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Mind the recognition gaps: layers of invisibility of farm migration in Norway

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the phenomenon of ‘invisible’ seasonal farm migrants, drawing on the case of labour migration to Norwegian agriculture. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews conducted between 2017 and 2020, with local stakeholders, farmers, and migrants, we employ the notions of (mis)recognition and recognition gaps to illustrate how various aspects of invisibility are the result of overlapping factors and practices, performed by the involved actors. Our analysis demonstrates how the established narrative of the normality of labour migration facilitates rendering the migrant workers invisible both in discursive and in institutional terms and reduces its function to a pure labour force. This is related to narratives about structural changes within agriculture that transformed the once intimate relationship between farmers and workers into a more impersonal employer-worker relationship. Finally, the situation of seasonal migrants can be understood as a ‘double absence’ as their lack of interaction with the local community and circular patterns of living deprive them of social reproduction and labour market opportunities in both the home and the host country. Thus, invisibility is a crucial component in normalising, legitimising, maintaining and reproducing the continued misrecognition of seasonal migrants.

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Introduction

Migrant workers have become one of the key factors ensuring the success of agricultural production in many European countries (Kalantaryan et al. 2021; Corrado, Perrotta, and de Castro 2017). The work they perform is amongst the least esteemed and most precarious, making migrant workers a particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable group (Rye and Scott 2018; O’Reilly and Rye 2020). The largely precarious situation of the migrant workers is a consequence of structural changes within the industry, in particular the intensification and capitalisation of production, the emergence of commodity chains, and retailers’ increasing demand for quality products (Rye, Slettebak, and Bjørkhaug 2018). These

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conditions create a demand for a flexible, cheap, and exploitable labour force; a niche in which migrant workers fit well (King, Lulle, and Melossi 2021; Lulle 2021). The exploitative practices within the agricultural industry are connected to mainstream economic interests, and although they do not represent the worst excesses of capitalism, they can be placed on a 'labour exploitation continuum' (Scott 2018). This means that they represent less-extreme and less-obvious instances of exploiting and harming workers than forced labour, modern slavery or human trafficking, and do not figure as criminal behaviour.

Despite their essential role in agriculture, migrant workers are frequently depicted as an invisible group (Lulle 2021; Mešić and Wikström 2021). So far, the notion of the invisibility of migrant workers has been addressed primarily with reference to their physical and social isolation within local host communities. Agriculture has long been labelled an exceptional industry (Fiałkowska and Matuszczyk 2021; Rye and Scott 2018; Fiałkowska, Matuszczyk, and Szulecka 2022), as highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which revealed the crucial role of migrant workers for the horticulture industry. The pandemic made this largely invisible phenomenon momentarily visible, attracting public attention and revealing the intricacies of the organisation of agricultural production (Haley et al. 2020).

Our objective is to come to grips with the notion of invisibility by employing the concept of recognition. By doing so, we broaden the notion, which we understand as a multilayered form of misrecognition (Herzog 2018; Honneth 1995). More specifically, we address what Lamont (2018) calls 'recognition gaps', that is, disparities in worth and cultural membership between groups in a society, related to the proliferation of neo-liberalism. We demonstrate how invisibility at the farm level is linked to the larger question of inequality at a societal level. Our analysis is based on a case of seasonal labour migration to agriculture in one southern municipality in Norway. Our data comprise participant observation and in-depth interviews with a broad range of actors including farmers, municipal workers, local stakeholders, and East Central European migrant workers. We analyse how the invisibility of seasonal migrants is a resultant of a complex interplay of processes and practices performed by a variety of actors.

In Norway, the production of fruit and berries is seasonal and labour intensive, and, whilst in the past farmers used to rely on family, youth and other local resources for harvesting, they now rely on seasonal migrant workers. The 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements ensured the supply of workers, which coincided with processes of a larger restructuring of European agriculture in the direction of enhanced specialisation, technological innovations to increase and streamline efficiency of production, and organisational practices such as stronger vertical integration. In short, farms became fewer, but bigger, and in need of more labour (Rye and Scott 2018).

The article has the following structure: First, we highlight various aspects of migrant worker invisibility in the existing literature. Next, we outline the theoretical concepts of recognition and misrecognition, and how the disparities between these amount to a range of recognition gaps between the majority populations and the migrant workers. In the methods section we describe the methodological aspects that form the basis for our analysis. We then present the analysis of the various aspects of migrant worker invisibility in terms of institutionalised recognition gaps, normalisation of recognition gaps, and dual misrecognition. Finally, we discuss how these gaps are established, legitimised and reproduced and how they contribute to the continuous exploitative practices of those who hire seasonal migrant workers.

Literature review

Scholars have emphasised how the seasonality of work in agriculture is a crucial factor contributing to upholding the largely precarious situation of the migrants (Scott and Visser 2022; King, Lulle, and Melossi 2021). The work tasks are predominantly simple and repetitive, and, apart from good physical health and stamina, they typically do not require any particular qualifications (King, Lulle, and Melossi 2021; Farinella and Nori 2020; Serban, Molinero-Gerbeau, and Deliu 2020).

Social and geographical isolation are frequently mentioned elements of work in agriculture (Andrzejewska and Rye 2012; Corrado, Perrotta, and de Castro 2017; Aznar-Sánchez, Belmonte, and Tapia-León 2014). Workers spend most of the time in the fields or the packing houses which isolates them from local communities, whilst lodging and housing arrangements often involve living on farms, in caravans, or in barracks, all of which increase physical isolation further. In some cases, those forms of settlement may develop into bigger settlements and evoke associations of rural equivalents of the ghetto (Brovia and Piro 2020). The organisation of the farm may entrench a rigid ethnic division of labour, with migrants performing predominantly manual tasks with domestic workers responsible for administration and supervision (Holmes 2013). Studies have shown that employers' attitudes toward the migrants may be purely instrumental, illustrating that migrants are 'wanted but not welcomed' (Lovelady 2020). Torres, Popke, and Hapke (2006) argue that there exists a 'silent bargain', where the conditions encompassing migrant labour are not articulated, but still tolerated by the employers, local community and migrants, under certain conditions that makes the organisation of labour an acceptable trade-off for all parties.

Scholars have also explored the complex relationship between agricultural seasonal work and integration. Some, like Samuk (2020), view it as a contradiction in terms, raising questions concerning entitlements, motivations and stakes involved in the integration of the seasonal migrants. Others underscore how integration trajectories of farm workers are limited by factors such as the seasonality of the work and isolated housing. Migrants' acceptance of these arrangements are rooted in their belief that their situation is temporary and that it might serve as a stepping stone for advancement in the host society (Scott and Visser 2022). Thus, the home country constitutes an important reference for migrant workers and helps to rationalise their precarious position (Rye and Scott 2018). In other words, despite being objectively disadvantaged, the home-country orientation makes seasonal migrants perceive their situation as better than it is. With time, however, these double frames of reference may weaken. Integration may also be problematic from the perspective of employers, as it may affect migrants' 'superior' work ethic (Waldinger and Lichter 2019).

Seasonal and circular migration involves regular movement between at least two countries. Many split their lives between host and home country, living in a state of prolonged inconclusiveness regarding the future (Scott et al. 2022). Combining the seasonal work in agriculture abroad with one's life in the home country involves careful balancing acts. This has been illustrated by Hedberg's (2021) study of Thai berry pickers in Sweden, whose attempts to achieve work-life balance between the relatively short berry-picking season in Sweden and their lives back in Thailand significantly compromise their family life and its division of labour. A prolonged seasonal migration may affect

gender roles, for example men who become vulnerable to societal pressures and expectations concerning the maintenance of the social role of a father and breadwinner (Fiałkowska 2019). As for the host country integration, the seasonality of work, the temporary nature of their stay, and the predominantly home-country orientation are all factors that limit migrants' chances of building social relations, especially with local populations (Andrzejewska and Rye 2012).

Whilst the existing literature on the invisibility of farm workers in agriculture covers a multitude of dimensions, analysing the phenomenon through the notion of recognition facilitates a more thorough and nuanced analysis of processes that render migrant workers a precarious and invisible group.

The notion of recognition

In this article, we consider the paired notions of recognition and misrecognition a useful tool to analyse the complexity of the labour migration phenomenon in Norway and how it is shaped by various actors at different levels. *Recognition* may be defined as a relational situation of mutual acknowledgement between individuals or groups, in which those involved view and treat one another as valuable (Sayer 2005; Sennett 2003). In particular, the concept of recognition emphasises how status, worth, and esteem are granted or denied to members of different groups in society (Honneth 2001; Thompson 2006). Recognition may be considered at both the individual and the group level, which means it may concern subjective feelings of a member of a given group or the ways in which entire groups are treated. Taylor (1992) called recognition a 'vital human need' and contended that being perceived and treated as worthy, accepted or belonging in a specific societal context is a precondition of self-realisation.

Examining the genealogy of the concept, Gimmler (2018, 303) concludes that it has been employed to analyse different forms of social pathologies. Recognition has been applied to understand the situation of various underprivileged and dominated groups, most notably working-class people, women, people of colour and sexual minorities, and has been closely associated with identity politics (Fraser 1995). It has been employed to illustrate how various groups raise their voices, complain about their unjust situation, and request a change of the status quo. In a well-known debate between Fraser and Honneth (2003), the latter contended that the prime examples of working class, gender, and race impose limits on the scope of recognition. Honneth (2001) argued for an extension of the notion of recognition to include groups which suffer in different ways and experience denigration, but who are for various reasons unable to attract public attention or form structures which could empower them. One of the prime examples in the context of international migration is domestic work, performed predominantly by female migrants who experience lack of recognition as a result of their immigration status, relationships of dependence, racism and patriarchy which render the workers powerless (Anderson 2000). We view migrant farm workers as belonging to a similar category.

Elaborating on the notion of recognition, Lamont (2018, 421–22) introduced the concept of 'recognition gaps' defined as disparities in worth and cultural membership between groups in a society. For Lamont, those processes are closely linked to the increasing dominance of neoliberal ideology, widening the gap between the groups

that epitomise success and failure in society. Addressing recognition gaps may lead to the de-stigmatisation of those groups, that is to acknowledge them and bestow respect on them or restore their dignity and value in a given social context (Lamont 2018, 420). She emphasises that institutions and cultural repertoires play a role in extending the range of inclusiveness to more groups. We find this proposition useful for the purpose of our investigations. The very idea of a gap sensitises us to potential ways in which migrant farm workers may lack recognition, and the conditions that facilitate this result. The notion of a gap provides a link between the notions of (mis)recognition and invisibility. It points to the ways in which groups may be silenced and overlooked so that they do not exist in the public discourse and are not perceived as equals or occupying the same status as dominant groups (Herzog 2018; Sennett 2003). Those two forms of lacking acknowledgement are important constituents of misrecognition. The relationship between invisibility and misrecognition may also be expressed as absence. As pointed out by Sayad (2004), one of the central aspects of being a labour migrant is the 'double absence', in a social sense, from both one's home community, and the one to which one has come. This absence reflects both the structural conditions that affect migrants' disengagement from home and host community, and their negative existential effects.

Recognition and misrecognition involve several intertwined aspects: material, cultural, symbolic, or social. Whilst material aspects are crucial to the understanding of the situation of a given group, they are by no means exhaustive. Rather, the material conditions intermix with cultural elements, for instance, when a lack of recognition and associated stigmatisation of a specific group affect the material situation of the seasonal workers. As such, members of a given group may be denied access to valuable resources, for example, through discrimination on the labour market. (Mis)recognition rests upon a range of practices of a discursive, communicative, or interpretative character and may acquire different forms of dominant relationships and representations such as stereotypes, essentialism, disrespect, hostility, and more, all of which may impinge on the conditions for access to various resources.

The foregoing theoretical preliminaries will be central to our discussion of the situation of migrant farm workers in Norway and will be useful to unpack layers of invisibility, allowing us to analyse the standpoints of the local community, employers, and the labour migrants themselves.

Methods

The empirical material that forms the basis for our analysis consists of ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews conducted on several farms in a municipality located in the southeastern part of Norway. The municipality has a population of about 25,000 people, and a long history of producing fruit, berries and vegetables. For many years, most of the farmers have been reliant on seasonal migrant workers for the labour-intensive picking season, when an estimated 1,500 seasonal labour migrants arrive.

The interview data is part of a larger international project that explored global labour migration to rural communities in four different countries. The research has been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Where Norway is

concerned, we conducted a total of 45 semi-structured qualitative interviews with community stakeholders (10), employers (12) and East Central European migrant workers (23) between 2017 and 2020. The first author conducted four interviews with farmers and 16 with migrant workers in 2017 and 2018. In addition, 25 interviews were conducted by our colleagues as a part of the research project. The first author participated in seven of those. The informants were recruited by snowballing and approached by phone or e-mail. When approached, potential informants were informed about the project and the researcher, and about anonymity and consent. To ensure the anonymity of our informants we do not provide details regarding the name of the municipality, the farms in question, the types of produce or particular characteristics of our informants, apart from national backgrounds, gender, and age group.

The ethnographic fieldwork was also conducted by the first author and consisted of three weeks of participatory observation on a fruit and berry farm during the height of the 2018 harvest season. In addition, the same author visited the same and two other farms on numerous occasions. The participatory observation included picking and packing fruit and berries; informal small talk with seasonal migrants, employers and other workers on the farm; joining the seasonal migrants for lunches and coffee breaks and hanging out at their lodgings, as well as taking several shorter car trips. The fieldwork proved invaluable in obtaining in-depth insights into the specifics of the work performed by the migrants and the organisation of the farm, and was also crucial for building rapport with the informants and facilitating the interviews.

Interviews with employers were conducted on the farms, with the community stakeholders in their offices, and with the migrant workers mostly in their homes or lodgings, or in vacant offices on the farm. The interviews with employers and community stakeholders were conducted in Norwegian, and with the migrant workers in English. During the interviews, the informants were asked to describe their roles and daily tasks in relation to the topic of migrant labour in agriculture, their opinions, motivations, and hopes, their relationship to their peers, how they navigated conflicts and challenges, and their reflections on the history and the future of both the agricultural sector and the role of labour migration. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts were jointly analysed by the authors in two stages: first we highlighted and coded statements of significance, and then we identified themes by moving between the transcripts, theory, and existing literature. During the analysis we paid particular attention to accounts of everyday life and meaning-making within the context of structural, global and industrial conditions, some of which are fixed, others changing.

Analysis

Our findings are organised around three themes. First, we illustrate how the invisibility of migrant workers is connected to various established practices, which we understand in terms of institutionalised recognition gaps. Second, we demonstrate how structural changes within the agricultural sector have gradually affected employment relations, rendering the workers an invisible group. Third, we show how migrants' circular and seasonal lifestyles affect the ways in which they are being misrecognised.

Institutionalised recognition gaps

A key feature of seasonal work in Norwegian agriculture is its position as low-paid and low-status work. Considering the fact that this work is also performed predominantly by labour migrants, we argue that an institutionalised recognition gap is present from the start. At the most basic level, low status is reflected in low wages that the seasonal migrants receive, meaning that they are not being recognised in a material sense. Norway does not have a common minimum wage, but in the case of nine industries which rely heavily on foreign workers, a generalisation of collective agreements has been applied (Bodahl 2021). Agriculture offers the lowest pay out of these nine sectors, which at the time of the fieldwork was 123 NOK per hour (11,61 USD in 2022). By comparison, other industries such as construction or cleaning houses offer 188 and 181 NOK per hour respectively.

Another key feature of labour migration to agriculture is its temporary nature, which combines the seasonal character of work with specific forms of governance and regulation of migration (Triandafyllidou 2022; O'Reilly and Scott 2022). We need to keep temporality in mind as we consider various aspects of recognition of seasonal farm workers. EU citizens move freely between Norway and their respective home countries, and are not required to obtain a work visa to work on farms. The majority of migrants to agriculture rotate between their home country and their place of work in Norway or relocate to their respective home countries after some time, as opportunities for year-round work in agriculture are rare. Most migrant farm workers are seasonal workers and employed only during late spring and summer, roughly from May through September. Our analysis shows that the temporary aspect of their stay often serves as the basis for differential treatment and recognition gaps at various points. An example in this context is the provision of substandard housing. The seasonal migrants in our study live in tied accommodation provided by the employer, in on-site barracks or near the farms. The rent is typically equivalent to one hour's pay per day, and even when facilities are in accordance with safety and sanitary regulations, the standard is often below that of year-round housing. Typically two to four persons share a bedroom, and up to 30 people share a common kitchen and living room area. The barracks are not insulated as they are for summer use only. A representative from the local agricultural office discussed the differences between regulations for seasonal housing standards and those for 'normal' ones:

PERNILLE: Four-person bedrooms versus one-person bedrooms, bathrooms, facilities, these kinds of things. (...) When it comes to those who are only here for a short while, [the authorities] allow for housing that has a little lower standard than for those who stay long-term. For those people, a normal housing standard is required.

As the above extract illustrates, the disparities in housing standards are directly connected to the temporary nature of seasonal migration, where migrant farm workers are institutionally construed as not in need of 'normal' housing conditions. The improvements that have been applied in later years are related to a few dramatic events that reached the public, provoking a debate about the housing conditions for migrant workers. Nevertheless, despite the increased recognition of the problem, the lower-quality accommodation for seasonal migrants is justified based on the temporary character of their stay.

Substandard housing is only one manifestation of the institutional recognition gaps. Some of our informants, both migrants and local stakeholders, discussed practices related to illness or injuries. Anyone residing in Norway is entitled to emergency medical treatment regardless of citizenship status; however staying in Norway for treatment and recovery would mean having no income in a high-cost country, as the social security net that protects the income of Norwegian citizens does not apply to seasonal migrants. Thus, an injury would leave workers with not much choice but to return home, as pointed out by a local union representative.

- INTERVIEWER: (...) But what if a seasonal worker gets injured or sick, what are the consequences then?
- INGE: [chuckles]. Then that person will quickly be sent back home by aeroplane.
- INTERVIEWER: You think they are sent home?
- INGE: Yes. Yes. For they have nothing to do here. Then they are just expenses, both for the employer and for the agent. And therefore there are probably few records of sick leaves or of injuries out in the fields. We probably don't get to know much about what is really going on there, even if agriculture and the farmers are high up on the statistics documenting occupations with work injuries, recorded by the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority [nor. Arbeidstilsynet].

Since the social security net does not protect the seasonal migrants in case of injury that affects their ability to perform work, the temporary nature of the work is thus a defining aspect of their situation. It excludes them from the right to long term medical treatment, even in case of work-related medical issues. The same union representative underlined an associated aspect claiming that 'we have more or less given up on organising the seasonal workers we have because (...) we do not have a satisfactory membership scheme to offer them. That is unfortunate, but it's just something that we have to admit.' He reflected on the fact that what the unions have to offer, such as pension schemes and insurance, are largely irrelevant to the seasonal workers. Instead, the unions focus exclusively on taking care of those who settle on a permanent basis.

With factors such as housing and unionisation being subject to institutionalised recognition gaps, much depends on the employers to ensure the recognition of seasonal migrants. In the following, we argue that, with time, this crucial relationship has also taken a turn that involves a lower level of recognition.

Becoming invisible: widening recognition gaps

Apart from other migrants, the employers are often the seasonal migrants' only social connections in the community and the host country. The relationship between employers and seasonal migrants in agriculture has often been described as more intimate and familial than the typical employer-worker relationship, due to the rural setting, on-site housing, and side-by-side work tasks (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010). However, the character of this relationship has gone through significant changes in recent years. The number of seasonal migrants has increased steadily over the past 10–20 years, which falls in line with the general increased industrialisation of European agriculture (Rye and Scott 2018). The farmers report that they have for the most part lost the bond

they once had with their workers: their role has changed from farmer to employer, and the relationship changed from personal to hierarchical and impersonal. The above was discussed by one of the local farmers, who had recently retired, but had many years of experience with employing seasonal migrants:

- ROBERT: We went there [to the workers' home country] many years ago, to visit some of them.
- INTERVIEWER: Were you friends with them?
- ROBERT: Yeah, back then we didn't employ more than four or five people, and then this rose to 10–15; so we did socialise. We held an annual party for them, and before there were many we got to know them pretty well, they were so few. But now there are so many of them that we get to know only the ones who are here for a long time, it's not the same as it used to be back then.

Many of the employers we interviewed recalled a time where they had a handful of seasonal migrants living in spare houses on-site or in the main house. The relationships were closer and included sharing meals, raising their children together, participating in each other's weddings, and even spending holidays together. However, the number of workers grew as production intensified, which ultimately affected those relationships. One of the farmers pointed out that he had to take on the role as a boss, and underlined that befriending some of the workers would lead to differential and unfair treatment.

Another aspect related to the increased number of seasonal workers is the high turnover rate. As estimated by the interviewed farmers to be between 30 and 60 per cent, this means that they spend considerable time recruiting and training workers. Due to the unstable nature of farm work they may end up over-recruiting or under-recruiting. A cold spring, wet summer, late harvest, or plant disease may result in more workers than needed, who then will have to return home. No-shows and leavers also pose a challenge and sometimes leave the employers short of workers. One of the interviewed farmers also reflected on the need to recruit the right kind of workers, in addition to the right number: 'The good ones readily get a job somewhere else (...) and then it is difficult to get hold of the number [of workers] we want.' This decline in closeness of social relationships and the increasing focus on numbers contribute to the invisibility of seasonal migrants. It widens the misrecognition of seasonal migrants as they become viewed first and foremost as a flexible labour rather than as complex human beings (see also: Serban, Molinero-Gerbeau, and Deliu 2020).

This increasingly instrumental view of the seasonal migrants is also mirrored in the local community's attitude towards them. Although fruit and berry production plays an important part in the region, both economically and socially, the aspect of production related to labour and its near-total dependency on migration is rarely problematised. This is exemplified by the local newspaper, where agricultural issues such as agricultural policies, land regulation or modes of production receive much attention, but issues concerning labour migration are largely absent, as elaborated by a representative from the local media outlet:

- INTERVIEWER: Are there any negative stories that could have been ...
- PATRICK: I'm sure there are, but I know too little about it. I think the employers have been pretty good at taking care of the seasonal migrants. You guys know more than I do about this.

- INTERVIEWER: Yes, but it's interesting to hear about it from the local community perspective. When you say these things, it is a reflection of how people think about seasonal migration in agriculture – that it is fine, that it's not something people discuss. It's not a source of conflict?
- PATRICK: No.
- INTERVIEWER: So there's no debate in the newspapers about labour migration?
- PATRICK: No.

The absence of debates and lack of general interest on the part of the public in seasonal migration suggests an established normalcy, to the point where seasonal migrants usually appear in the news only when there's a scandal regarding working or housing conditions. The practice of hiring seasonal migrants is common to such a degree that it seems to erase the migration aspect altogether, as implied by Paul, a farmer who had been hiring both seasonal and year-round labour migrants for several years:

- PAUL: To us it's just the way it is. We don't focus on it. It's just the way it is. It doesn't matter if someone is Polish or Norwegian. It's not something we talk about.
- INTERVIEWER: No, it's manpower?
- PAUL: Yes.

The informants' remarks reflect the fact that seasonal EU migration is greatly facilitated on a structural level by open border policies, as well as by cheap airfare and, at ground level, by the distinctly normalised and instrumental view of seasonal migrants as first and foremost workers. A recent example of this presented itself when the government closed the national borders at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The horticulture sector's dependence on migrant workers quickly became a topic, however the discussion quickly turned into questions about practical solutions for getting the harvest done and had no effect on the improvement of migrants' work conditions.

Between double absence and dual misrecognition

Another aspect contributing to the invisibility of seasonal migrants is the common conception that they 'like to stick to themselves,' as succinctly pointed out by several informants. One informant confessed that 'we could have been better at inviting them into our social life here [in the community]. Perhaps we're not good enough at that.' Typically, the seasonal migrants do not attempt to engage with the local community, and the locals do not expect it. However, our analysis shows a clear difference in how seasonal migrants are perceived compared to the settled labour migrants, which reflects how leading itinerant lifestyles results in the invisibility of the migrant group. Transitioning to a settled lifestyle typically entails less precarious jobs and housing, enrollment of children in local schools or kindergartens in the (new) host country, and engagement in sports and leisure activities, which significantly increase the visibility to the local community. As emphasised by a local female resident who for many years had been involved with the volunteer centre:

- IDUNN: They are straight into work when they arrive, so they do not have time to go to language courses, and these courses cost money. For the labour immigrants. It does not cost money for the refugees. So that is a shame, because many of them are living here for a long time, they live here and do not return to their home countries. At least it looks

like that. They are eventually buying houses and apartments and having children in school and bringing their wives or husbands here, and then this thing about Norwegian language courses slips away from them. And that is too bad. Because then they are walking on the fringes here for a long time before they get more included, more integrated.

The aspects mentioned by the informant may be understood as markers of normality commonly applied to immigrants. However, those who start out as seasonal labour migrants, on the fringes of society, are arguably structurally disadvantaged insofar as they are originally regarded as irrelevant for integration measures. Entering a 'normal' lifestyle, then, seems to be what constitutes meeting the criteria of worth (Lamont 2018) required for seasonal migrants to achieve recognition. The temporal and spatial limitations of seasonal migration, in combination with the normalised situation as regards their presence, adds to their relative invisibility.

An important premise for the organisation of work in agriculture is the availability of a just-in-time workforce (O'Reilly and Scott 2022). It means that people engaging in such work split their lives between two countries or localities, which makes them simultaneously absent, at least in part, from both contexts. The temporary nature of the arrangement seems to justify the poor working and housing conditions and function as a way of mitigating their consciousness of the unfavourable circumstances in which they live and work. For most migrant workers, seasonal work in agriculture is a strategy that is expected to bring improvements in the future. A common conception of work in agriculture is that it is a temporary state taking place before a 'normal life' can begin. For example, students assume that they will be exiting the seasonal work cycle upon graduation and connecting with the labour market back home. Not all manage to follow through on this, as detailed by Iwona, a young Polish woman who felt confident that her sixth season as migrant worker would be the last, as she also recently completed her studies:

IWONA: There is one guy here, who has really great studies as well, but he is not using it. He is 32 I think, and he started a normal job in [his home country], and then he decided it is not great cash, it is good to come back here, and he came back too many times I think. (...) Because when you start going abroad you get really good cash fast compared to what you get in [his home country], and you know when starting a normal job you know that you will need to sacrifice a year or two before you get a good salary. (...) And for a short time [going abroad] is good, but long term it is just really shitty cash. So he moved again and again and again. Okay, he will go back to [his home country] but he is 32 and he will have to start like a beginner, you know. And I know that's really scary for him.

The practice of repeating circular labour migration over time may thus have a negative impact on people's later work careers. Despite being viewed as a temporary and liminal phase, seasonal work provides an economic foundation in migrants' lives. The low status associated with farm work is accepted conditionally and temporarily as it offers the potential to increase their home-country social status in the future. However, when prolonged, it may lead to a narrowing of possibilities for social advancement. As a result, the migrants' overall precarious position is solidified through lack of recognition in the receiving country and a gradual decrease in opportunities in the home country. As such, transnational ways of living are normalised, and, insofar as migrants view seasonal

work as the only viable way of maintaining their material status, this comes at the expense of other forms of social status. The absence from the home country labour market may involve devaluation of migrants' education due to advancements made in specific fields and the inability to acquire relevant experience. Seasonal migration thus entails both a gradual disappearance of opportunities available in one's home country, and associated lack of outlooks in the receiving country, alluding to a state of 'double absence' (Sayad 2004) from both contexts.

Informants report that absence from the home context often causes considerable stress with regards to work, family obligations, personal relations and practical tasks. Even those who have been engaged in rotating between countries and who viewed it as the best and only viable option for them and their families, were quite open about the multiple sacrifices and costs such a recurrent relocation entailed. Many migrants engage in transnational simultaneity (Hedberg 2021) attempting to manage and negotiate various responsibilities in their home country whilst working in the host country. The complexities and dilemmas associated with living here and there were discussed at length by Karol, a Polish man in his thirties for whom this was the fourth season working in Norway. He described the increasing difficulty of combining seasonal labour in Norway with helping his parents in Poland and tending to the family farm in the home country. He also held an office job in his home country, which meant that each seasonal stay in Norway required negotiations with his boss to find a replacement whilst he was abroad. He detailed situations where people were sometimes forced to choose between seasonal labour migration and the connection to the labour market in their home country. In addition, whilst a transnational family is a common arrangement, it often becomes a concern and a burden for the migrants. Pawel, a family man in his thirties, reflected upon the pros and cons of seasonal work in agriculture:

PAWEL: I think there are more drawbacks [to work in agriculture], because of family. Because I have a young family. Young children so everyday without them is ... you know ... it's ... it won't return, you know what I mean. And children get older and it won't return so ... I do not know. Maybe the people who have older children or have adult children have other problems, I think so, but for me the most problematic is the separation from the family. And the good thing is? ... hmmm ... [silence] ... good things ... only the money. Nothing else.

When reflecting upon existing family arrangements and the possibility of moving their families to Norway, the informants also pointed out that they don't consider this line of work compatible with costs of living in Norway. Seasonal migrants, then, are 'fit for the job' by virtue of getting their income from a high-cost country whilst having most of their expenses in a lower-cost country, which implies that Norwegian horticulture is dependent on its workers splitting their work life and family life between two countries. The above was stressed by Vlad, for whom seasonal labour had become a part of his life-style as he was returning to Norway every summer for over 15 years.

INTERVIEWER: But then say, if you, if you decided to bring your family here? How would it be to raise kids here? Do you think that would be good?

VLAD: Well, I am not sure. Because then I could not work that much, and if I do not work as much then the family won't get too much from me. Actually, I can give them more if I earn in Norway and spend that

money in Poland. So there is no reason to bring the family here with me working on the farm, it had to be another job, with fewer hours and with a better salary.

As reflected in the above quotation, relocating the entire family to Norway is significantly constrained in the context of seasonal work. Family life in one country and work life in another is normalised through widespread and long-running practice (O'Reilly and Rye 2020) and relocating with the entire family to Norway is generally not a viable option due to the precarity of farm work.

Discussion

In this article, we have analysed the invisibility of seasonal farm migrants in Norway in terms of misrecognition. To a degree, our analysis reflects themes known from the existing literature, such as the relative isolation of seasonal migrants or a mutual lack of motivation to build social relations with either fellow migrant farm workers or people in the local community (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010; Rye and Scott 2018; Brovia and Piro 2020). However, employing the notions of misrecognition and recognition gaps, which emphasise disparities in social status, worth and treatment, enables us to reach novel insights. Temporality is a defining facet of farm migration, and, whilst it is essential to keep that in mind in order to comprehend the synchronisation of labour with harvest periods (O'Reilly and Scott 2022), its significance transcends beyond those aspects. Our analysis expands on the aforementioned tenet and explains the formation, legitimation, reproduction, and widening of the recognition gaps.

In the case of community stakeholders, the recognition gaps become apparent in two ways: first, in their perceptions of seasonal workers as just a labour force, and second, as the stakeholders distinguish between seasonal and settled migrants. In the first instance, the community stakeholders downplay the complexity of migration by limiting it to a question of manpower. In this way, they overlook the fact that migration, even 'low-stakes' migration such as the intra-European seasonal kind, comes with a whole set of challenges for the host countries, the migrants themselves, and their home countries. By curtailing the significance of those aspects, they render the migrants' everyday experiences invisible, and conceal the human face of labour migration (O'Reilly and Rye 2020). In the latter case, invisibility becomes the outcome in several ways. One of them is manifested through references to conventional dimensions and measures of integration, such as permanent work, moving one's primary household to the local community, enrolling children in school, moving from temporary lodgings to year-round private housing or participating in social life. Drawing boundaries between seasonal and permanent migrants is further reflected in the absence of engagement with the local community and organisations, such as the labour union or those that view inclusion as irrelevant for seasonal migrants. Deprivation of a number of essential entitlements, such as access to health care, insurance, or decent housing reveals a lack of recognition in a social, material, and symbolic sense. It is accepted, considered natural and logical, and appears as the only conceivable option by the variety of actors involved in running the finely tuned agricultural machinery.

The employers-farmers and their attitudes vis-à-vis the labour migrants also reveal a complex dynamic. It is not our impression that the employers deliberately subject their

workers to subpar treatment. Quite the opposite, they generally do spend considerable amounts of time and energy accommodating the migrant workers. However, with increasing demands from the deregulated market, they operate within a sector characterised by competition and small margins (see also: Holmes 2013). Those changes are reflected in how farmers view relationships with the employed migrants. As we have demonstrated, the once personal and intimate relationship between the parties have been gradually transformed into more distant and formalised relations, which are to a large degree characterised by stereotype-based preferences consistent with the interest in recruiting workers. The farmers' frequent use of essentialising group characteristics, such as 'informed' stereotypes and a conception of the migrant as a 'good worker' (Scott and Rye 2021), serve to render individual migrants invisible by reducing them to an anonymous mass.

Arguably, the migrants themselves are also involved in maintaining such a status quo. The recognition gaps widen also through seasonal migrants' sense of their own situation and way of living, imposed by recurrent engagement in seasonal work and continual and prolonged home-country orientation. The perceived temporality of the situation means that migrants, too, understand such a way of living as 'outside of the normal', which in turn makes them prone to accept subpar treatment and to put demands for structural change and improvement aside (see also: O'Reilly and Rye 2020). This leads seasonal migrants to underestimate and rationalise the need for basic job security, financial predictability, community belonging, and overall well-being – and to privatise the potential hazards.

Our analysis sketches out a larger and complex pattern of misrecognition of seasonal migrants by connecting the institutionalised practices with everyday ones. Taken together they render seasonal migrants invisible in various ways, and serve to establish, legitimise and reproduce the recognition gaps between seasonal migrants and the majority population. Although international farm migration is not a new phenomenon, the ongoing restructuring of the horticulture sector in the last decades has affected its character (Corrado, Perrotta, and de Castro 2017). As illustrated, from the local perspective, the seasonal migrants first and foremost represent a continuation of the economically, culturally and socially important horticulture industry. The normalisation of migrant labour thus translates into a lack of awareness about the marginalisation of labour migrants. However, the misrecognition of seasonal farm workers should be viewed within a broader structural context. At the supranational level, the EU's open border policy, the affordable modes of transportation, and the advancement of communication technology all play key roles in promoting such a situation. At the national level, of which we have seen instances, the farm workers are among the least recognized groups on the labour market. This becomes apparent by looking at the wage level, but also by the fact that even at the time of the pandemic, the migrants were considered the only viable option to rescue harvests.

Large groups of people are working in an industry that is of great economic, cultural, and social importance to local communities, whilst being economically, culturally, and socially disembedded from those very communities. As such, one could claim that the misrecognition of seasonal workers is an important prerequisite of the maintenance of the system. Seasonal and circular EU-migration is possible at low cost (and with low stakes) to accommodate the farmers' need for flexible workers. However, from the migrants' perspective both the stakes and the costs may be high. We argue that the

ways in which seasonal migrants are rendered invisible constitute a complex and highly problematic misrecognition that justifies the unequal treatment and enhances the vulnerability and exploitability of the migrants (see also: Anderson 2000). To construe seasonal migrants as pure ‘manpower’ thus constitutes a failure to recognise the challenges that come with being migrants, and presents them with the double downside of first being in a disadvantaged position, and then being denied recognition for it. Studying the situation of seasonal migrants problematizes also the question of ‘Europeanized’ citizenship which presupposes a set of rights and entitlements for its mobile citizens, but which in the case in point seem significantly restricted (Ciupijus 2011).

A central manifestation of the foregoing, is the fact that some basic aspects of inclusion are regarded as futile and unnecessary when directed toward a group of people who by definition are not meant to settle. This results in several recognition gaps that serve to establish, legitimise and reproduce perceptions and practices that keep seasonal migrants in precarious material, social and economic situations.

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