



The structural disempowerment of Eastern European migrant farm workers in Norwegian agriculture

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A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Dual labour market theory
Agriculture
Farm workers
Labour migration
Norway
Wage

Since the 2004 EU enlargement established one European common labour market, a large number of Eastern Europeans have taken up seasonal employment as hired farm workers in Norwegian agriculture. Much attention in the public has been given to the potential for 'social dumping' of these migrating workers, as they are considered prone to exploitation by farmers looking for cheap and docile labour, and subject to low-wages and poor labour conditions. In response to these threats, Norway implemented labour regulations ('transitional rules') that established minimum standards for wage levels and labour conditions, combined with registration and supervision of the incoming labour force. Nevertheless, reports from the field indicate that many of the westward migrating labour force experience work conditions that are far poorer than prescribed by the labour regulations, as these are not implemented at the farm level. In this paper, we discuss the social processes that result in this mismatch between state regulations (e.g. transition rules) and the actual experiences of migrant workers building on dual labour market theory. Analysing qualitative in-depth interviews with 54 farm migrants, we argue that there are two sets of factors underlying the poorer working conditions observed on the farms: Firstly, the structural disempowerment of migrant workers, which gives them weak negotiating positions vis-à-vis their employers (farmers); and secondly, the migrant workers' frame of reference for wage levels, in which poor payment levels by Norwegian standards are found acceptable or even good when judged by Eastern European wage levels. While a number of works have described the exploitation of farm migrant labour, we demonstrate in this paper how national immigration and agricultural histories, structures and present policies configure the labour–capital relations at farm level in the Norwegian case.

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1. The new farm labour force

The 2004 EU enlargement accelerated economic, political and institutional integration between Western and Eastern European states. Among the most important changes was the opening up of Western European labour markets for citizens from the new member states, resulting in increased streams of migrant workers from Eastern to Western Europe (CEC, 2006). Norwegian farmers¹ have been among those most eagerly making use of this new supply of cheap labour. In 2007, some 27,000 migrants worked on

Norway's 50,000 farms, primarily as short-term/seasonal workers, and their work constituted about 10% of the sector's total work input that year (Vik, 2008).

Norwegian farmers employing Eastern Europeans have welcomed the deregulation of labour markets, as migrants provide inexpensive and good labour. However, extensive recruitment of low-paid foreigners also generates series of challenges for the Norwegian agricultural sector. Particularly, it has been accused by trade union representatives and the media of exploiting the migrating farm workers who are one of the most vulnerable groups on the labour market (so-called 'social dumping'). This may challenge the popular image of farmers in the Norwegian public as being hard-working but poorly paid self-employed men and women, who are exploited rather than exploit others. Such a change in the public image of farming may in effect have profound implications for the trade, as a large part of its income comprises of direct state transfers. In 2007, the country's 50,000 farms received about 1.4 billion Euros in subsidies, an average of 27,500 Euros per farm. Public perception of farmers spending

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¹ Norway is not a member of the European Union but takes part in the free labour market arrangements through the EEA agreement of 1994, which, effectively, implies that Norway is a 'full' EU member in terms of migrant labour regulations.

these subsidies on underpaid foreign labour may challenge the present-day widespread public support for up-keeping of an extensive national agricultural production (Dalen and Lillebø, 2007; Rye, 2008).

Mindful of concerns about farm-based labour relations, farmers' organisations in Norway were generally positive towards the transitional rules implemented by Norwegian authorities in 2004² (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007). These rules established minimum standards for wage levels (defined by minimum rates in tariff agreements) and labour conditions, combined with registration and supervision of the incoming labour force (Dølvik and Eldring, 2006), and were seen as an important tool to prevent 'social dumping' by Norwegian authorities. Official spokespeople for farmers have at the same time campaigned to enhance farmers' compliance with the transitional rules, for example through media statements emphasising that good treatment of the migrant labour force is pivotal for continued political support for the agricultural business, and thus, for the survival of the farming sector as a whole (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007). Interestingly, when the Norwegian authorities decided to end transitional arrangements by May 2009, farmers' spokespersons agreed with the trade unions on the need for alternative measures to secure minimum levels of work conditions. A national regulation of general application of wage agreements was proposed by trade unions, which, in effect, implies that farmers' still are required to pay migrant workers according to tariff agreements regardless of their union membership.

Nevertheless, reports from the field indicate that certain sectors of the in-migrating labour force experience work conditions that are far worse than prescribed by labour laws, as regulations are not implemented at many Norwegian small-scale family farms. Underpayment is reported to be common, many workers receive less per hour than stipulated, and they rarely receive overtime pay or other benefits granted by Norwegian labour laws, e.g. sick pay and vacation pay. Work conditions are often poor, as are the living arrangements offered. In general, the situation of the migrant farm labour force resembles what in the literature has been labelled the second tier in dual labour markets (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Piore, 1970, 1975, 1979; see Rye, 2007a for an overview).

In this paper, we discuss the social processes that may produce this mismatch between state regulations (e.g. the transition rules) and the actual experiences of Eastern European migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture. Thus, at the theoretical level, the key research question of the paper is why EU and nationally-sanctioned labour regulations aimed at guaranteeing migrant labour's rights do not translate into actual practices at farm level. Employing the dual labour market theory as a theoretical backdrop, we address this question by providing an in-depth analysis of the situation of farm migrant labour in Norway. Integral to this analysis is an emphasis on how the particularities of the national (Norwegian) agricultural context influence the implementation of labour-capital relation at farm level.

Empirically, we address the research question through a corpus of 54 qualitative, in-depth interviews with migrant farm workers in

Norway. We analyse the relationships between employers and employees at farm level in order to identify the micro-level social mechanisms that may generate low-wages and poor labour conditions for the migrants. We argue that there are two sets of factors underlying this phenomenon: firstly, the structural disempowerment of migrant workers gives them weak negotiating positions vis-à-vis their employers. Secondly, the migrant workers' frame of reference for wage levels is usually their homeland standard, which makes their wages in Norway appear not only acceptable but relatively high, and thus lowers the incentive to bargain for higher wages.

The paper consequently argues that informal institutions established at the farm level, which favour the farmers as the stronger party in the employer–employee relationship, in practice often override the state-sanctioned formal institutions created by the transition rules and other labour regulations. State regulations have nonetheless had an impact on migrants' wages and work conditions, however not primarily as an empowering factor for migrant workers. Rather, these regulations work as a frame of reference for farmers needing to avoid formal and informal sanctions from third party domestic actors, for example, by fear of gaining a reputation in public and political debates for the exploitation of migrant employees.

Furthermore, we show how this situation is dependent on national particularities of the Norwegian case. The described situation is theorised to be corroborated by the historical farming structure of farming, e.g. the small-scale family farm character of Norwegian agriculture and the pre-2004 immigration regulation regime, as well as the present-day political framework, e.g. state subsidies and production controls.

2. Norwegian agriculture, Eastern European migrants

The outcomes of the deregulated European labour market seem particularly clear in Norway, especially in its agricultural sector. Norway receives large numbers of migrant workers relative to its population size of 4.6 million, and has been the main destination of Eastern European migrant workers among the Nordic countries (Dølvik and Eldring, 2006). In 2008, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration issued about 79,000 individual work permits to Eastern European citizens (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2009). Beyond the official figures, there is an additional unknown number of persons working in Norway on other work arrangements, for example, as private suppliers of services, out-stationed personnel, or undocumented migrants.

The Norwegian agricultural sector is one of the major employers of this labour force, especially during the summer season. In 2007, some 27,000 immigrants worked on Norway's 50,000 farms, most of them as short-term/seasonal workers (Vik, 2008). This presence of a large migrant labour force represents a relatively new feature of Norwegian agriculture. As late as in 1990, only about 4300 work permits were given to foreign farm workers under the state seasonal immigration quota programme which was established that year. Since then, the use of foreign labour on Norwegian farms has increased steadily (see Rye and Frisvoll, 2007 for an overview). This is due to developments both within the wider society and the agricultural sector over the recent years. Firstly, the traditionally flexible labour force of housewives, students and other groups who potentially engage in manual seasonal work has diminished over the recent decades. Secondly, prior to the present global financial crisis a long-lasting economic boom produced very low levels of unemployment in Norway and this additionally shrunk the national labour force reserve available to the agricultural sector. Thirdly, farmers face increasing competition for the remaining part-time labour force from other trades, which are usually able to offer

² Transitional regulations varied among the 'old' EU member states. The governments of England, Sweden and Ireland liberalised access to their labour markets for the citizens of EU8 group (i.e. Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia); other countries maintained their work permit systems, although with some modifications. For instance, Italy and Portugal combined a work permit system with a special entry quota; France maintained its work permit system with some exceptions (i.e. in the research sector), and Germany and Austria additionally applied restrictions also on the posting of workers in certain sensitive sectors. Although Norway was one of the countries which maintained work permit schemes, obtainment of such a permit is almost automatic, provided there is a full-time employment offer from a Norwegian employer, guaranteeing equal work and payment conditions to domestic workers.

higher wages than agriculture. Fourthly, Norwegian agriculture has undergone processes of restructuring and industrialisation, resulting in an increased demand for hired labour at the cost of family labour. Fewer farms (and thus, fewer farming families) today produce the same amount of agricultural goods. For example, the number of farms growing strawberries, one of the sectors which relies most heavily on foreign labour from Eastern Europe, decreased by 55% between 1999 and 2008. In the same period, the strawberry production fell by less than 8% as measured in the size of cultivated land with strawberry plants (Norwegian Agricultural Authority, 2009). Similar developments are observed in other agricultural commodities.

The Norwegian farmers' increased demand for hired labour has been matched by the abundance of Eastern European citizens searching for employment in Western Europe in recent years. From their perspective, the EU enlargement and 'opening up' of Western European labour markets provide new, attractive opportunities. Despite the great variation of migration patterns across the region, similar underlying facts seem to drive the out-migration processes. The most recent labour flows appear to be a response to the existing welfare gap, with real, material and measurable differences in the standard of living, level of social security (including exposure to social, ethnic and gender conflicts) and disparities between Norway and Eastern European states (Godzimirski, 2005). For example, the GDP levels in the EU8 are much lower than in the destination countries: in Poland, Slovakia and the Baltic States, the GDP is about a half of the EU25 average level (World Bank, 2006). This is reflected in the substantial wage gap between countries in Western and Eastern Europe. To give an example, the average gross annual earnings in industry and services in Poland, which has been the major supplier of farm labour migrants to Norway, was about 6300 Euros in 2005. This compares to about 45,500 Euros in Norway (Eurostat, 2007). Serious labour market disequilibria comprise another push factor from the sending countries. Although the unemployment rate has fallen substantially in some countries, the Polish rate equalled 13.8 as late as in December 2006 (Fafo, 2007). Even though we could observe a steady growth in wages in Poland over the last 2 years, considerable differences in wage levels still remain. Furthermore, with the increasing impact of the global financial crisis and its consequences, one can expect growing migration pressure due to the reduction of employment and wages by domestic companies.

Differences in the economies in Eastern and Western Europe are expected to level out in years to come, nevertheless, the westward streams of migrant labour are likely to continue and even increase in the short run. Thus, Norwegian farmers will most likely rely on labour from low-cost/low-wage countries in order to keep their costs down as they respond to demands of increased efficiency in their farm operations. However, the attractiveness of hired foreign labour depends upon the arrangements of labour relations between farmers and migrants, in particular the wage formation processes. Similarly, the attractiveness of migrant work in Norwegian agriculture for citizens in Eastern Europe depends on the wage and labour conditions that they will be offered on the farms.

The existing legal framework attempts to establish a balance of power between labour and capital, protecting migrant workers from 'social dumping', while at the farm level there seems to be an inherent bias towards the interest of employers. A reasonable hypothesis would be that such a situation in the long run may prove counter-productive to the needs of Norwegian agriculture. Given the situation described above, where farmers become more dependent on hired labour, while Eastern Europeans find steadily improved conditions in their home countries, future recruitment will require relatively improved labour conditions. However, it is questionable how far the very structure of the relationships

between farmers and migrant labour allows for substantial changes in this regard due to the micro-level barriers towards implementation of national labour regulations within agriculture identified in this paper. This is a claim that at least at a general level relates to key findings in the existing research, which often has emphasised the segmentation of ethnically delineated sectors of labour markets. As will be shown in next section, migrant workers often find work in secondary labour markets where their very presence reinforces the segmentation of these labour markets (Martin, 1993).

3. Migrants in agriculture – a review

Research on migration into rural areas and the agricultural sector has a long tradition in the US. Temporary Mexican migrants in the United States under the *Bracero* programme, their living and working conditions, received considerable attention from researchers (e.g. Friedland and Nelkin, 1971; Goldfarb, 1981; Mize, 2006). There is also a rich literature on the contemporary large migrant labour work stock in the US agricultural sector, discussing their vulnerable position in the labour market and causes and consequences thereof (e.g. Wells, 1996; see Rogaly, 2006 for an overview). Given the differences both in agricultural production and immigration traditions, however, it is difficult to translate US experiences to the European, not to say the Norwegian, context.

Unfortunately, research on rural and agricultural migrants has been more limited in Europe. The literature reflects previous domination of migration streams from rural South into Northern European urban centres and, until recently, less research has examined the European cross-national rural-rural migration streams. For example, *Journal of Rural Studies*, the leading European academic journal in the field, has published only one paper related to the topic over the last 10 years – Hanson and Bell's (2007) analysis of Australian seasonal migration. Except for the fact that the paper discusses a non-European case, it merely mentions the immigrant farm workers as a part of the overall seasonal labour stock, and does not elaborate on their particular experiences. Similarly, the other key European academic journal covering rural and agricultural topics, *Sociologia Ruralis*, has not given much attention to the issue in the last decade. Two papers published in the journal (Kasimis et al., 2003; Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999) discuss the Greek and Spanish cases of migrant farm labour, but neither of these address wage and labour conditions as their main point of interest.

Kasimis et al. (2003) examine the underlying factors for labour immigration into Greek agriculture and the way in which the immigrant labour force has incorporated itself into local economies and communities. Their key argument is that farm migrants have covered the demand for labour in Greek agriculture and helped reduce the labour costs in the industry. Furthermore, the use of migrant labour has led to a reallocation of family labour on the farm, relieving family members of the hard manual tasks. Although the authors pay little attention to the work and payment conditions of migrants, they note however that migrants are usually hired to do the hardest and most unhealthy jobs, while at the same time receiving poor wages and experiencing long working days. Hoggart and Mendoza's (1999) study, which discusses the reasons behind African immigrant employment in Spanish agriculture and the employment patterns of these workers at the provincial level seems to have more relevance to our analysis. The authors emphasise the uncertainty of farm employment due to the lack of permanent contracts accompanied by low-wages and poor working conditions. Thus, as Hoggart and Mendoza argue, the Spanish agricultural labour market has developed the characteristics of

secondary labour markets as described by Doeringer and Piore (1971) and Piore (1970,1975,1979).

These Mediterranean experiences, stemming from the stable increase of numbers of immigrants in Southern European economies over the last 20 years, has led researchers to formulate the 'Southern European model of migration' (King, 2000, referred in Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2005), which is characterised by illegality related to strict migration controls imposed by EU, heterogeneity of immigrants' nationalities, differentiation of their social and cultural origins, predominance of male over female migrants, and coexistence of immigration, unemployment and underemployment in the countries of reception (Kasimis et al., 2003; Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2005).

Over the last few years one could also observe growing influx of immigrants into rural areas of Northern Europe, and their presence has become particularly vivid after the 2004 EU enlargement. Some authors argue that most of workers from the new accession countries found employment in rural areas (Jentsch, 2007), many in agriculture. Reflecting the increasing numbers of immigrants, a growing body of literature discussing the underlying mechanisms of this phenomenon and its implications for rural communities and migrants themselves has surfaced (Jentsch, 2007; Jentsch et al., 2007; Gowricharn 2002; CRC, 2007; Rogaly, 2006). Although studies often point to migrant workers' underpayment and bad working conditions (e.g. Jentsch, 2007; CRC, 2007), they rarely analyse the underlying mechanisms of these phenomena, e.g. the micro-processes of wage formation discussed in the present paper.

One noteworthy exception is Rogaly's (2006) study of the role of migrant workers in British agriculture and horticulture. Rogaly argues that international migrants have become the major workforce in the labour-intensive harvesting and packaging sector of British agriculture. He relates this phenomenon to a general pattern of intensification in agricultural production connected to the growing concentration of retailers' power in food production and greater availability of migrant workers. To describe migrants' situation on the labour market, Rogaly focuses on three aspects of the changing 'work-place regimes', a concept which 'encompasses the whole set of labour arrangements made largely by employers, with varying degrees of negotiation with labour contractors and workforces, and in response to wider labour market legal and commercial conditions' (Rogaly, 2006: 3). These aspects are as follows: the employment of international migrant workers, the return of the 'gangmaster', and finally, the use of piece rates. The workings of these mechanisms rely on workers' vulnerability to ensure their compliance in the labour force. This vulnerability of migrant workers is related to their immigration status and lack of information due to the duration of their stay and poor knowledge of English (Rogaly, 2006). Rogaly sees the causes of poor working and payment conditions in farmers' struggle to meet the retailers' demands for quality and 'just-in-time' delivery.

Anderson (2007) also points to migrants' vulnerability but relates it to state immigration controls and labour market policies. State immigration controls, in particular, give employers greater control over labour mobility by creating various categories of migrant workers with diversified levels of legality and labour entitlements. Using the concept of 'precarious work', which refers to a number of elements such as the degree of certainty of continuous work, the degree of control over working conditions, wages, pace, the extent of protection of workers, and finally, income; she argues that immigration controls on their own can neither hinder low-wage labour markets from developing, nor migrants from exploitative employment practices (Anderson, 2007: 4).

Due to the specificity of the Norwegian national context for agricultural production, in particular its small-scale and family farming character, combined with very strong state regulation

(Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008); transference of findings in the referred literature to the Norwegian context needs to be done cautiously. It is interesting, however, that the only detectable Norwegian work of relevance prior to the EU enlargement in 2004, Møller and Jensen's (1999) report which evaluates the Norwegian state quota programme for agricultural migrant workers in the 1990s, parallels many of the referred findings. Their study shows that migrant workers were an important source of labour for some segments of the Norwegian agricultural sector, particularly berry harvesting, already prior to the 2004 enlargement. These migrant workers did not replace Norwegian ones, but made it possible for farmers to keep up their production despite low profitability. Thus, most farmers claim in the study that the alternative to the foreign labour force is not domestic labour but reduced production or even the closing down of their farm production. This is explained by the low-wage level (by Norwegian standards) offered to the migrant workers. Echoing Hoggart and Mendoza's (1999) reference to dual labour market theory, Møller and Jensen (1999) argue that the agricultural migrant labour force constitute a new, secondary segment on the Norwegian labour market.

Thus, the existing literature on the migrant agricultural labour markets in Norway and elsewhere in Europe clearly shows that these labour markets tend to develop key characteristics of secondary labour markets. This implies low-paid, low-status jobs, hard-working conditions and high instability of employment, lack of promotion and training opportunities, and in a considerable degree, informal and personal relationship between employers and employees. According to Piore, international migration is a response to shortages in labour supply, and fulfils the demand for the lowest positions in social hierarchy. The temporariness of migration streams to industrialised economies equips migrant workers with particular social roles. Migrants arrive to their destination countries mostly to accumulate capital they want to invest in their home countries. Therefore, their attitude towards work is purely instrumental – directed at the highest income, at the same time making them insensitive to the social aspects of work related to the social status and position that every job determines. Consequently, migrants are ready to take up low-status jobs, with long, unsocial hours and bad working conditions. According to Piore, migrants belong to the marginalised groups on the labour market, together with farmers/rural workers, housewives, and youth, and the migratory labour markets are characterised by minimal wages and unlimited supply of labour. The shaping and level of wages depend mostly on the relative isolation of immigrants from the domestic workers, and the temporary character of migration decreases the will of immigrants to organise and generates problems of leadership due to high rotation of workers.

4. Interrogating farm labour relations

In this paper we draw on data collected by the Centre for Rural Research's 4-year research project 'Migrant Farm Labour in Norwegian Agriculture' (2005–2008) to explore the relationship between farmers and hired migrant workers. The analysis is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 54 migrant farm workers in three chosen study areas (municipalities) in Norway. These were selected due to prior knowledge about the structure of Norwegian farming, as they each represent a typical agricultural sub-system in the country's agricultural sector. The first study area is characterised by extensive production of fruit and berries on a large number of small farms. At these, one or two migrants typically work for 3–6 months. There are close interactions between farmers and workers, e.g. it is common for migrants to live in farm buildings and share meals with farmers. The second study area has a far more intensive, and by Norwegian standards:

industrialised farm production of fruit, berries and vegetables. Some of the farms employ relatively large workforces, up to 200, during harvest season. Thus, social ties between farmers and workers are looser. The last study area has more traditional farm structure, very much based on family farming. Dairy farmers are the main users of foreign labour. However, few farmers need full-time help and they often 'share' one migrant worker in the summer and during harvesting. These study areas were chosen in order to cover as much as possible of the wide spectrum of farming practices in Norway. However, as elaborated upon in what follows, we were surprised by the strong commonalities between the study areas with regard to the issues addressed in this paper. There were rather differences of *degree* and not of *kind* between migrants in the respective areas.

Data collection took place in the summer and autumn of 2006. As result of a prior mapping of all farms' use of migrant labour in the study areas, including a questionnaire returned by 80% of the farmers ($N = 174$), we had a reasonable good overview of the farm migrant populations in the locations. From this pool a sample of migrants was strategically selected (Thagaard, 1998) with the objective to cover workers with different backgrounds and with different work contexts. The workers were then called on at the work-place and asked to take part in the project. There were some refusals, however in most cases seemingly not due to fear of sanctions from their employers. More often time was the problem, as some worked very long hours and needed their spare time for rest and sleep. Nevertheless, most of the workers agreed to be interviewed.

The age of the sample's informants spanned from 18 to 54 years, with an average of 33 years. Three quarters of the interviewees were male. Half of the workers had employment in their homeland, with occupations ranging from craftsmen to teachers. One fifth were students, and another fifth were unemployed persons stating that they were not presently looking for work in their homeland. Only five workers stated that they were unemployed and actively searching for work in their country of residence. The average educational level was also relatively high: 24 of the interviewees had tertiary education, another 26 were educated to the secondary level, and four had primary schooling only. Two thirds of the sample were living with a partner (married or cohabitating) in the home country, and about half had children. None was bringing family members to Norway during the work stay.

In order to better contextualise the experiences reported by the migrant workers, we interviewed (survey and in-depth interviews) farmers in the study areas, as well as other key informants such as agricultural bureaucrats in the municipal administration and leaders of local agricultural organisations. One member of the research team also spent three weeks on a strawberry farm engaged in participant observation work prior to the commencement of the interviews.

We registered key information about the workers and their responses to a pre-defined set of questions in a standardised questionnaire. However, the main part of the interview was organised as an informal dialogue structured according to a list of topics we wanted to raise with the informants. These covered the past (personal background and motivation for migration), the present (work and social life at the farm including wage and labour conditions) and the future (plans, ambitions). Interviews were conducted in Norwegian, English or Polish, depending on the informants' language skills. The majority (42 out of 54) of the informants were Polish. This was partly due to the fact that Poles constitute the dominant national group working on farms in the study areas – they were present on more than three quarters of the farms, but also reflects that the research team included one Pole. No members of the research team had skills in other Eastern European languages.

As the interview guide included potentially sensitive topics, for example, possible breaches of labour regulations (wages, working hours, etc.), we took care to create an atmosphere of trust, ensuring the informants that no information would be disclosed to their employers or state authorities. This was particularly important as the recruitment of informants and subsequent interviews, for practical reasons, took place on the farm and thus with the knowledge of the farmers. Despite these limitations, we were surprised by the degree of openness shown by the informants.

As a qualitative study, this material does not intend to constitute a statistically representative sample of Norwegian migrant workers. Results cannot be automatically generalised to this population. However, the material does give corroborated insights into the logic of the studied phenomenon in the three study areas, and, as will be elaborated upon later, some of these have a structural quality that makes it reasonable to transfer (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) results to other agricultural contexts that share the characteristics of the chosen study areas.

5. The marginalisation of farm workers

The empirical backdrop of the present study is the introduction of the 'transitional rules' following the 2004 EU enlargement, and we will briefly present these and some other key information on wage regulations and practices in Norwegian labour markets.

Norwegian authorities opted for relatively liberal transitional rules in 2004 compared to the other Western EU member states (Dølvik and Eldring, 2006). These included measures to prevent 'social dumping' through a regulatory framework governing wage and labour conditions. The arrangements were to ensure that workers were offered labour terms at least equal to the national standard for the given trade and location, as expressed in agreements between employers' association and trade unions. For the agricultural sector, this implies in effect a national minimum wage of 11.00 Euros per hour, which is relatively low compared to other trades in Norway. For example, the minimum tariff for unskilled work in construction is 15.10 Euros per hour, and the pay rate per hour for industrial work in Norway is 19.50 Euros.

Migrant workers' wage is also lower than the actual wage for most Norwegian hired farm workers. These are most often employed on longer term contracts, and thus benefit from higher pay rates for non-seasonal work, for example, employment lasting more than 3 months attracts a pay rate of 13.00 EUR per hour. Moreover, Norwegian farm workers are often able to negotiate far higher wages than the pay award's minimum rate, due to the high demand for labour in the Norwegian economy. Thus, the formal wage level of migrant farm workers in Norway is relatively low compared to other employees in the Norwegian labour market, domestic as well as migrant ones, both within and outside agriculture.

Moreover, in practice migrant farm workers' wages are often even lower than assumed by state regulation. Farmers do not uniformly conform to the legal wage requirements, and during our fieldwork we were regularly presented with informal wage agreements between the parties where wages were substantially lower than required by law. Such breaches of regulations were even openly acknowledged among farmers (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007). This impression is supported by other sources, e.g. media coverage (see Rye, 2008) and reports by the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority. For example, their investigation into wage practices within the strawberry production in the Trøndelag region concluded that the migrant work stock on average earned only 5.5 Euros per hour, half the tariff rate (see Roel, 2007). It is difficult to estimate more exactly how widespread such underpayment is, as there are no nationwide wage statistics for migrant

farm labour, and even if such existed, it is unlikely that breaches of pay scales would be accurately captured in such official data.

The qualitative logic of inquiry in the present study, however, does allow for an in-depth analysis of the underlying social mechanisms that may produce such sub-standard wage agreements between farmers and migrant farm workers. Of particular interest, is that, even though actual wage levels on the farms in the study areas were lower than assumed by the transitional rules, migrant workers rarely attempted to negotiate better payment conditions with their employers. They did not invoke the transitional regulations to execute their rights or use the legal system to obtain better payment or working conditions. No instances of industrial action or other collective measures to better work conditions were registered, not even conceived of by the informants. Moreover, even when they were aware of the discrepancies between assumed and actual wages, they still expressed satisfaction with their payment.

In the following, we will analyse this empirical paradox by focusing on two factors: firstly, the migrant farm workers have very few resources to draw upon in order to negotiate better wages, even though such claims would be backed by the state authority (transitional rules and other labour regulations). Secondly, migrant workers seemingly do not problematise their underpayment, as they do not relate their earnings to Norwegian standards but rather compare their payment to the standards of their home countries. In short: they are in a weak position to bargain for higher wages, and they do not care much to do so anyway.

5.1. Weak bargaining position

There are several factors responsible for migrant farm workers' weak negotiating position vis-à-vis their employers, as there are various processes leading to disempowerment of workers in the labour relation. Particularly, we will draw attention to (1) their lack of knowledge and poor cultural competence, (2) the processes of informalisation of employment arrangements, (3) the marginalisation of migrants, both in the labour market and in the local community, and (4) the very dynamics of the labour migration process.

5.1.1. Lack of knowledge/poor cultural competence

The actors' access to information is important in the formation of well-functioning institutions of wage negotiations in any labour market. Neither employers nor employees are able to make rational decisions with regard to payment arrangements without proper knowledge of the wage level of other actors in the particular labour market and the factors shaping labour relations. Therefore, in order to understand the dynamics of labour relations between farmers and migrant workers, we interviewed the latter about their knowledge of their rights and entitlements, for example, the implications of the transitional rules, and their actual wage agreements with the farmers. Our respondents, echoing findings in studies from other countries (e.g. Bauder, 2006; Rogaly, 2006), admitted that they often lack information about their entitlements as employees in Norway. The picture becomes even more confusing when they were asked about their actual wage practices. Some migrants do not know their actual earnings but only have some overall idea about their payment. As one of the workers, 'Jarek', said:

I can only guess that this year it's 55 NOK [6.77 EUR], although last year it was 45 NOK [5.54 EUR] per hour, tax included. But I made a deal with the farmer that he pays half of the tax and I pay the other half, so I had like 50 NOK [6.16 EUR] per hour. ('Jarek')

The practice of per-piece payment, particularly widespread in vegetable production, opens further space for uncertainty and

relativity resulting in a situation where the actual hourly wage is difficult to estimate. A quote from 'Karol', a young doctor from Poland, illustrates this phenomenon:

...this year is the first year when we work per-piece [...] and it's some struggle here in the beginning of this piece work, in my opinion it is [the salary] too small [...] when you finish work, after two months in this farm [...] he [the boss] say: 'I will pay you 81 [9.97 EUR] per hour'. But the job has been done, yea, and you said: 'mmm, I'm not satisfied, let's say 85 [10.47 EUR]', and he says: 'no, 79 [9.73 EUR]', yea? 'No, let's back to the 81, it's 81!' ('Karol')

The use of piece rates is a widespread practice in agriculture worldwide. As Ben Rogaly (2006) argues, piece rates have played important role in the intensification of work-place regimes in Great Britain. They have been used on the one hand to speed up work and increase labour control, and on the other, they are related to the reduced prices growers have been obtaining from retailers for their products (Rogaly, 2006). The confusing feature of piece rates has also been recognised in a study of employment practices in British agriculture and horticulture (Precision Prospecting, 2005).

It is important to note that, even when the workers have some information and do try to negotiate their wages with the employer, their negotiating position is still weak. This is due to the language barrier and the lack of social and, in the concepts' wider sense, cultural capital. They rarely know what to inquire about or whom to address, and have few contacts to ask for guidance, in terms of labour entitlements. In most cases, migrants stated that they leave all formal arrangements and paperwork related to their stay to the farmers, i.e. their employer. Some migrants even admitted that they signed several documents but did not know what they were about or did not understand their content. 'Alina' reflects on that:

I have a contract [...] in Norwegian I guess, or English, I don't know. I don't understand it. It would be much easier if it was in Polish because there are many people who don't speak English or they do but very badly. ('Alina')

In other words the migrant workers lack the basic condition for improving their wage, namely, knowledge of existing terms. However, this is not only due to farmers withholding information out of ill will but as much a result of migrants' more or less insurmountable challenges in understanding the Norwegian system of wages, taxation and other rules. In particular, the complicated and unclear regulations of the Norwegian tax system lead to uncertainty and confusion among migrants, and they often pointed to the vagueness of the tax regulations as one of the main problems concerning wage estimations. 'Lech', a migrant from Poland emphasises the importance of information about the tax system:

The tax is about 22–24%, sometimes it's even about 30% tax. It depends, we don't know. It depends on what we are trying to get to know about it [the tax system]. But it's not so easy to get information about it. We don't want to make a bad contact with our boss or to make a problem for him. [...] It is difficult to say how much we'll get excluded tax, because we don't know how much tax we'll pay. This we get to know when we receive our payment at the end of the stay. ('Lech')

Once more the migrants' lack of social and cultural capital is both the cause of the problem as well as the barrier to overcoming it. They are lost in the details of Norwegian bureaucracy due to their poor language skills but also due to an apparent lack of informal contacts with Norwegian nationals who may be able to offer advice. This situation resembles findings in other national contexts (see: CRC, 2007; Jentsch et al., 2007). For example, the British Commission for Rural Communities, in its report considering A8 migrant workers, similarly points to the problems migrants face in and

outside their work-place due to their poor knowledge of English: lack of information about their rights, entitlements and obligations, unfair dismissal, poor working conditions, difficulties in accessing mainstream financial services, including setting up a bank account, and accessing basic healthcare (CRC, 2007).

The migrants' poor knowledge also applies to issues outside the employer–employee relationship. As EU citizens they are entitled to a number of welfare benefits while in Norway, e.g. health services, unemployment benefit and child support. However, only a very few of our respondents had knowledge about these arrangements, and even rarer, experiences with applying for support. This is not surprising, given Norwegian authorities very limited efforts to communicate such information to the migrant labour force.

5.1.2. Informalisation of employment relation

The above quotes illustrate that the work environment of many migrants is marked by uncertainty. This may be seen as a result of the informal nature of employment relations between farmers and migrant workers, where terms and conditions are not explicitly stated. This is reflected in the widespread lack of proper formal work contracts, despite that such are strictly required by the national labour regulation.

The informal nature of the employment 'contract' is often due to the informal character of the recruitment process. Contrary to descriptions in the international literature, and also to the situation in other sectors in Norway (Napierała, 2008), recruitment of migrant labour to Norwegian farms is rarely organised by way of professional recruiters or contractors (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007). During our research we observed only one such case. Rather, most of the migrants we interviewed had found their employment in Norway through family or friends on an individual basis. Thus, the initiation of the relation between farmers and their employees is not only informal but also often indirect, through other employees. This adds further confusion about the 'rules of the game', as the employees often merely inherit the unspoken conditions of their predecessors. This further disempowers the workers vis-à-vis their employers.

The case of 'Ewa', a teacher from Poland illustrates the problem. She came to Norway with a friend who had worked on the farm previous years and recommended her to the farmer. 'Ewa' speaks neither Norwegian nor English and does not know anything about the wage system on Norwegian farms. Instead, she trusts her friend completely. When asked about her wage, she told us:

I cannot say too much about this. I didn't ask the employer about it at the beginning. If I tried to ask other people, nobody wanted to answer, they say 'maybe so much, maybe not'. (...) I don't know how much I should expect to earn because I don't know the wages and I don't know how to count it. (...) I don't have my own copy of the contract. I took it to the police and left it there but I admit that I didn't even read it. (...) I had it in my hands so I could read it carefully but I didn't analyse it. I rested on what my friend told me. ('Ewa')

The informality of the recruitment process encourages long-lasting relationships between the two parties. If they establish a good relationship during the first year of work on a given farm, both farmers and migrants save time and resources by repeating the work relation in the future. In this way, relationships between employers and employees are built throughout many years, resulting in the reciprocity of trust. Therefore, formal written contracts are often neglected, and where such do exist, they are often openly violated. This is demonstrated by the quotations of 'Andrzej' and 'Maria':

We don't have written contract. No! We just go and work for three months. We do not need contract. I trust [the farmer] and [the farmer] trust me, that is good enough. ('Andrzej')

The contract is in Norwegian. It says the length of my stay, the salary per hour, that the farmer is representing me. I trust him completely. I don't have the document at the moment [...] I don't put too much attention to it. The farmer explained me everything in detail once. It wouldn't enter my mind to check the things he says. ('Maria')

The lightness with which migrants often treat their employment contracts stems also from the awareness of the disparity between the official contract and reality. 'Karol' works without a written contract. However, he had recently found out that he should have one, and had asked his employer about it:

...two weeks passed and I think nothing will happen [...] so, it's not their business to do it like this. [...] In the farm opposite us, [...] they have the contract [...] and there is written that you are earning such money for an hour, you can work such load of hours, and here is a little mistake because they know, ok, there is 45 hours for week and he sign it, but between us, if you want to work more, no problem, you can work twelve hours per day, it's ok. ('Karol')

The absence of formal and written work contracts, as well as the negligence of the issue altogether, although often emphasised in the existing literature (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2005; Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999; Jentsch et al., 2007), is remarkable within the context of the Norwegian labour market. We believe this relates to the institutionalisation of informal norms among farmers which allow for different treatment of migrant and domestic workers. The following quote of 'Vladmir' illustrates how conditions are perceived to vary along nationality lines in a way that even the discriminated actors do not question but only acknowledge. 'Vladmir' from Latvia agreed with the farmer on 85 NOK [10.47 EUR] hourly wage, and although he was not really satisfied with it and knew he was entitled to better payment, he never tried to negotiate the wage with the farmer:

*Interviewer: What if you asked for wage rise?
'Vladmir': I don't know. He [the farmer] may say 'go home to Latvia' [...]
Interviewer: Do you receive overtime pay?
'Vladmir': No, it doesn't work that way for me. This is only for you, Norwegians! [...]
Interviewer: Do you receive extra pay for weekend work?
'Vladmir': Funny question!*

5.1.3. Marginalisation and the dynamics of the migratory process

Migrants' positions in individual employment relations are further undermined by their weak position on the Norwegian labour market and in society in general, which echoes that of the situation described for agricultural migrant labour in most Western societies (see e.g. Bauder's study in Ontario, Canada). Most of migrants work in an isolated environment of the farm from dawn till dusk, and the farm family is often their only contact to the local community or the host society (Rye, 2007b). Often, only one or two migrants work on a given farm, which may be located a considerable geographical distance from other farms. Such social and geographical isolation makes any form of collective action difficult, if not impossible. Migrants also tend to work long days and have little spare time for trade union work. The temporary character of their stay, leading to high rotation of workers and problems of leadership, also plays an important role, as Piore (1979) has argued. Furthermore, Norwegian trade unions have shown little interest in the conditions of migrant farm workers, and have hardly made any efforts to recruit members from the new migrant agricultural labour force. As a result, migrant farm workers have developed no collective agenda for claiming their rights and there is no

organisation or spokespersons to protect them. This was acknowledged by 'Piotr':

'Piotr': Everybody would like it to be as in Poland, like a monthly salary but for them [the farmers] it's better this way because they have the money on the account;

Interviewer: Did somebody try to negotiate with the farmer to get a monthly salary?

'Piotr': I suspect that nobody did...;

Interviewer: Do you know why?

'Piotr': There is no such organisation here among the Poles, we don't have time for it and some don't want to irritate the farmers.

The lack of formal representation of migrant farm workers makes threats of discharge credible, a factor that discourages migrants from attempts of bargaining. Some of our interviews indicate that such threats have been explicitly made, as in the case of 'Jarek'. He earned about 55 NOK [6.77 EUR] per hour but knew that the minimum wage according to the transitional regulations the previous year was 83 NOK [10.22 EUR]. When asked whether he tried to negotiate with his employer, he answered:

Yes, I did. He said: 'if you want it [83 NOK per hour] I can pay that much but you will not come here next year'.

The abundance of labour from Eastern Europe adds to the credibility of such threats. Big differences in incomes, coupled with difficulties on the labour markets in Eastern Europe create strong migration incentives which are additionally fuelled by the developing social networks between Norway and the sending countries. The importance of networks in shaping migration flows has been emphasised by Massey (1990,1999). According to his theory of cumulative causation every migration changes the context in which another migration takes place. After the migration flow reaches a critical point, it becomes a self-perpetuating process. Expanding social networks make the migration decision and migration itself a lot easier than it was for pioneers. In this sense, growing numbers of new migrants create pressure for those already working on Norwegian farms. 'Tomek', young migrant from Poland acknowledges this fact:

Interviewer: So the fact that there are more [Poles] in Norway makes it easier for farmer to pay less?

'Tomek: Yes, it will be so in every place where there will be a lot of people, the farmers will hire illegally or pay less than it is required, and there is this issue that people will work more than it is declared in the contract, it should be said so, that people on the farms work more than it is written in the contract. So, you get the same money for more work, there are no overtime payments'.

Moreover, given the farm workers lack of knowledge about and experience of the culture in the recipient country, they have few opportunities to seek alternative work on other farms, and even less within other sectors of the economy. As observed by migration scholars, social networks play vital role for migrants concerning access to information and employment in the host country. However, networks also influence migrants' behaviour in the receiving country and have the potential of isolating them from the host society (Kritz et al., 1992). Most of the farm workers we interviewed got their jobs through family members or friends already working at one specific farm. Thus, the individual worker rarely relates to the Norwegian agrarian labour market in general, but has to decide whether or not to accept the particular job offer. This decision includes an acceptance of the term of wage and labour conditions offered. Once migrants arrive on the farm, these are in practical terms non-negotiable.

Thus, for the individual worker, the actual choice is between the offered work or no work in Norway. The former alternative is usually chosen, as even a lousy job in Norway is judged as *relatively* good compared to no employment, or poor employment in the home country. In terms of Hirschman (1970), migrants have few resources to protest (voice). However, their exit-strategy is not to find alternative employment within the Norwegian labour market but is limited to exiting it altogether, thus giving up what, after all, is good money judged from their homeland perspective. This will be discussed in closer detail in the next section.

5.2. Frame of reference

In his article on the status paradox of migration, Nieswand (2006) points to the importance of taking into account migrants' situations in their home countries while analysing the processes of their marginalisation within the host country's labour market. This transnational aspect of migrants' experience is especially important when considering short-term migration, as usually is the case for migrant farm workers. The importance of the temporariness of migration in the shaping of migrants' perceptions of their wage and work conditions has been stressed by Piore (1979), who argues that in the case of temporary migration there is a sharp distinction between work and the social identity of a worker, which is situated in his/her home country). Massey et al. (1993) similarly emphasise that the disjuncture in living standards between sending and receiving countries makes low-wages seem generous to the migrant. The importance of the home country's frame of reference finds evidence in our empirical material. Describing wages and working conditions, migrants refer to the wage levels in their countries of origin, as observed in the following quotes by 'Slawek' and 'Alina':

...compared to the Norwegian rate it [the salary] is laughable, as far as I know their basic rate is 150 NOK [18.47 EUR] per hour minimum and we have a lot less. [...] It is affordable for us because there are different conditions, different rates for everything in Poland [...] in Poland you couldn't save so much money in one and a half year as you earn here in three months. ('Slawek')

...the wage isn't too high but for Polish standards it is, so it's a relative matter. ('Alina')

Thus, even though migrants' wages are low in the Norwegian context, they evaluate their earnings according to standards in their homeland and consider them not only as satisfactory but as good, or even very good. However, this perspective relies on the workers' mental approach to their farm work in Norway. By conceptualising their work stay as a short and non-permanent exception in their regular everyday life in their homeland, they are able to view their stay in Norway as an extension to their 'normal' homeland life. This frame of reference is rarely contested, as most of their time in Norway is spent working with fellow countrymen who share the same view that wages and labour conditions are acceptable and preferable compared to homeland standards. Therefore, migrants do not aspire to the work and welfare rights of 'native' Norwegians. Time off from work is similarly spent with people of the same nationality. There are usually few arenas for social contact with Norwegians, and thus migrants are not exposed to their consuming patterns (Rye, 2007b), which might have made evident that their wages are relatively low. This finding is concordant with Piore's description of the characteristics of the migratory labour markets, in which migrants' wages heavily depend on relative isolation from the domestic workers, especially in the realm of payment (Piore, 1979).

This homeland perspective is further reinforced by the use of strategies that emphasise their status as short-term visitors and not

as regular members of the Norwegian labour market. For example, few spend their incomes in Norway but save money for consumption in their homeland. It is also commonplace to bring meals for several weeks from home, in order to avoid expenses in Norway. Migrants employing this strategy have been described by Eade et al. (2006) in their study of Polish migrants in London as 'storks' – migrants employed seasonally in low-paid sectors of the market, who stay abroad for 2–6 months, use network channels of recruitment and have their point of reference exclusively in Poland, in their family environment.

Establishment of a homeland frame of reference for the wage and work conditions in Norway depends on migrants' status as short-term, seasonal workers. The typical stay of the migrant labour force is 1 or 2 months, and only on a few farms (19.3%) migrant workers stay longer than 3 months (Rye, 2006). Interestingly, those who reside more permanently in Norway were less likely to evaluate their work conditions from an outsider's perspective and often paralleled their situation to that of Norwegians. One can argue, in accordance with Piore's analysis that prolonged stays in Norway lead to the expansion of social contacts and closer attachment to the country, which consequently give rise to changes in professional aspirations and the development of the awareness of the social status related to the job performed.

Summarising, the situation for the major part of the Eastern European labour force within Norwegian agriculture seems paradoxical. From a 'Norwegian' perspective, they are clearly among the most disempowered actors in the Norwegian labour market. Migrants receive low-wages and poor labour conditions and they are poorly situated to negotiate and improve their terms. At the same time, from an 'Eastern European' perspective they are privileged by high wages compared to their homeland earnings. Moreover, labour migration for many is the best or only strategy to avoid unemployment or other market risks. By working abroad migrants make savings for important investments, acquire necessary capital and strengthen their domestic budgets. Thus, migrants' situation can be seen as highly incongruent: thanks to their earnings abroad they can aspire to higher living standard in their home countries and lift their social status, while at the same time, they are a group who are situated close to the bottom of the social ladder in Norway. This phenomenon has been described by Nieswand (2006) as 'the status paradox of migration'.

6. Structural disempowerment

In this paper we have analysed the processes of wage formation between farmers and new migrant worker populations. We have shown that the transitional rules and other labour regulations issued by the Norwegian government in order to combat 'social dumping' are rarely implemented at farm level. Rather, informal labour arrangements are established, often resulting in underpayment, instability and uncertainty of work on the part of the migrant workers.

In traditional labour market theory, wages are assumed to be the result of negotiations between the two key elements of the labour relationship who have control over different sorts of resources; workers controlling labour, and employers controlling capital. The individual labour relationship is thus, an exchange, in which workers trade their labour for wages. Wage levels reflect on the one hand, the quality of labour force and on the other, the complexity of work. One might argue that the institutionalising norms of the underpayment of wages for the agricultural migrant labour force on Norwegian farms are simply a reflection of the value of their work, as work in agriculture is characterised by simple, manual tasks. However, this logic is undermined by the discussion above. Firstly, by the fact that in our sample the average educational level of

migrants was relatively high – almost half of the migrants had tertiary education. Rather, as emphasised by Bauder (2006), we see that the segmentation of the labour market also involves a process that leads to a devaluation of migrants' educational credentials and previous work experience. Secondly, the wage paid for most domestic hired farm workers is substantially higher. Interestingly, the results from a national and statistically representative survey show that farmers employing migrant workers evaluate their work quality as high (Rye, 2006), with language differences judged to be rather unproblematic (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007).

This observation indicates that other factors play a significant role in the shaping of agricultural migrant workers' wage and labour conditions. We argue that there are particularly two sets of factors underlying this phenomenon, each reflecting and elaborating on the dual labour market theory: Firstly, the structural disempowerment of migrant farm workers gives them a very weak negotiating position vis-à-vis their employers, the farmers. Secondly, the migrant workers' homeland frame of reference for wage levels makes their wages in Norway appear not only acceptable but relatively high, and thus lowers their incentives to negotiate better payments.

The implementation of post-2004 transitional rules might be viewed as an attempt by state authorities to protect workers and provide them with a tool that strengthens their position vis-à-vis capital. However, despite the authorities' efforts, official regulations are often replaced by informal labour arrangements at the farm level. This is due to the lack of proper control instruments on the farm and to the characteristics of work in agriculture. Without the state's financial and organisational capacity to control the implementation of labour regulations, these rules are largely theoretical, as discussed in this paper.

The present study also illustrates the particularities of the Norwegian agriculture in terms of the actual labour regulations experienced by the migrant labour workforce. The paper provides a somewhat different picture than described both in studies of other national agricultural contexts (cross-national differences) as well as in studies of other Norwegian trades (cross-sectoral differences). Specifically, we will point to three such aspects: (1) the geographical, and in effect also social and political, dispersion of enterprises and workforce, which works as a barrier to collective action, (2) the short-term, seasonal character of work, which further reduces the workers' interests in bargaining activities, and (3) the general low earning capacity of agriculture and growing pressures on competitiveness in the globalising agricultural economy, which structurally constrains the level of wages within the trade.

(1) In general, agricultural trade has fewer traditions for organised labour than is the case for other Norwegian occupations (Halberg, 1993). This is clearly demonstrated by the low level of interest from the Norwegian trade unions in the conditions for the present migrant labour in the agricultural sector (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007). In addition, the physical marginalisation of migrants plays an important role in this lack of effective unionism. The importance of relative isolation of migrants from the domestic labour force, as well as the temporariness of labour relation (discussed in the next paragraph) in shaping wages and engagement in unionism is emphasised in Piore's (1979) analysis of the dynamics of dual labour markets. Moreover, the structure of employment, where only one or two workers work on each farm, which additionally is usually distant from other farms and centres of local or state administration, makes any kind of public control difficult. The geographical dispersion of Norwegian farms, an inheritance of the agricultural policies of which the key objective was to

preserve small-scale farming all over rural Norway, strongly limits the opportunity for migrant workers to organise themselves or seek help and advice. One might argue that the situation for domestic workers is very similar; however, the limitation of organisational opportunities for migrant workers is further exacerbated by their lack of linguistic and wider cultural competence and social capital.

- (2) Labour migration within agriculture is primarily about seasonal work. This strongly contributes to the 'disempowered satisfaction' in two ways. Firstly, the short-term character of the work makes it difficult to establish collective action between the workers, as this usually requires interaction over time. Secondly, as the workers only reside in the recipient country for a limited period of time, they judge the wage level based on homeland standards and are able to conceptually split their lives in two separate spheres: they *work* in Norway and *consume* in their Eastern European homelands. In most other occupations, such short-term migration is less common, and thus, migrants have to spend more of their incomes in Norway where prices are higher (Friberg and Tyldum, 2007).
- (3) The general low earning capacity of agriculture arguably contributes to the observed practices. Many farmers claim that the consequence of higher wages will lead to the closing down of production and, thus, firing their seasonal employees (cf Møller and Jensen, 1999). Growing pressures from the global market such as higher competitiveness in the production of raw commodities additionally forces farmers to cut costs. The enhanced bargaining power of the retail chains, which in Norway as elsewhere have been strongly centralised as result of restructuring processes (Stræte and Jacobsen, 2002), leaving only a handful of buyers of farm products, adds further pressure towards cost savings in farm production. As migrant workers are very vulnerable, cutting their wages is the easiest strategy to reduce the costs of production.

Taken together, these factors reduce the likelihood of future improvement of pay and work conditions for migrant workers on Norwegian farms. Moreover, we claim that migrants' problems in some ways seem more cemented in Norway than in many other countries with industrialised agricultural production, due to the historical and present-day context of farming. This is worth noting, as labour generally has gained a relatively strong position versus capital in the Norwegian welfare society, much a result of the intimate relationship between the trade unions and the social democratic party which has been in government for much of the post-war period (Dølvik et al., 2007). For the present discussion of migrant workers in the agriculture, however, it is significant that the specifics of the Norwegian agricultural case would seem to contribute to, rather than modify, the disempowerment of the migrant workers.

First, the historical inheritance of the state seasonal immigration quota programme in operation between 1990 and 2004 was the establishment of a practice where individual farmers recruited individual workers. Such direct hiring has continued as the dominant way of organising migrant labour within Norwegian agriculture, despite that the post-enlargement regulations allow for alternatives, e.g. subcontracting, as observed in other trades (Dølvik and Eldring, 2006). This, in combination with the geographically dispersed farm structure, a result of the country's geography and political objectives of maintaining a scattered settlement structure, generated an 'individualised' migrant work stock with strong loyalties towards their employers. As shown, this is still the case.

Second, the very structure of Norwegian agricultural policies with its emphasis on maintaining a large number of small production units combined with a high degree of family farming, both in terms of ownership and labour input (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008), has given less space for large scale and professional organising of contract work.

A third and related particularity of the Norwegian case is the relative absence of trade unions within the farming sector. While more than half of the total workforce belongs to workers unions (Nergaard and Stokke, 2007), unionism is more or less non-existent within farming, much a result for the traditional small-scale and family farming character of Norwegian agriculture.

Taken together, this implies that no social or political structures are present that may provide the basic requirements for future collective action that would challenge the present labour–capital regime.

7. Conclusions

The Norwegian context generates a consolidated set of conditions where the marginalised and individualised agricultural migrant labour force has few prospects of improved work situations. Farmers are looking for cheap and docile labour to fill domestic labour shortages and to minimise production cost in order to survive in a trade facing increased pressure from globalised markets. The migrants, on their side, have few options other than accepting up-front the work conditions offered by Norwegian farm employers, as the formal labour regulations are not effectively implemented by the state at the farm level. Due to poor knowledge about their legal entitlements and few organisational structures that could help advocate their case effectively, migrants become structurally disempowered and have few or no resources with which to invoke their formal rights. Moreover, they are isolated from the Norwegian work and social environment due to their lack of social capital in the host country. Their frame of reference is that of their home countries. Therefore, poor working conditions in Norwegian terms are still found satisfactory compared with those of the jobs available in Eastern European labour markets. In concordance with Piore's (1979) arguments, the temporary character of migration leads to the separation of work identity and social identity, the latter remaining embedded in the worker's home country. A low-status job in Norway enables migrants to achieve their consumption goals and strategies in home countries, thus contributing to their higher status there. This aspect of the migratory process has been described as the 'status paradox of migration' (Nieswand, 2006).

At the same time, the Norwegian case presented in this paper also demonstrates in detail how a secondary labour market may appear, unfold and intensify despite government's good intentions and active policies to counteract such developments. At the micro-level, in everyday life encounters between farmers and migrants, the measures of the authorities are outstripped by informal agreements between the parties. In the process of shaping these agreements, the power is predominantly in the hands of employers. The labour–capital contract is a result of a dictation rather than negotiation.

The present study clearly illustrates the importance of the national context in analysing the establishment of ethnic migrant niches in the labour markets of advanced capitalist societies; in this case the agricultural historical structures, current agricultural policies and established farm level practices, in combination with immigration history and policies. In particular, the small-scale and geographically dispersed farming structure of Norway, traditionally relying on family labour, generates social environments where migrant workers develop loyalties towards their employer, rather than collaborating with other migrant workers in collective action to change the terms of employment. The short-term character of

their stays further adds to the lack of interest in coordinated action to improve work conditions.

The implication of these findings is the need for analysis of migrant labour which is more sensitive to the national and sectorial contexts within which migrants' everyday working lives are embedded. The structural conditions for agricultural migrant workers in Norway are different from that of their fellow citizens working in other sectors of the Norwegian economy, however, they are also diverging from that of migrant agricultural workers in other Western European countries. Accordingly, future studies of migrant farm workers need to be embedded within and analysed in light of national contexts.

The analysis presented above raises important questions for the use of migrant farm labour within agriculture, in particular with regard to the need for the enforcement of state regulation of labour relations. The observed practices of underpayment of migrant workers actualise the shape and the effectiveness of the transitional rules and similar labour regulations. Our analysis suggests that state authorities need new and refined instruments to make the implementation of the labour regulations for migrant work in the agriculture more universal, that is, instruments which are closer to the farm level.

Furthermore, from an equity perspective, this paper indicates the need of stronger incorporation of migrants into the local community and broader society. Some actions have been already taken in the Norwegian building and construction sector, where workers unions make efforts to engage migrants in their activities by providing information and counsel in their mother tongues. Even though this may be perceived as less important for short-term migrant workers, it would present a tool to combat social dumping, as it gives a voice and an arena through which migrant workers can claim their rights. As long as only formal regulations, and not micro-level empowerment of migrants, takes place, the Norwegian agricultural migrant workers are likely to keep their position at the bottom rung of the ladder in the Norwegian labour market.

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