focus on this.

UNDER THE SUN, THE WIND AND THE RAIN. HOUSING CONDITIONS OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS IN AGRICULTURAL ENCLAVES

The seasonal nature of agriculture in these enclaves has led to the emergence of mobility and settlement forms linked to the harvest calendar. As a result, many of these agro-productive centres witness the arrival each year of a mobile and floating population that moves along the seasonal circuits. The presence of a large number of immigrant workers who must be temporarily housed has produced a chronic and long-standing problem – the appearance of informal settlements – to which are added structural deficiencies in the housing conditions.

Already in the 1990s, various investigations pointed out the housing problems of foreign workers employed in agricultural campaigns in diverse Spanish provinces (Giménez 1992; García-Castaño Agrela and Martínez-Chicón 1998), an aspect that became one of the priorities on the intervention agenda of social organizations facing the growth of shantytowns, and more or less generalized housing in abandoned houses, farmhouses and industrial warehouses in ruins. In 2001, the Andalusian Ombudsman, after carrying out a specific work to supervise the living conditions of seasonal agricultural workers, called on the public authorities to provide decent accommodation for these workers during the seasons. This report highlighted the indifference of the administrations and agricultural employers to a problem that seriously endangered the health and living conditions of these workers (Defensor del Pueblo de Andalucía 2001).

Two decades later, this situation not only continues, but also has worsened. There is still no infrastructure network capable of housing displaced workers during harvesting periods able to cover their basic accommodation needs, and few actions have been taken to favour access to private accommodation. Moreover, as mentioned above, over the years, not only the number of settlements has increased, but also the volume of workers living in them permanently, partly due to the expansion of crops that has prolonged the months of harvest work. Additionally, the occupation of substandard housing or abandoned infrastructure has extended to

many of the agricultural enclaves that in diverse geographical areas of Spain depend on abundant seasonal foreign labour (Garcés-Mascareñas and Güell 2021).

Reports carried out in the last decade by social organizations – the only entities that have kept this issue on their intervention agenda – highlighted that the problem of settlements is especially serious in the Andalusian provinces of Huelva and Almería, while the problems of substandard housing and occupation of abandoned spaces are more frequent in Lleida, Valencia, Murcia and Albacete (see CEPAIM 2013; Cáritas 2013; Mesa de la Integración 2017; FECONS 2017; Güell and Garcés-Mascareñas 2020).

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, referred specifically to the conditions of these accommodations in the report presented after his visit to Spain in February 2020. In his own words, “[i]n Huelva, I met with workers living in a migrant settlement in conditions that rival the worst I have seen anywhere in the world. They are kilometres away from water and live without electricity or adequate sanitation. Many have lived there for years and can afford to pay rent but said no one will accept them as tenants” (United Nations 2020).

Migrants living in informal settlements and in infrastructures that lack habitability conditions have denounced that this situation is due not only to the indifference and neglect by the institutions, but to the social racism they suffer, materialized in the refusal of the local population to rent them any property (Garreta et al. 2016). Some recent research in the Spanish case has shown precisely at a more general level how migrants have experienced this form of racism when trying to rent a house (Iglesias et al. 2021). A survey conducted in Lleida in 2016 indicated that 25% of immigrants in an irregular situation lived in settlements, and slightly less than 9% in occupied warehouses. In addition, almost 30% of the places they inhabited did not have the minimum conditions of habitability, lacking light, water, toilet or shower (González-Rodríguez, Garreta and Llevot 2021).

In the settlements of the Andalusian provinces, where plastic sheeting is used to insulate the shacks and small kitchens are built to prepare food and keep warm, one of the most serious problems has also been the continuous fires that have devastated these informal camps over the years. These fires have resulted not only in the loss of human lives but have also stripped the migrants of their minimal belongings. In fact, research on the sociohealth needs of migrants residing in the Huelva camps identified that protection from the risk of fire was one of their main expressed needs, ahead of regularization and improved working conditions (see García Padilla et al. 2021).

In addition to the harsh living conditions in camps and substandard housing, there are also constraints to registration. In the case of Spain, immigrants in an irregular situation have the right to register in the “pardon”, a municipal registry that allows them access some resources and social services, as well as to prove their stay in the country in order to obtain the so-called “arraigo social”, which is

one of the few existing ways to regularize their status. However, many of the migrants residing in these agricultural enclaves have denounced the recurring challenges that the municipalities present them with when registering, despite the existence of a legal framework that allows their registration (article 3.3 of the Resolution of March, 16, 2015 on technical instructions to municipalities regarding municipal census management). In November 2020, and for the first time, a sentence recognized the right of migrants to be registered even if they live in shantytowns, following a complaint filed by an immigrant who, in 2019, requested to be registered in a town of Huelva, and whose request was denied.

AGENCY AND RESISTANCES. CLAIMING LEGAL DOCUMENTS, WORK AND HOUSING IN DIGNIFIED CONDITIONS

Over the last two years, the health crisis has triggered a series of mobilizations among migrant workers employed in agriculture. This is an unprecedented process in the Spanish case since the migrant mobilization has been mainly articulated in big cities and border areas. Faced with precarious legal status, terrible housing conditions, labour exploitation and health insecurity, migrants employed in agriculture have demanded legal documents, housing and work in decent conditions.

First, seasonal workers have been one of the most active actors in demanding an extraordinary regularization process during 2020, an initiative that was articulated through the #RegularizaciónYA movement (López-Sala 2021; López-Sala 2022). Following the declaration of the state of alarm and the imposition of strict limitations on mobility in Spain, the president of the Spanish Government announced a series of exceptional social and economic measures aimed at softening the effects of the crisis caused by the pandemic on the most vulnerable sectors of the population. These initiatives, however, excluded migrant workers in an irregular situation. In addition, in order to ensure food production, measures were adopted in the agricultural sector to ensure the supply of workers, including extraordinary instruments to favour the employment of unemployed national workers, resident immigrants and temporary community workers (Sajir, Molinero-Gerbeau and Avallone 2022). These proposals did not include the possibility of hiring immigrants in an irregular situation (Molinero-Gerbeau 2021), many of whom had been residing in Spain for years, and working in the sector without having the option of accessing a non-precarious legal status. However, the essential nature of their role during the healthcare crisis led to an awareness of their contribution to society as a whole that did not materialize in the measures adopted. The #RegularizaciónYa movement, which emerged in May 2020, brought together a wide range of organizations of migrants in precarious situations that participated in a coordinated manner for the first time in the history of the political struggles of migrants in Spain, and in which seasonal agricultural workers have played a major

role. This social movement considered that the exceptional circumstances emanating from the health crisis turned that moment into a historic occasion to give a political response to the situation of thousands of irregular immigrants employed in the underground economy, and whose work had been revealed as essential for the functioning of the country. In addition, they argued that the Immigration Act itself protected them in this demand, since article 127 of this law indicates that temporary residence permits may be granted under exceptional circumstances of collaboration with the authorities, reasons of national security or public interest. Despite the broad mobilization of this collective during the central months of 2020 and the wide support they received from civil society, trade unions and several political parties, the Spanish Government opposed at all times to carry out an extraordinary regularization. Migrant seasonal workers have indicated that this refusal has contributed to the chronification of the conditions of exploitation to which they have been subjected for some time, limiting any possibility of access to a legal status that would allow them to improve their situation, even when the Government itself recognized the fundamental role they played during the first months of the pandemic (Castillero 2021).

However, it has been the mobilizations around living conditions and the right to decent housing that have had the greatest social impact in some Spanish agricultural enclaves. It is important to mention that the health crisis has made visible to public opinion as a whole, both the unhealthy conditions in which many of these agricultural workers subsist, and the chronic lack of national, regional and local institutional responses. In July 2020, the Ombudsman called on all administrations, agricultural employers and agricultural organizations to seek a coordinated and urgent solution to put an end to “the situation of degradation in which seasonal agricultural workers live in various areas of Spain” (Defensor del Pueblo 2020).

This mobilization has been particularly intense in provinces such as Huelva, Lleida and Almeria, although it has been especially prominent in one town in the province of Huelva (Lepe) in the region of Andalusia. In the first moments of the health crisis, claims were articulated around the right to water in which not only organizations of seasonal migrant workers participated, but also several civil society organizations. One of the findings of the previously mentioned research on the socio-health needs of migrants residing in camps in Huelva (see García Padilla et al., 2021), concluded that access to water was the main demand among residents of informal settlements.

At the end of March 2020, due to the seriousness of the pandemic, the Andalusian Social Water Board (Mesa Andaluza del Agua, in Spanish), an organization made up of thirteen trade union, environmental, citizen, business, agricultural and scientific organizations, requested through a letter addressed to the Ministry of Health, the Government Delegation in Andalusia, the Andalusian Regional Government and various town councils in Huelva the adoption of urgent

measures to authorize an emergency instrument that would allow access to water for these camps. On the same dates, the Collective of African Workers (CAT), an association of farm workers which emerged in Lepe (Huelva) with the aim of fighting to improve their living conditions, addressed a similar request to the Ministry of Health to guarantee access to water in the settlements, in order to avoid the risk of contagion. These demands, in a climate of growing general concern about the possibility of Covid-19 outbreaks on farms, led the central and regional governments to approve some exceptional aid for the distribution of water, cleaning and garbage collection in these shantytowns, which, however, only reached some of them, and proved to be insufficient. In the end, they turned out to be very punctual measures, especially the distribution of water through tanker trucks, as the measure adopted by the Municipality of Lepe. Despite these demands and the special public health needs required by a health crisis of this severity, prophylactic and temporary measures have been very limited, and have barely alleviated the situation.

Over the last few years, the repeated fires in the settlements have aroused the indignation of seasonal workers. Demands around decent housing gained strength in October 2019 following a fire that ended with the largest settlement in the province of Huelva, the one known as “la urba”, and which led to a first wave of demonstrations demanding decent housing in the municipality of Lepe. This situation worsened months later, already in the middle of the health crisis, when several fires occurred in various settlements in the town that led not only to multiple demonstrations, but also to a camp protest outside the town hall, that lasted for several weeks, and led to the creation of the platform “SoluciónAsentamientos”, formed by several associations of seasonal workers and civil society. Despite all these protests, the administrations did not offer any solutions, and during the year 2021 the camps continued to grow. This issue has even reached the European Parliament. In March 2021, the Petitions Committee admitted a complaint of the Spanish party Izquierda Unida and two non-governmental organizations (Almería Acoge and Asociación Multicultural de Mazagón) to investigate the situation of the shantytowns of seasonal workers in Huelva and Almería.

Moreover, although in March 2021 the municipality of Lepe signed an ambitious plan for the eradication of shantytowns that included the transfer of municipal land for the construction of a shelter for 500–800 seasonal workers who reside permanently in the settlements, this initiative has not materialized for the time being. This initiative, moreover, has aroused some reticence among civil society organizations working in the field, since in 2005 the municipality began the construction of a seasonal workers' shelter initially intended for 300 farm workers, which was subsequently halted due to lack of budget. This facility, in which, at the time, more than one million euros were invested, is today in very poor condition,

and is sometimes occupied by undocumented workers during the most intensive period of the campaign.

Faced with this lack of response, in 2020, the New Citizens for Interculturality Association (ASNUCI), formed by African seasonal workers to support and defend the workers living in the settlements, decided to carry out an initiative of its own that was a milestone in the history of the municipality: the construction, on its own initiative, of a shelter for homeless migrant seasonal workers. This idea arose, first of all, from the increase in the number of people who, over the years, have been living permanently in informal settlements. This increase is due to the growing expansion of the cultivation of red fruits in the province, adding to strawberries, blueberries and raspberries, as well as citrus fruits, which has led to an increase in the number of months of the year in which workers are needed, leading many to reside permanently in the municipalities of Huelva, without housing facilities in which to stay. Additionally, this association considers that this problem is the result of a lack of political will.

For this reason, in the summer of 2020, after seeing the lack of responses to this reality by the administrations, even in the context of the health crisis and the additional problems caused by the fires, the Association decided to launch a fundraising campaign on social networks. In the context of widespread social concern about the living conditions of seasonal workers throughout the country, this association managed to raise more than 100,000 euros. This budget was used to start the construction of a shelter for just over 40 workers, in a rented warehouse, which was completed in just a few months and inaugurated in the spring of 2021. This is the first initiative of its kind in Spain, as it is the first shelter to be self-managed by the seasonal workers themselves (its maintenance costs are covered by the workers themselves, who must pay a deposit, a rental fee, as well as electricity and gas costs). Although aware that this is a very limited solution, since the number of places is low and the maximum length of stay is six months, the promoters consider that it is not only an initiative that can potentially be applied in other agricultural enclaves of the national territory, but it shows that migrants in an irregular situation do not demand subsidies or free housing, but are willing to pay for accommodation that has the necessary conditions to be able to live with dignity. It should not be forgotten that, during the various mobilizations carried out in this municipality, both those that took place in 2019 after the great fire of “la urba” and those that followed the fires of 2020, the seasonal workers have stated, as the press has also picked up: “we do not want to live for free. We are workers and we can pay to live in decent accommodation” (Molina 2020).

CONCLUSIONS: EMERGING STRUGGLES FROM THE BOTTOM; BREAKING THE CIRCLE OF INVISIBILITY

The development of industrial agriculture in Spain has been accompanied in recent decades by an itinerant, recurrent and temporary mobility of immigrant workers between different productive enclaves. Although this group presents a wide internal diversity, an important segment of it is made up of workers in an irregular situation, who participate in the seasonal circuit and who reside temporarily in some of these intensive production geographies. This labour force fulfils a subsidiary function, recruited as a “last chance”, and facing the broad demand for workers during periods of higher production intensity. Recruited through informal channels, either directly by employers or indirectly by intermediaries, they perform the toughest tasks in a sector where working conditions are already extremely harsh. Their employment in conditions of informality also makes them highly exposed to extreme forms of labour exploitation and to widespread difficulties in gaining access to a non-precarious legal status, which has turned their lives into an overlapping succession of chronic forms of social and labour exclusion.

Additionally, the lack of political will, along with institutional and social racism has condemned many of these migrants to extreme forms of housing exclusion that has led them to reside in abandoned buildings and spatially segregated informal settlements. The result is their embeddedness in a chronic and intersectional dynamic of vulnerability and precariousness that has seriously affected not only their living conditions and health, but also their possibilities of articulating an autonomous migratory project, condemning them to extreme forms of subalternity.

However, the recent health crisis has given impetus to various struggles that have developed over the last few decades. Their fundamental role in ensuring food production during the first months of the health crisis, and their awareness as indispensable subjects for the country and the economy have channelled a mobilization around the right to live in dignified conditions that has integrated demands for regularization, demands articulated around labour rights, and demands for the right to decent housing in the enclaves where they reside, thus contesting a deeply rooted policy of indifference that extends to the host societies. This action, which has also resulted from the visibility of their living conditions during the pandemic, has meant achieving, for the first time, a prominent weight, both in the press and in public opinion. Thus, although limited in scope, it has been an exception in the recent history of migrant struggles in Spain, mainly articulated in urban spaces and border areas, constituting a fact that has managed to break the historical circle of invisibility that has turned its back on a segment of the immigrant population which has a structural presence and function in the maintenance of the agricultural sector.

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Dezvoltarea agriculturii industriale în Spania a fost însoțită, în deceniile recente, de o mobilitate itinerantă, recurentă și temporară a lucrătorilor imigranți între diferite enclave de producție. Deși grupul de lucrători implicați în acest tip de mobilitate prezintă o largă diversitate internă, un important segment al său este compus din lucrători în situație nereglementată care participă la circuitul sezonier și care locuiesc temporar în unele dintre aceste spații geografice de producție intensivă. Angajarea lor în condiții informale îi expune într-o mare măsură la forme extreme de exploatare prin muncă și la dificultăți numeroase în a

accede la un status legal non-precar, transformându-le viața într-o succesiune de forme cronice de excluziune socială și legată de piața muncii. Mai mult decât atât, lipsa voinței politice, împreună cu rasismul instituțional și social, îi condamnă pe mulți dintre acești migranți la forme extreme de excluziune locativă care duc la locuire în clădiri abandonate și în așezări informale, segregate spațial. În acest articol, ne concentrăm asupra locuirii, analizând intersecțiile între a avea un status nereglementat, a lucra în agricultură și a experimenta un tip de locuire subaltern/particular. Totuși, departe de a intenționa reproducerea unei viziuni pasive asupra subiectului, analizăm modalitatea în care migranții înșiși încearcă să răspundă situației. Recent, acești migranți s-au mobilizat în jurul dreptului de a trăi în condiții demne, integrând în demersul lor solicitări pentru regularizare, cereri articulate în jurul drepturilor legate de muncă și locuire decentă în enclavele unde trăiesc, contestând astfel politica, adânc înrădăcinată, de indiferență care se extinde la nivelul societăților de destinație.

Cuvinte-cheie: *lucrători imigranți; agricultură; locuire; nereglementare; activism; calitatea vieții; Spania.*

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