

Summary of the dissertation

The topic of this dissertation is seasonal migrant labour to Norwegian agriculture. In the two decades since the 2004 EU enlargement, Central and Eastern European labour migrants have become the biggest immigrant groups to many Western and Northern European countries. While much of the research on European labour migration was initially focused on long-term migration to urban, year-round industries, less attention was paid to short-term labour migrants in typically rural industries like agriculture. In recent years, a large and growing body of literature has amended to this (see for example: Gertel and Sippel 2014; Corrado, Perrotta, and Castro 2017; Rye and O'Reilly 2020a; King, Lulle, and Melossi 2021).

Migrant workers have become an established labour force in most low-wage sectors and industries in Norway, which through the EEA-agreement effectively is part of the EU's common labour market. They work in sectors such as construction, hospitality and tourism, care work, and food production (NOU 2022: 18 2022). Today, around 200,000 migrants from Eastern and Central European EU countries live and work in Norway, in addition to a little over 50 000 short-term migrants. A large proportion of the short-term migrants are seasonal workers in agriculture (Bøckmann et al. 2024). The influx of EU labour migrants to Norway gave rise to concerns about social dumping, low-wage competition, segmentation and increasing inequality (Friberg, Elgvin, and Djuve 2013; Friberg 2016). In agriculture, Central and Eastern European workers quickly became a significant part of the farm labour force, providing cheap labour but also facing issues like job insecurity, exploitation, isolation, hard physical work, and low wages (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010).

This dissertation is situated within an understanding of labour markets as segmented (Doeringer and Piore 1971). Segmented labour market theory posits that international labour migration is driven by the demands of the labour markets in receiving countries. Labour markets are split into primary and secondary segments, where the primary segment consists of stable, secure jobs, which often require formal skills or higher education, and are typically higher paid than the secondary sector jobs. In the secondary segment, jobs are precarious, sometimes known as 3D jobs (dirty, difficult and dangerous), typically low-wage and low-status, and do not require formal skills. In addition, these jobs have few possibilities for advancement (Massey et al. 2005). As native workers often shun these types of jobs, they are often performed by EU migrant workers. As *migrants*, these workers are in a relatively privileged position compared to most other migrant groups, as they are free to move to any

other EU/EEA country to reside and work. As *workers*, however, the majority are working in the secondary segment, in low-skilled, manual and precarious work, and are among the most disadvantaged and marginalised in the labour market, compared to native workers. There is still a need for more insight into how the secondary segment of the labour market is reproduced, legitimised and maintained, especially at the micro level, from the ground up. This dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of these processes by analysing the practices and dynamics at micro level. Based on the case of seasonal labour migration from the new EU countries to Norwegian fruit and berry farms, the dissertation explores the practices, experiences and reflections of employers, local stakeholders, and seasonal migrants, all the while taking into consideration the structural frameworks and the rural context encompassing and shaping this particular form of labour migration. The data that forms the basis of the dissertation are based on a qualitative study that was carried out between the years of 2017 and 2019. The methods used to gather the empirical material are semi-structured qualitative interviews, in combination with photo elicitation methods (the use of images in interviews) and participant observation.

Four articles form the basis of the dissertation. The first article, titled *Labour Migration, Employer Preferences and Symbolic Boundary Work*, focuses on the employer perspective, discussing why employers prefer low-wage labour migrants, and how these preferences are legitimised. The article highlights that employers value soft skills like motivation and deference, construed as a 'migrant work ethic', linking migrant workers to the category of 'good worker'. Using the concepts of symbolic boundaries and moral economy of employability, we show how these hiring practices become socially acceptable, and how moral judgments create social distinctions and hierarchies.

The second article is titled "*Du må bare leve med det*". *Om strukturelle føringer, handlingsrom og strategier blant sesongmigranter i landbruket*. (In English: "*You just have to live with it*." *On structure, agency and strategies among seasonal migrants in agriculture*.) The macro structures that shape seasonal migrants' experiences are mostly constructed to fit employers' needs for flexible working hands, and thus contribute to the marginalisation of seasonal migrants, subjecting them to long hours, physically demanding work, and low wages. However, within the marginalising structures of migrant labour, seasonal migrants express agentic capabilities. The article discusses the ways in which seasonal migrants express their agency by way of resilience, reworking, and resistance, showing how resilience at times is used as a coping strategy in day-to-day-life, and at other times as a way of working to improve conditions in the longer run.

The third article, *Mind the recognition gaps: layers of invisibility of farm migration in Norway*, analyses the phenomenon of 'invisible' seasonal farm migrants, employing the concepts of recognition, (mis)recognition and recognition gaps to illustrate the various aspects of invisibility. The analysis demonstrates how the established narrative of the normality of labour migration renders the migrant workers invisible, both in discursive and in institutional terms, and reduces their presence to pure labour force. The paper concludes that invisibility is a crucial component in normalising, legitimising, maintaining and reproducing the continued (mis)recognition of seasonal migrants.

The fourth article, *Picture this: Photo elicitation in the study of seasonal migration to agriculture*, is an account of my experiences with using images in interviews. Photo elicitation is a method where photos are incorporated into interviews to stimulate discussion and elicit deeper responses from participants. The article distinguishes three ways in which the use of images contributed to enhancing my interviews: It prompted my informants to revisit previous topics; to reflect on themes that we had not previously discussed; and to reciprocate by showing images of their own.

This dissertation contributes to the literature on labour migration in several ways. Empirically, by providing an intimate and unique insight into the everyday lives and reflections of seasonal migrants in Norwegian horticulture, adding to the research on how the exploitative practices of seasonal labour are legitimised and reproduced. Theoretically, by linking segmented labour market theory to concepts borrowed from the field of cultural sociology in order to analyse the perpetuation of the secondary segment from the ground up, which is made possible through the symbolic boundary work of employers, through the strategies of resilience and reworking of labour migrants, and through the continued (mis)recognition of labour migrants. Methodically, by analysing the use of photo elicitation and thus making the case for creative use and combination of various tools from the methods toolbox in situations of complex and messy field settings.