

OPEN LETTER

MIGRANTS PROTECTION

To the President of the Republic, H.E Sergio Mattarella
 To the Prime Minister, Hon. Giuseppe Conte
 To the Honorable Ministers of Agriculture, Labor, Homeland, Health and Territorial Cohesion

“Urgent action should be taken to safeguard the health of migrants confined in rural and informal dwellings and ghettos”

Italy is dealing with a major health emergency. Coronavirus outbreak is putting a strain on our country, on Europe and on the entire world. We are in a dramatic situation, requiring the extraordinary commitment of every level of society, from institutions to individuals. Today more than ever we need to refer to the principles of social justice and solidarity embedded in the Italian Constitution to face this unprecedented threat.

As both union and social organizations dedicated to the ecology and to the protection of human and civil rights, we express our deepest concern and preoccupation for the thousands of foreigners living in the many ghettos and makeshift camps in our country.

Many of them are employed in agrics, a sector which is more important than ever to guarantee food security and general wellbeing to the citizenry. As you are aware of, the conditions of the farmworkers who pick the products for our meals are often unacceptable: the slums in which they are forced to live are unhealthy and indecent settlements, poles apart with respect to basic human rights. The risk that Covid-19 reaches these camps, transforming them into hotbeds of the pandemic, is reason for justified alarm. In the misery of the ghettos, located in agricultural districts, the daily lives of migrants are marked by an unaltered schedule, notwithstanding the imminent coronavirus peril hanging over their heads. Requests to stay home and frequently wash hands, with which the institutions and the media constantly address the population of, are nothing more than pipe dreams for them. They survive in vast swaths of slums, without water or sanitary facilities. The important measures taken by the Government to curb the Coronavirus emergency do not reach these settlements. In the face of the commitment of the organizations that go ahead with their commitment, we have no record of any prevention measure adopted by the institutions in those high-risk contexts. This alarming discrepancy requires immediate institutional correction, for instance by adopting measures of preventive monitoring and by taking care of possible coronavirus cases that might emerge, in line with the constitutional principle of the safeguard of health as a fundamental right of the individual and general interest of the community.

In light of the further powers granted to Prefect with Prime Minister's Order of March 9th, we strongly believe that these institutions have the capacity to take on autonomous initiatives and adopt measures aimed at rendering safe the conditions of migrants and refugees hanging out there. A first measure could be the requisition of estates to be devoted for the safe accommodation of migrants. The resources necessary for refurbishing and adjusting the estates could be drawn from the *Triennial Plan* against exploitative labour.

We cannot ignore the agricultural sector, which is already harmed by the crisis and which today more than ever suffers the lack of agricultural workers due to the interruption of workforce migration fluxes from Eastern Europe. Due to Covid-19, in fact, there has been a massive repatriation of agricultural workers from Romania and Bulgaria, while no arrival should be expected from Poland. Non-european undocumented can buffer this deprivation, but it is necessary to guarantee their fundamental rights. Many foreigners today are undocumented as consequence exacerbated of the Security Order. They can't search for occasional jobs due to the fear of Law Enforcement. It is thus fundamental to legalize these workers position to allow them resurface from irregularity. This measure would guarantee both equity and the safeguard of the national interest in a rough situation in which food security could be undermined. The currently running emergency cannot be a fast track to get cheap workforce in times of economic shock. It is necessary to reinforce the measures aimed at tackling exploitative labor and favor the up-coming working irregularly, with strict observance of the sectorial Collective Agreements.

We need structural solutions which, especially in these extraordinary conditions, cannot wait any longer.

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