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Tides of labour. Forms of exploitation and practices of individual resistance in seasonal tourism industry

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Abstract. This paper investigates seasonal seaside tourism in Eastern Veneto. On one hand, drawing on literature about labour exploitation forms, it examines critical issues and labor standard violations within the sector, focusing on wages, supervision, work rhythms, and segmentation along the lines of gender, migration status, and age. On the other hand, the paper explores individual resistance, particularly through the various exit and quitting strategies employed by workers. This scenario underscores the need to complement individual forms of resistance – recognized as pivotal – with new union interventions and institutional actions to regulate working conditions.

Keywords: tourism industry, labour exploitation, tourism companies, mobility power, labour market segmentation.

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INTRODUCTION

Southern European countries, including Italy, have experienced tourism-led employment growth since the Eurozone crisis (Bürgisser, Di Carlo 2023; Portella-Carbó et al. 2023). In Italy, some social contradictions favoured by this growth model, such as those related to the proliferation of short-term rentals, have been investigated in the literature (Celata, Romano 2020), in the context of an articulated international debate on the subject. By contrast, less attention has been paid to working conditions in the sector, with the exception of the meritorious study of Iannuzzi (2021) on the Venice hotel industry. On the other hand, work in seasonal seaside tourism has remained largely unexplored in the scholarly literature.

This paper intends to fill this gap, dwelling on a peculiar setting such as that of the eastern part of the Veneto region, one of the major tourist destinations as far as seaside context is concerned. The contribution aims to critically dialogue with two main strands of the scientific literature, that of

multiple and varied forms of labour exploitation and that of resistance practices – with peculiar attention to quitting, given the low rate of unionisation and collective mobilisation forms in the study area. The article's methodology, based mainly on 31 semi-structured interviews with workers and other key informants such as trade unionists and employers, aims to capture the routinisation of labour exploitation forms, following the theoretical framework proposed by Davies (2019), as well as the systemic persistence of the most critical cases. By means of collected evidence, the article investigates both the more common labour standard violations and mobility strategies that workers exercise to escape poor and unsatisfactory working conditions.

In detail, the contribution focuses on the mechanism of wage setting by reconstructing the various practices, formal and informal, by which employers not only seek to reduce labour costs but also activate managerial strategies to extract maximum labour effort. Attention is also paid to contractual forms, the intensification of work rhythms and supervisory arrangements, which are more intense in family-run businesses and in any case not ascribable to the mere capital-labour relationship but the result of hierarchies among employees within the workplace. The research then explores forms of differential exploitation based on gender, migration status, and age. These often-intertwined axes of segmentation contribute to defining a plurality of working conditions, spread across a myriad of jobs and enterprises, often small and medium-sized.

Two cases of trade union interventions emerged in the research, again in the form of individual disputes. Specific covered forms of individual resistance also occur at the workplace level. However, the most recurring theme in our interviews is that of exit strategies by workers. The paper tries to outline the different ways in which quitting takes place, proposing four possible situations: a) young workers who see tourism jobs as an intermediate stage in their career and who look for new opportunities, with differentiation given primarily by the level of education; b) workers who would have stayed in the tourism industry but found other positions (large retailers, multinational logistics companies), with differentiation based on skills; c) workers who change jobs while remaining in the sector, facing some constraints and challenges, also given by some structural factors such as the average size of enterprises; d) the forms of exit exercised by migrant workers, with a specific focus on the differences related to various legal statuses (EU citizens, long-term migrants who have obtained Italian citizenship, asylum seekers, etc.).

In the conclusions, the paper critically discusses the research results, dwelling on what opportunities open up for the sector in a scenario characterised by forms of exit and recurring labour shortage debates. Advocating for a nuanced reading of the consequences that mobility strategies can have on individual workplaces, the paper nevertheless argues that both trade unions and public institutions could act in favour of stronger regulation of the sector. If the seasonality of the industry poses difficulties in achieving long-term arrangements, certain initiatives can be pursued to improve working conditions, already challenged by workers' quitting strategies.

CONCEPTUALISING LABOUR EXPLOITATION AND WORKERS' RESISTANCE PRACTICES

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) operationally defines labour exploitation as «working situations that deviate significantly from the normal conditions of work established by law and bargaining, particularly in terms of recruitment, hiring, wages, working hours, holiday entitlement, health and safety standards and living conditions of workers» (Rosas 2020). According to the ILO, labour exploitation is understood as the antithesis of decent work, which is characterised by fair remuneration, respect for fundamental rights, workplace safety, social protection and social dialogue. The ILO groups labour exploitative conditions in three operational areas (Corbanese, Rosas 2021). These include, first, unlawful and/or deceptive recruitment, involving the fraudulent hiring of workers to be assigned to third parties, often misrepresenting the type, location, or conditions of the work, as well as transport and accommodation arrangements. Second, the violation of working conditions, such as excessive working hours, non-payment or wages below the legal or collectively bargained minimum, breaches of health and safety regulations, abuses of labour laws and social protections, and degrading conditions (especially regarding surveillance methods and transportation to and from work). Third, substandard living conditions, such as being forced to live

in overcrowded spaces without access to sanitation, running water, or electricity. According to the ILO definition, labour exploitation occurs when any of these violations is coupled with the abuse of vulnerability and need.

The ILO's conceptualisation has faced criticism for attributing responsibility for exploitation primarily to individual rogue employers, overlooking structural causes (Lerche, 2007; Bernards, 2017) and the fact that, under capitalism, exploitation is an inherent and constitutive element of the employment relationship (Rigo 2016; Gordon 2019), especially by adopting a Marxist analytical framework. As a result, scholarly debate on more severe forms of labour exploitation has evolved within a broader theoretical discussion on free and unfree labour (Brass, Van der Linden 1997, eds.). Several authors have therefore interpreted unfree labour (Strauss, Fudge 2014; Bernards 2017), labour exploitation (Skrivankova 2010), and labour coercion (Gordon 2019) as part of a continuum, aiming to highlight the similarities across various labour regimes in contemporary capitalism. However, in a later contribution, Fudge (2019) questioned the continuum paradigm, arguing that it fails to adequately capture the complex interplay of coercion and consent that underlies the extraction of value from labour power. Fudge instead advocates for the concept of local labour control regime (Jonas 1996; Baglioni 2018), which offers a more effective analytical tool for identifying the constraints on workers' freedom imposed both within and outside the labour process.

In analysing the situations where constraints are greatest, the concept of super-exploitation proves particularly useful. It highlights workers' dependence on low wages that fall below the amount necessary for their social reproduction, as well as the socio-economic mechanism trapping them in these conditions. For instance, this may be the case of migrant workers who must send remittances to their home countries, especially in contexts where currency values are highly susceptible to fluctuations in financial markets (Portes Virginio et al. 2023). The concept of super-exploitation was originally introduced within the framework of dependency theory (Marini 1973) to understand the strategies of capital in peripheral countries, such as those in Latin America, which struggled to compete with former colonial powers that controlled the access to advanced technologies. In these contexts, as a compensatory strategy to remain competitive in sectors like mining, wages were systematically below the level required for social reproduction. More recently, Selwyn (2020) demonstrated the relevance of the super-exploitation concept for analysing specific production segments in the Global North, examining in-work poverty across three British economic sectors: textile, agriculture, and services, with a particular focus on food delivery digital platforms. Moreover, low wages are often closely linked to various complex forms of wage theft. Cole et al. (2024) examined this relationship in the hospitality industry, highlighting both the most flagrant violations and those carried out through more informal labour-management practices.

This body of literature, however, focuses primarily on the most severe forms of labour exploitation, while more routine forms remain largely overlooked (Davies 2019). The latter refers to systematic and normalised violations of labour regulations that often evade anti-exploitation enforcement policies grounded in simplistic concepts such as that of modern slavery. Such conditions are imposed on workers through the exploitation of a complex system of constraints, including hyper-precariousness affecting migrant workers (Lewis et al. 2015) and gendered labour regimes impacting women (Bair 2022). We argue that this theoretical perspective is particularly well suited to capturing the forms of labour exploitation prevalent in the tourism sector, characterised in Italy, and beyond, by a high degree of informality, precarity, and in-work poverty.

Despite the extensive debate on the nature of the different labour exploitation forms, there is relatively little literature on individual and collective resistance practices workers adopt to counter or escape severe or more routine forms of exploitation. The existing research draws on Katz's typology (Katz, 2004), which identifies three distinct forms of resistance (Lewis et al. 2015; Rydzik, Anitha 2020). The first form is resilience, which encompasses small acts aimed at ensuring survival and managing daily challenges. The second form is reworking, which involves a range of practices that

> alter the conditions of people's existence to enable more workable lives. (...) Projects of reworking tend to be driven by explicit recognition of problematic conditions and to offer focused, often pragmatic, responses to them (...) [They] are enfolded into hegemonic social relations because rather than attempt to undo these relations or call them into question, they attempt to recalibrate power relations and/or redistribute resources (Katz 2004: 247).

Finally, as Katz noted, actual resistance practices are those that subvert existing power relations. Migrant workers interviewed by Lewis et al. (2014) and Rydzik and Anitha (2020) in the UK employ various forms of resistance in response to the exploitative labour conditions they face. One key strategy highlighted in both studies is the practice of quitting or exit, which we believe is underestimated by the authors, as it is categorised alongside resilience and reworking. Drawing on the insights of Silver (2003), Smith (2006), Strauss and McGrath (2017), and Alberti and Sacchetto (2024), we argue that quitting can serve as a form of mobility bargaining power – defined as the form of power exerted by workers in relation to their ability to exit employment relations in a tight labour market (Strauss, McGrath 2017: 204).

In particular, in sectors experiencing low wages, the absence of other institutional and collective forms of bargaining, and the possible emergence of labour shortages, as may be the case with tourism in certain areas of Italy, workers' ability to leave their jobs can lead to improvements in both individual and collective working conditions. This effect is particularly notable when exit is combined with other forms of voice (Meardi 2007; Alberti 2014), although these potential improvements are often unevenly distributed across the entire labour force. Through this article, we aim to enhance the understanding of labour exploitation by examining the routine and severe forms prevalent in Italy's beach tourism industry and the resistance practices employed by workers.

CASE AND METHODS

Case

Work in the tourism sector is often characterised by flexibility, temporary contracts, low wages, and informal arrangements (Knox, 2010; Bullock et al. 2024; Çıvak et al., 2024; Cole et al., 2024). Union density tends to be very low, while violations of labour standards are notably high (Papadopoulos et al., 2021). The workforce is predominantly made up of women, young people, and migrants (Tufts, 2007; Rydzik, Kissoon 2022), who are typically employed at the lowest tiers of the hierarchical structure, often differentiated by gender, skin colour, age, language, and origin. Higher up the ladder, the presence of native male workers increases (Iannuzzi 2021). This stratification stems from the production and is reinforced by stereotypes that influence the hiring of workers based on social differences (Alberti, Iannuzzi 2020).

The literature has placed significant emphasis on the emotional (Hochschild 1979), aesthetic (Witz et al. 2003) and bodily (Wolkowitz 2006) dimensions of work in the hospitality industry. In this context, the interaction between workers and customers elevates workers' emotions and bodies to a central role in fulfilling guests' expectations and desires. Smiles, empathy, accents, tone of voice, and physical attributes all become essential tools of work. This has been highlighted by both Longo (2016), who examined the work of hostesses on cruise ships, and Iannuzzi (2021), who focused on workers in luxury hotels in Venice. Work in tourism is particularly demanding, both physically and mentally. The health implications vary significantly depending on the specific tasks performed. Notable attention has been directed towards the health risks and psychological stress faced by hotel housekeepers, who engage in some of the most strenuous and exhausting work. This is exacerbated by the intensified work rhythms resulting from outsourcing practices that have heavily impacted these roles (Shapoval et al. 2022; Iannuzzi, Sacchetto 2024). Another significant source of distress for tourism workers, especially women, is the risk of sexual and gender-based harassment (Guerrier, Adib 2000; Mitsakis et al. 2024).

In Italy, the tourism sector – including hotels, campsites, bars, restaurants, bathing and spa facilities, nightclubs, travel agencies, and amusement parks – employs 1.298.708 individuals across 197.790 enterprises. A structural characteristic of this sector is the seasonality of employment, which is evident in its monthly fluctuations: employment reaches its lowest point in February (1.032.155) and peaks in July (1.572.558) (EBNT, 2023). As has also been shown in other studies (Çıvak et al., 2024), seasonality exposes workers to a high risk of poverty in the off-season months, leading them and their family members to engage in multiple income-generating activities. However, in Italy, seasonal workers – both native and migrants with regular status and residency rights – can apply for unemployment benefits. Nonetheless, this right is not extended to trainees, who remain excluded from such

protection. Moreover, since the amount of unemployment benefits is determined by the total social security contributions paid, any off-the-books wage components (see next session) are excluded from the calculation.

Job insecurity is not only driven by seasonality but is further compounded by the widespread use of part-time contracts – which account for 52.1% of the workforce – and persistently low wages. The average annual income of just €11.247 reflects the combined impact of these factors, highlighting a structurally precarious labour market in which stable and sufficient earnings are largely out of reach for many. Consequently, hotel and restaurant employees are among those most at risk of failing into the category of working poor (Garnero et al. 2021). Consistent with global trends, the workforce is predominantly young and female, with migrant workers making up a quarter of the total (EBNT, 2023). Finally, even the Italian tourism sector is significantly affected by a high rate of irregularities. According to the National Labour Inspectorate's annual report for 2023, inspections in the industry revealed violations in 72.4% of the companies examined. This sector is among the most vulnerable to violations, ranking just behind transport and warehousing (INL, 2024).

These features create a particularly fertile environment for the normalisation of labour abuses (Davies 2019), which is why we chose it as the focus of our research. Specifically, we conducted our study within the seaside tourism industry in Eastern Veneto, in the province of Venice (Cavallino-Treporti, Jesolo, Eraclea, Caorle). This area is known for its robust tourism industry, although – unlike other parts of the country with higher unemployment rates – Veneto is a rich region with a low unemployment rate (3% in 2024) and many other employment opportunities. Cavallino-Treporti is the leading seaside tourist destination, attracting nearly 7 million visitors, closely followed by Rimini, Bibione, Jesolo, Caorle, and Lignano Sabbiadoro (Veneto Region 2024). In 2023, there were 46.591 employees in total. Labour shortages, especially of young workers, affect this sector as well as others, as a result of demographic decline and skill mismatch (Veneto Lavoro 2020; 2024). The issue of labour shortages is further amplified by a dominant public narrative centred on employers' complaints around recruitment difficulties. In May 2024, hoteliers in Jesolo reported a shortage of 1.000 seasonal workers and the challenges of hiring them through labour migration schemes (Cagnassi 2024).

At the same time, irregularity rates in Veneto align with national trends. Data from Cgil indicates that evasion of taxes and social security contributions is particularly significant in the sector (Abbadir 2024). The workforce composition differs slightly from national figures, with men outnumbering women and foreign workers constituting 32% of the workforce. The generational factor remains consistent, with many workers under 30 years old (Mulas 2024).

Methods

This study, conducted between May and October 2024, forms part of a broader research project[1] on severe labour exploitation in the tourism sector. Data was mainly collected through semi-structured interviews, chosen as the most suitable method to enable interviewers «more flexibility to digress and to probe based on interactions during the interview» (Blee, Taylor 2002).

For this purpose, two distinct interview tracks were developed: one for workers and another for further key informants such as trade unionists and employers affiliated with business organisations. The worker-focused interview included questions about current and past work experiences, with particular attention to topics such as recruitment modalities, wages, contractual conditions, working hours, job responsibilities, work organisation, supervision, workplace relationships (with both employers and colleagues), and the possible role of trade unions in workplaces or in workers' life trajectories. Additionally, questions addressed social reproduction issues and – for migrant workers – migration pathways and projects. The interview track for other key informants focused on the activities of their employer or trade union organisations, their conceptualisation of severe labour exploitation, and – for trade unions – the forms of interventions they employ. Further questions covered local labour market char-

[1] The research project, entitled "Severe forms of labour exploitation in shipbuilding and tourism industry", code 2022K479M8, was funded by the PRIN-PNRR grant 2022.

acteristics in the sector and any recent changes they had observed. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview format, with just-in-time adjustments made as the conversations unfolded, proved invaluable in grasping workers' daily experiences and allowing for a deeper exploration of the issues raised by other key informants.

A total of 31 interviews were conducted (for more details, see Table2 in Appendix), ranging from 30 to 78 minutes in length. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed; however, in four cases, the interviewer manually transcribed the conversation. Interview no. 2 involved both a hotel owner and a hotel manager, both members of *Associazione Jesolana Albergatori*, the main employer organisation for hoteliers in the area. Additionally, an interview was conducted with a hotelier affiliated with another employers' association, *Confcommercio*. Three trade union respondents from different organisations were also interviewed: two from traditional trade unions (Cgil and Uil) and one from a grassroots one (Adl Cobas). The Cgil and Uil respondents are from the sectoral branches dealing with this industry (Filcams-Cgil and Uiltucs), with the Uiltucs interviewee specialising in legal disputes. Two other key informants included a local activist from a left-wing party who has been involved in migrant and refugee solidarity initiatives for 30 years, and an employee from the Jesolo public employment service office.

The remaining 24 interviewees were workers, including 13 Italians and 11 individuals with an immigrant background. Of the latter group, two had obtained Italian citizenship, while others held residence permits (either short-term or indefinite) or were asylum seekers with precarious legal statuses. These respondents originated from Bangladesh (4), Pakistan and Tunisia (2), Morocco, Bosnia and Romania (1 each). Among the Italian workers, 10 were young people. Respondents were recruited through various channels, such as referrals from other interviewees, the local Cgil immigration desk office, or a Bangladeshi cultural mediator from Padua who collaborates with local public services. Additional contacts were made directly in the field, including social hubs like a low-cost Asian restaurant in Jesolo, frequented by many immigrant workers. Although the interviews primarily covered Jesolo, they also included nearby towns. Except for the trade union representatives, all interviewees are referred to by pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

In addition to the interviews, local newspaper archives (*La Nuova Venezia* and *Il Mattino)* were reviewed to gather information on the local tourism sector, including labour shortage debates, cases of severe exploitation, and statements of various social actors. Job listings from Facebook groups that connect employers with job seekers were also monitored. The original research design revolved around a core question concerning working conditions and the normalisation of exploitation forms, in line with the methodology suggested by Davies (2019), as well as the potential occurrence of more severe cases. However, a second research question regarding workers' exit strategies emerged from the ground, as the topic repeatedly surfaced in interviews. We deemed it important to give this issue specific attention. Several other relevant themes also arose (such as accommodation), which are not the focus of this paper but are crucial to understanding the complexity of working conditions in the sector.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS. EXPLORING CRITICALITIES AND BREACHES OF LABOUR STANDARDS

Based on the empirical evidence collected, this section aims to analyse the main recurring practices of both normalized and severe forms of labour exploitation in the seasonal tourism sector of the study area, some of which are summarised in Table1 below. We organised the research findings into three key areas: a) pay and contractual forms; b) work rhythms and supervision; c) segmentation based on gender, migration status, and age. The boundaries between these dimensions are often quite blurred, with frequent intersections.

Pay and contractual forms

Regarding the overall wage levels in the sector, these have been significantly impacted by structural issues within the Italian Industrial Relations system – a point that has been brought into sharp focus by the ongoing debate about a potential introduction of a statutory minimum wage. Although, as will be seen, under-the-table

Table 1. Critical issues in working conditions, by dimension and form of manifestation.

Dimension	Form of manifestation
Pay and contractual forms (formal domain)	Low wages Delays in the renewal of major sectoral collective agreements (CAs) Use of pirate CAs or convenience CAs Workers hired at lower pay scale levels
Pay and contractual forms (informal domain)	Under-the-table payments (compensation of overtime, missed days off, etc.) All-inclusive wage (individual negotiation) Misuse of deregulated contractual forms (e.g., internships; job on call)
Work intensity and pace	Chronic understaffing in many organisations Limited or no breaks *De facto* piecework (housekeepers paid per room cleaned) Long working hours Fragmented shifts Self-disciplining
Supervision and surveillance	Constant employer surveillance (stronger in family-run enterprises) Worker-to-worker surveillance along hierarchical, sometimes racial, lines (chefs over dishwashers; senior housekeepers over more precarious ones, etc.)

wage-setting practices are widespread, the stagnation of union-regulated wages has an impact on the broader landscape of individual negotiations, in a context where formal and informal domains increasingly intersect. Specifically, one key issue is the considerable delays in renewing collective agreements, a phenomenon that affects various production sectors unevenly. Private services, for instance, face greater challenges than the manufacturing industry. According to Istat's monitoring, by September 2022, only 2.1% of collective agreements in the industrial sector had expired, compared to a staggering 63% in the tertiary sector (Istat 2022). As a result, wage levels have been adversely affected. For instance, the Federalberghi-Faita collective agreement, covering more than 400.000 workers in the hospitality sector (including hotels and campsites), was renewed in July 2024 – more than five years after its expiration date (Fisascat-Cisl 2024).

It should also be noted that, instead of applying the collective agreement specific to the tourism sector, many employers frequently use the more convenient multiservice sector one, particularly for cleaning and housekeeping. As highlighted by a trade unionist from Adl Cobas, which monitors the sector in the province of Venice:

> The general issue stems from the type of collective agreement in use. In this regard, many employers opt for the multiservice sector CA instead of the tourism sector CA. While we consider wages to be low across the board, the tourism sector CA would be more favourable. The other one has not been updated for many years, and its gross pay has remained inadequate. This is one of the main concerns: wage capacity, or how much I earn based on the work I perform [Interview no. 5].

Another contributing factor to the deterioration of wage conditions is the presence of so-called pirate agreements, negotiated by unrepresentative trade unions, which create downward pressure on wages established by agreements signed by major unions (Leonardi, 2022; Lucifora, Vigani, 2022; Orlandini, Meardi, 2023). In the tourism sector, and specifically in the area we studied, the use of these agreements is also evident in job advertisements posted in the Facebook group *Offro cerco lavoro Jesolo* [Offering and looking for a job, Jesolo], one of the key platforms where supply and demand of labour can match. These ads often reference the application of the collective agreement signed by Cisal, a small, non-representative union, particularly in the hotel cleaning sector. An employee of Uiltucs legal dispute office in Mestre, who follows the seaside tourism industry closely, explained:

> The ideal collective agreement would be the tourism sector one, signed by the three main unions (Cgil, Cisl, and Uil). However, we frequently see other agreements being applied, which offer wages that are 30% lower, hirings at lower pay scale levels, or 13 months of pay instead of 14. (...) This occurs because many businesses outsource parts of their operations to companies, often with the registered office in Campania. When we review the mandatory communications sent to INPS, we find out that most companies based in Campania apply these pirate agreements [Interview no. 6].

These practices often involve service cooperatives, as noted by a local Filcams-Cgil official. These cooperatives «simultaneously manage the housekeeping operations of two or three hotels, but they tend to be poorly structured and often experience a high mortality rate» [Interview no. 9]. In any case, in the context of our research, unlike in other urban areas, many hotel owners prefer to manage these segments of the workforce in-house, showing a degree of scepticism towards outsourcing, and even more so towards the use of agency work [Interview no. 2]. This, however, does not automatically result in better labour conditions.

Another critical issue stands from hirings at lower pay scale tiers, often resulting from the polyvalence of tasks performed by workers, which are not fully recognised in wage and contractual terms. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in smaller organisations and is generally exacerbated by the chronic under-staffing of the workforce, a recurring theme in the interviews conducted. For instance, dishwashers frequently take on additional responsibilities, such as assisting cooks with tasks like salad preparation. This situation can lead to mixed feelings among individual workers. Imran, an asylum seeker from Bangladesh, expressed a positive view of not being confined to a single task where «you learn nothing» [Interview no. 3], while simultaneously acknowledging the unrecognised extra workload that comes with it. Another example involves handyman workers, as illustrated by Luca, a young Italian employee hired by a hotel in Jesolo:

> I am a handyman. I park customers' cars when they arrive, act as a porter by taking luggage to the rooms, and I also manage the swimming pool. My tasks include preparing and cleaning the pool, maintaining the outdoor areas, and handling minor repairs that do not require outside technicians. Additionally, I take care of delivering laundry to the floors. Although I'm hired as a concierge assistant, my actual duties differ significantly from what this title suggests. Here in Jesolo, job contracts are often designed for convenience, which means they cost the employer very little [Interview no. 15].

Other notable examples of underpayment are provided by the Uiltucs official. A hotel night porter, for instance, is typically hired at the sixth tier of the tourism sector's collective agreement pay scale. According to the collective agreement, this wage level should cover only security-related tasks. However, it is not uncommon for the same porter to be asked to handle late-night check-ins, which involves managing ID documents and sensitive customers' data – a responsibility that should warrant a level three classification. Yet, this adjustment is not always made. Regarding housekeeping staff, cooks, and pizza makers, the interviewee further explained:

> Floor maids are hired at level six because they are supposed to focus solely on cleaning rooms. In reality, they often perform additional tasks, which should qualify them for a level five or even four classification. The same issue arises in restaurants and pizzerias. Cooks and pizza makers, who are central to the business, are sometimes hired as assistant cooks, placing them one or two wage levels lower than they should be. When they talk to colleagues in other workplaces who are properly paid, word spreads, and by the end of their contracts, litigations can arise [Interview no. 6].

A common practice is the under-the-table payment. Against the backdrop of a part-time or full-time contract, wages are partially transferred through the bank, following the contractual schedule, and partially paid in cash. This arrangement is often used to cover overtime and compensate for missed day offs. It can be appealing to certain segments of the workforce, such as young people or recently arrived immigrants with precarious legal status, who may prioritise immediate income over indirect or deferred benefits. Furthermore, under the table payment is not always a one-sided imposition by employers. Workers sometimes negotiate this part of salary in informal, individual discussions, using it to secure increases based on factors like seniority or trust. For example, Francesca, after several working seasons at the same campsite, negotiated a raise in her under-the-table wage as a condition for continuing to work there [Interview no. 18].

However, this practice presents several issues. It often functions as an all-encompassing wage scheme, where the agreed monthly salary includes 13th and 14th month payments, severance pay, as well as overtime, night, Sunday, and holiday shifts. This mechanism is known as *paga globale* [all-inclusive wage] and is very common in industries like shipbuilding (Quondamatteo, 2022). The all-encompassing pay is often well below the correct amount and difficult for workers to understand. Maria, a Romanian woman employed as a housekeeper, explained that she never

had the courage to ask a trade union to check her payslip. After comparing it with her son's, she realised how different they were:

> I have everything included in my payslip. My son, who just started working at the same pay scale level as me, gets the 13th and 14th month pay separately. In his payslip, everything is clearly marked, but in mine, it's all lumped together [Interview no. 26].

Nafis, a hotel night porter of Bangladeshi origin who has been in Italy for over 30 years, added:

> I know hotels where everything is regular: pay, severance pay, etc. However, most hotels do not provide severance pay or the Renzi bonus. They simply tell you that they are giving you a sum of money, and that is it [Interview no. 7].

Nafis' reference to the «Renzi bonus» is particularly revealing. Introduced in 2014 and later extended, this tax bonus aims to ease the tax burden on low- and middle-income employees. As a tax withholding agent, the employer is required to pay this bonus to their employees in their pay envelopes. Yet, in this sector, under the guise of all-inclusive pay agreements, it is common for employers to withhold the tax bonus and keep it for themselves. In most severe cases, as reported by the Filcams-Cgil official, employers also withhold tax deductions that workers are entitled to, based on their previous years' tax declarations[2].

The mechanism of under-the-table payments may exert a disciplining effect on workers, as it relies on mere verbal agreements and promises that the employer can easily question, reinterpret, and deny. In this context, the unionist of Adl Cobas and Francesca explained:

> The issue of economic promises leads to significant blackmail. For instance, I might say, 'I'll officially pay you €1000 for a part-time contract, but in total, I'll pay you €2000 a month'. Many people understandably accept such compromises, which are not always honoured. In those cases, one has to be very cautious [Interview no. 5].

> During my third year working at the same campsite, I requested a week off in mid-September – something I had never done before. Naturally, the owner held this against me and withheld the extras – namely the under-the-table wage part – for that month. Essentially, it was a form of punishment. So, I only asked for holidays that year, but after that incident, I did not attempt it again [Interview no. 18].

A contractual form that can facilitate these entrenched practices, if misused, is job on call. This type of contract is frequently employed during the early part of the season (for example, in May), when the tourist traffic has not yet peaked. It provides employers with considerable flexibility, allowing them to forgo hiring for non-peak months while supplementing on-call work (formally limited to legal boundaries) with a fluctuating amount of non-contractual hours paid in cash as needed. On-call contracts are often converted to part-time or full-time from June onwards. Additionally, specific contractual forms are utilised for the differential exploitation of youth labour, as we will discuss later.

Pace and supervision

Workloads in the tourism sector are generally intense, exacerbated by the understaffing prevalent in many organisations. This situation results in extended working hours (overtime) and heightened work rhythms. A notable example is that of floor maids, who are often paid on a piecework basis, meaning they receive compensation per room cleaned. This practice is common in the hotel industry worldwide and has been extensively documented in the literature (McDowell et al., 2007; Lundberg, Karlsson 2011; Sherman 2011; Iannuzzi, Sacchetto 2022; Bullock et al. 2024). Several interviews we conducted corroborated this phenomenon, revealing that maids are typically

[2] As a tax withholding agent, the employer advances this amount to the employee on behalf of the State, which reimburses the employer at a later date.

allotted just 10 to 15 minutes to clean each room [Interview no. 6]. This tight timeframe leads to both increased pressures to work quickly and the need for unpaid overtime to fulfil their assigned duties.

Understaffed workplaces often rely on the acceleration of employees' work pace: breaks are limited, meals are eaten quickly or at the end of the shift and even going to the toilet becomes difficult. This is not always directly imposed by the employer but is often a form of self-discipline forged through daily work experience – an aspect explored in the sectoral literature, for instance by Çıvak (Çıvak 2021; Çıvak et al. 2024), who drew on Bourdieu's theoretical reflections. In our research, for example, Hamza, a Pakistani dishwasher working in a hotel (shift: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.), felt that another worker was needed to assist him and his two colleagues. He explained:

> The pace is intense. That's why we do not take breaks, and we eat only after work. It's usually pasta or chicken, but always after the shift. Are you asking if I go to the bathroom? If I go even for two minutes, the dishes pile up [Interview no. 12].

Another telling case is Giulia, a young Italian who had her first job experience as a waitress in Jesolo. She worked in a hotel where the owner used extreme cost-cutting strategies for staffing:

> The pace and hours were unbearable. I worked every day without a single day off, but that's very common. My shifts were 10 to 14 hours long. (...) There were five of us, all waitresses, and we basically ran a four-star hotel. We did everything: washed dishes, served guests, and sometimes even had to cook. At that time, I thought being a waitress meant doing everything. We were understaffed, and he refused to hire people [Interview no. 1].

Shifts and working hours are especially long in the animation sector and holiday campsites. The service is typically outsourced to specialised companies. Morgana, a young Italian worker, shared her firsthand experience in this employment segment. She described a typical working day consisting of a morning shift from 9.45 a.m. to 12 a.m., an afternoon shift from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., and an evening shift from 8.45 p.m. to 11 p.m. In addition to this routine, she was also involved in entertainment activities during lunch breaks and night rehearsals for evening shows and performances, which could last until «2 a.m., 3 a.m., 3.30 a.m., even 4 a.m.» [Interview no. 24].

Another interview with a Tunisian pizza maker (Tarek) highlighted similarly gruelling hours. He had worked in a restaurant-pizzeria owned by Italians but left due to issues with unpaid wages. His workdays often stretched to 12-14 hours, with variable shifts depending on business demands. His job contract did not specify fixed hours, and a significant portion of his salary was paid off the books. Typically, he started working at 9 a.m., and could end as late as 11 p.m. While there were supposed to be breaks (during certain afternoon hours), the owners would often extend his working hours to accommodate customer flow, afternoon birthday parties, or other needs [Interview no. 16].

Several interviews also mentioned tight supervision of their work, especially in family-run businesses [Interviews nos. 1, 10, 15, 16, 18]. This oversight also extends beyond the mere capital-labour relationship. Chefs often act as *de facto* supervisors for dishwashers [Interviews nos. 3, 12], demanding faster work rhythms. Hamza usually captures this demand with a word frequently repeated by the chef: «quick, quick, quick» [Interview no. 12]. Luca also noted similar dynamics in his workplace, where older maids oversee and pressure younger ones, creating tensions described as «a struggle among the poor» [Interview no. 15].

Differences matter. Migration status, gender, age

The tourism sector is marked by various forms of segmentation that trap workers in distinct, highly gendered, racialised, and age-specific roles. In terms of ethnic stratification, native men and women typically occupy customer-facing jobs like receptionists, bartenders, entertainers, while migrant workers are often relegated to behind-the-scenes roles, such as in kitchens or housekeeping. In the context we studied, migrant workers began entering the tourism workforce in the 1990s. Tommaso, a political activist involved in promoting social inclusion for migrants explained:

> It all started with refugees fleeing the wars in the former Yugoslavia. They were housed at a Red Cross facility in Jesolo. Many locals were opposed to their presence, given our city's reliance on tourism, fearing it would harm the area's image. But local entrepreneurs

> would go to this facility seeking workers for their businesses – dishwashers, assistant cooks, positions that were all internal, out of the public eye [Interview no. 8].

Lejla, one of our interviewees, comes from this initial migration stream. Despite her extensive experience as a room cleaner, she only managed to advance from the sixth pay scale tier to the fifth one near the end of her career. This wage and contractual progression only occurred after she changed her employer, as her previous one refused to meet her requests [Interview no. 29].

Over the years, the national composition of the workforce has evolved, with a notable increase in workers of Bangladeshi origin. According to ISTAT data, in 2023, Jesolo was home to 2.603 foreign-born residents, of which 15.6% were of Bangladeshi descent, making it the second-largest nationality after Romanian. This resident migrant population is a primary source of seasonal labour in the tourism sector. Additionally, many Bangladeshi workers move to Jesolo for the summer season from cities such as Rome and Milan. Nafis estimated that around 80% of these workers find housing through a network of fellow countrymen – friends, acquaintances, and family members – while only 20% secure accommodation through their employers [Interview no. 7]. This factor makes Bangladeshi labour highly attractive for employers, as they can alleviate the costs related to social reproduction, in a context where housing is a significant challenge.

Moreover, some seasonal workers of Bangladeshi origin use winter unemployment period to visit their families in Bangladesh [Interviews nos. 7, 30], a practice also observed among Pakistani workers like Bilal, a hotel dishwasher [Interview n. 14]. Bangladeshi, along with some Pakistani, workers dominate the lower-skilled and labour-intensive sector of dishwashing. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the number of asylum seekers entering this employment niche. Conversely, the housekeeping segment features a significant presence of Eastern European female workers, such as those from Romania and Ukraine, while sub-Saharan migrants are relatively less represented than in urban areas of the region. Some Eastern European workers only come to Italy for the summer season, returning to their home countries for the remainder of the year.

Regarding the role of gender hierarchies within the sector, the use of low-cost collective agreements and pay schemes has a direct impact on the cleaning sector, which is composed entirely of female workers. The issue is exacerbated by pervasive sexism in workplaces, as highlighted in some interviews [Interviews nos. 1, 10, 18]. Sexism also leads to a differential increase in workload. For instance, Francesca shared an experience in this regard:

> At some point, it happened that that someone had to clean the tables. Even though two male colleagues were doing nothing at that moment, the owner would send me while I was already busy. He would say to me: 'You have to clean the tables because you are a girl, and girls clean the tables [Interview no. 18].

Another significant challenge for women in the workforce is balancing non-domestic work hours with family responsibilities, a burden that continues to primarily fall on women. This is particularly relevant in the seasonal tourism industry, where days off are often overlooked, and many shifts are fragmented. In their search for employment, many women must navigate these challenges, as noted by Elisa, an Italian hotel bartender and handywoman [Interview no. 10].

Finally, youth labour plays a crucial role in the local economy. In the area we studied, «doing the season is almost an obligation for young people» [Interview no. 18], on average more oriented towards service sector jobs (large retailers, care services, tourism) and less inclined towards factory work. While tourism sector employers often express frustration about a perceived lack of interests from the younger generation – alongside concerns about a shrinking workforce due to demographic shifts and the overall aging population [Interview no. 2] – our research reveals a significant number of young people working as seasonal employees to fund their studies and contribute to family budgets. Young workers represent a particularly cheap labour force, as they can be hired through internships and apprenticeships – contractual forms frequently exploited in a distorted manner to further reduce labour costs. Here are three excerpts from interviews with a young worker (Giulia), a hotelier, and the Uiltucs official:

> I was hired as an intern, and part of my salary was paid off the books. It's a common practice to pay people less. Internships typically offer around €800 [Interview no. 1].

> Internships contracts are often used with young people, but the pay they receive depends on their performance. Last year, I had two young interns at my facility. I felt embarrassed when I paid them the first salaries and committed to improving their conditions. Yet, in this industry, these types of contracts are standard and often applied to many students attending secondary schools with vocational training in the hotel industry [Interview no. 2].

> Internships should be used for those entering the job market – such as students nearing high school diploma. Internships can last a maximum of six months and are typically based on an all-inclusive pay. Our region has implemented this framework to boost workers' figures. However, companies have manipulated this term to employ even trained youths. Where there is a law, there is a loophole [Interview no. 6].

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS. EXIT AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE?

This section examines how workers respond to the challenging working conditions discussed above. Our research did not find any recent instances of collective mobilisation. Interviews with union officials and activists highlighted significant difficulties in organising workers within the sector [Interviews nos. 5, 6, 9]. Most trade union interventions revolve around individual lawsuits related to unpaid wages, which typically arise at the end of the summer season when employment contracts conclude.

In our interviews with workers, we identified two specific cases where union intervention took place. First, Tarek approached the CISL offices after a dispute with his employer over pay, which ultimately led to the termination of his employment relationship [Interview no. 16]. Second, Morgana sought assistance from Adl Cobas, supported by her family, after being dismissed from her job in the animation sector due to a disagreement with a manager from the outsourced firm handling the service [Interview no. 24]. The grassroots union successfully advocated for her reinstatement by sending a letter to the external firm. In response, it dismissed the manager for unprofessional behaviour and replaced him with a new one. Initially, working conditions improved with the new boss: he reduced working hours, allowed animators to bathe during beach shifts and treated workers more respectfully. However, these improvements were only temporary, the situation plummeted again when one of the animators fell ill and was unable to work for several consecutive days, so a new union intervention was required.

Beyond these specific instances, and aside from various forms of verbal expression and grievances – also observed in other studies, such as the one conducted by Çıvak and colleagues in Turkey (Çıvak et al., 2024) – the most common response among workers in this sector to unfavourable conditions seems to be to *vote with their feet*, by leaving their jobs. Based on the evidence collected, we identified several ways this mobility power is exercised.

One notable case involves young workers who have always viewed tourism jobs as a transitional phase in their career prospects. These individuals often take on jobs in the sector during their late teens and university years to gain some financial independence from their parents or to help cover the costs of their studies. Giulia exemplifies this perspective:

> Hotel and restaurant owners hire young people who need money. They know there are university students looking to fund their master's degrees or Erasmus experiences. In these situations, there's a willingness to work 15-hour days. They heavily rely on our inexperience. For me, it was entirely normal to work under those conditions. After that hotel experience, I assumed all jobs were like that. Everything changed when I did an internship in my field, cultural heritage. There, I realised that working does not mean exhausting yourself, and I understood how I had been manipulated in the tourism sector [Interview no. 1].

Similarly, Francesca, after years of seasonal work at the same campsite, aligned her job search with her university studies in environmental sciences. Morgana, despite not having completed secondary school and having a lower level of education, is also uninterested in staying in the tourism sector. She is considering taking a course to become a care worker [Interview no. 24].

Additionally, there are workers, both specialised and less skilled, who would have preferred to remain in the tourism industry but have sought opportunities elsewhere to improve their circumstances. This chance to change jobs and sectors is typical of the region we studied, one of the richest in the country with a high labour demand. A hotel manager shared insight on this matter:

> New types of employment have emerged that draw from the same labour pool as ours. For instance, consider large-scale retail. It was once unimaginable for a supermarket to have kitchen staff. Now, supermarkets of all sizes have kitchens where they prepare baked goods and other items. These roles have become attractive options for many cooks, who can now choose between a permanent position in a large retailer or a seasonal job in our industry. In the less skilled professions, we see significant competition from the online sector. Many of *Amazon*'s drivers are young people who previously entered our industry, as it had low entry levels for unskilled profiles. Now, many are leaving seasonal work to join these larger companies that offer more opportunities [Interview no. 2].

This phenomenon is echoed by Barbara, a cashier in a Jesolo supermarket, who noted that many of her colleagues in the gastronomy department transitioned from the tourism sector [Interview no. 17]. Barbara explained how they were able to maintain continuity with their professional profiles by staying in the kitchen area. These workers have not only improved their job stability – a point emphasised by the hotel director – but also benefited from better shift arrangements. They have moved away from the fragmented shifts of lunch and dinner in their previous roles to more continuing working hours in supermarkets.

Moreover, some workers remain in the tourism industry, like Elisa, who has left small to medium-size hotels for a chain facility:

> The place where I work now? It's the first good company I've been with, the first to provide me with a badge to clock in and out. This company operates differently compared to the four or five experiences I had. For instance, in my last hotel, the porters were hired by a cooperative, but here they are employed directly by the hotel. Even in terms of pay, I earn €500 more, along with all the benefits [Interview n. 10].

This type of mobility is limited due to the production structure of the area we studied. Chain hotels are relatively rare, while small and medium-sized, often family-run businesses make up the majority of the market. Job mobility within the sector from one season to the next remains high, as the area is not known for strong worker retention.

Finally, our research also explores the mobility power exercised by migrant employees. A portion of Bangladeshi seasonal workers who had been working in Jesolo for years embarked on a further migration to the UK. Tommaso pointed out:

> Two or three years ago, we saw a significant migration of Bangladeshi employees from Jesolo to England. Most went to the UK because they had contacts who could help them. I met many of them, and we've stayed in touch. They say they would never return to Italy because they found better treatment there, both in terms of wages and welfare [Interview no. 8].

Local media also covered this phenomenon (Cagnassi, 2022). A 2022 article reported approximately 1.000 fewer Bangladeshi workers than usual – assistant cooks, handymen, dishwashers and porters. These workers had been in Italy for a long time, with some having obtained citizenship, thus gaining a stronger passport. This migration of Bangladeshi workers from Jesolo to the UK echoes a trend previously identified by Della Puppa (2021): workers disillusioned by the Italian experience embarking on a new pathway in search of a more inclusive society, drawn by the presence of a large Bangladeshi community in the UK. However, it is important to note that this represents a specific segment of migrant labour. On the other end of the spectrum, our research encountered asylum seekers or more recently arrived immigrants for whom working in Jesolo's tourism sector is one of the few available options. Some even view these jobs as an improvement in their conditions. This is the case of Bilal, the aforementioned Pakistani labourer. He regularised through the 2020 amnesty after a rejected asylum application. In the interview, he compared his current job as a dishwasher in a Jesolo hotel to a worse experience in a Chinese restaurant in a nearby town:

> I worked as a dishwasher in a sushi restaurant owned by Chinese people. At first, I worked 10 hours a day, seven days a week, for a salary of €850. After the Covid period, I returned to the same job, still working 10 hours a day but with one day off. I earned slightly more (€1.000) but was now both a dishwasher and an assistant cook. The surveillance was more intense, with the owners constantly watching me and telling me to use less water. Here in Jesolo, the situation is better – I earn €1300, with one day off [Interview no. 14].

In this case, working in a Jesolo hotel represents an improvement, although the €1.300 includes eight hours of weekly overtime and holiday surcharges. Additionally, some Bangladeshi workers try to enter the tourism sector after negative experiences with compatriot employers:

> In Jesolo, many of our countrymen have opened shops and other businesses. For some Bangladeshis, this serves as their entry into the local labour market. However, all the Bangladeshi workers employed by Bangladeshi owners either lack a proper job contract or are only contracted for four hours a day, while their shifts are 14 or 15 hours long. Countrymen exploiting countrymen... That's why many people contact me, as I've been here for 30 years and know many people. I help them to find work in hotels [Interview no. 7].

The fact that the tourism sector is temporarily viewed as a better alternative to other jobs does not mean that migrant workers see it as a permanent career choice. Hamza hopes to find a job in manufacturing, which he believes would offer greater stability and independence [Interview no. 12]. Similarly, Imran considers his current role as a dishwasher to be only a temporary step [Interview no. 3]. During his migration pathway, he worked as a receptionist at a government office in Dubai. Fluent in English – our interview was conducted in that language – he is now learning Italian and aspires to find a more qualified position. These examples highlight the varied trajectories of labour mobility, shaped by both aspirations and constraints.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The paper examines critical challenges within the seasonal seaside touristic sector in Eastern Veneto. It emphasises the structural character of labour standard violations and how these intersect with factors like gender, migration status, and age. The erosion of labour standards follows specific patterns across these lines. For instance, internships and apprenticeships are often misused to differentially exploit young workers, while wage deflation occurs through low-cost outsourcing and the use of pirate collective agreements in cleaning cooperatives (female and often migrant workforce). This takes place within a scenario in which the spheres of formality and informality are deeply entangled and interwoven.

More broadly, in this contribution, we present the wide range of drivers that can contribute to the weakening of labour protection. These factors outline the normalisation (Bullock et al. 2024) and routinisation (Davies 2019) of labour exploitation forms. The more these factors recur simultaneously in workers' everyday experiences, the more systematic the constraints become (Lewis et al. 2015; Fudge 2019), both in and outside the workplace, negatively shaping labour conditions in the sector. A paradigmatic example is that of Bangladeshi workers who arrive in the region we studied for the sole duration of the season, with their social reproduction (housing) typically shifted by companies onto the community networks. In these cases, wages consistently fall below the level needed for social reproduction, aligning with the concept of super-exploitation (Selwyn 2020; Portes Virgio et al. 2023). This leads to structurally poor housing conditions – an issue that, due to space limitations, this paper does not address in detail, but which provides important grounds for future research. Similarly, local female (native or with migrant background) and young workers' incomes are poor and below the subsistence level if calculated on the whole year, but they are able to cope with super-exploitation thanks to household solidarity that means the availability of a shared house and multiple incomes.

Additionally, the paper analyses the common practice of paying part of salaries under the table, fostering informal wage-setting mechanisms. These arrangements are not always one-sided; workers may leverage the experience or the difficulty of their replacement to negotiate the informal components of their pay. However, these verbal agreements, based on mere promises, often serve as tools for employers to extract maximum labour effort: extended

hours, intensified workloads, or reluctance of workers to ask for holidays and day offs, as seen in interviews with Tarek and Francesca.

Whether paying part of the wage under the table is therefore a managerial strategy of entrepreneurs to reduce the indeterminacy of work effort (Smith 2006), this article also explored the second side of labour indeterminacy (labour mobility), referencing Smith's framework. Thus, the paper detailed various forms of quitting strategies employed by workers to challenge poor working conditions, a highly visible and recurrent phenomenon in the interviews conducted.

Other forms of resistance emerged. For instance, underpaid hotel maids, who were exposed to long shifts and were not provided with food by their employer, rebelled by sneaking on the sly food from the kitchen or even from customers' plates when the latter ordered richer meals such as fried fish. Nevertheless, a more detailed treatment of these misbehaviour practices (Ackroyd, Thompson, 1999) would have required more in-depth and time-extensive research using ethnographic practices (for an in-depth analysis of resistance practices in the tourism sector see, for instance, Çıvak et al. 2024). On the other hand, our research collected a multitude of details on the plurality of exit forms, which we try to summarise here. With regard to young people who have seen and/or see jobs in seasonal tourism as transitional jobs, mobility trajectories are mainly influenced by education. Graduates tend to seek jobs related to their field of study (in our research: cultural heritage or environmental sciences), while those without secondary education may transition into social or care work. On another front, some workers, like cooks, leave the tourism sector for roles in large-scale retail, where their skills are recognised, contractual stability is greater, and working hours are less fragmented and anti-social. Other workers, performing less skilled tasks in the tourism industry, move into driving jobs with companies like *Amazon*.

It is important to highlight how the possibility of these forms of exit can take hold within a distinctive labour market, one that differs from other regions of the country – for example, the Mezzogiorno – where leaving the tourism sector presents greater challenges for workers. A task for future comparative research could be to focus on exit practices across different contexts, in order to reflect on the relationship between these practices (as potential forms of agency and resistance) and the various constraints that make them more or less difficult to pursue.

Among those who, by contrast, remain within the tourism sector in the area we studied, the quitting option exercised by Elisa – moving from less structured firms to a chain hotel – is limited by the dominance of small and medium enterprises with less formalised labour relations. Anyway, many workers switch jobs between seasons. Therefore, turnover is significant in many organisations. It is more challenging to move from one hotel to another within the same working year. According to some interviewees, this is generally frowned upon by employers. In a local labour market when hoteliers know each other, it is easy, by word of mouth, to end up on a sort of blacklist as a troublemaker. Changing jobs within the same season is relatively simpler for young workers, not being reliant on wages to support a household. In this case, jobs most frequently left involve ice cream parlours, pizzerias and campsites.

Migrant workers also exhibit varying forms of quitting. Some Bangladeshi workers left Italy for the UK, though this may decline due to Brexit effects (Morad et al. 2021). However, workers with EU citizenship, such as those from Eastern Europe, may explore similar opportunities (Andrijasevic, Sacchetto 2016) towards other member States, as revealed in the interview with Nafis. Asylum seekers, a growing and more vulnerable workforce with precarious legal statuses, face greater challenges in exiting severely exploitative jobs. However, their current positions may still represent a partial improvement over more precarious experiences in sectors like ethnic shops or Chinese restaurants. This trend aligns with recent research on the gig economy and food delivery (Peterlongo 2023; Orth 2024), employment contexts known for their lack of labour protections (Tassinari, Maccarrone 2020). Yet, as Orth explains about some migrant workers in food delivery sector in Berlin:

> labour conditions for migrant workers outside platform work can be more precarious than on platforms, including regular wage theft, homelessness, unstable housing and sexual, physical and psychological abuse by landlords and employers. Indeed, the workers employed for this study themselves often compared their platform jobs favourably to other low-wage jobs they had done outside of platforms (Orth 2024: 483).

This important nuance is crucial for understanding the complexity of migrant workers' employment and life trajectories, particularly in labour markets with strong segmentation. It also highlights how entrepreneurs can exploit these dynamics in specific ways. Despite being trapped in precarious conditions and haunted by even worse past work experiences, migrant labourers continue to consider further mobility opportunities. Hamza, for instance, looks to the manufacturing sector, while Imran aims for a qualified public-facing job. Several factors play a key role in these possible transitions, including the educational background, the wealth of experience accumulated in the migration path, the proficiency in English, and the speed with which migrant workers learn a good Italian.

Finally, exploring these exit forms is crucial in a context where employers complain of labour shortages and seek to recruit workers from non-EU countries like Egypt (Cagnassi, 2023). Employers also advocate for structural labour migration programs, particularly focused on seasonal work, and a simplification of bureaucratic processes [Interview no. 2]. In this scenario, could workers' mobility power lead to improved working conditions? Unlike the authors with whom we critically engaged in the theoretical part of the paper (Katz 2004; Rydzik, Anitha 2020), an important classic literature essay frames quitting strategies as resistance (Edwards, Scullion 1982: 92). Nevertheless, these scholars stated that quitting did not effectively resolve collective grievances and, therefore, was not necessarily a strategy that favoured workers' overall interests, even though it allowed individuals to move to a preferred job (*ibid.*). In the context we studied, the evidence outlines a more nuanced situation where some workers manage to individually bargain for a pay increase, often in the under-the-table part of the wage. This is more successful for workers with a higher seniority rate and a better knowledge of the local labour context. The employers interviewed spoke of a rebalancing of power relations that has already taken place. However, in a number of cases and job positions, understaffing is a critical issue, which multiplies the overall workload. Possible individual improvements are thus unevenly distributed among the workforce, and the segmentation axes we have referred to also play a role here.

Nonetheless, within this peculiar context, the combined effects of quitting, workers' mobility trajectories, and ongoing and chronic employers' narratives on labour shortages may offer opportunities for trade unions and public institutions to push for better regulations at the territorial level, addressing not only wages but also the regularity of contractual forms, working hours and other aspect of workers' conditions including accommodation.

Some labour segments can lead the way, such as future tenders for the concession contracts of bathing facilities, where social conditionalities can be demanded. The regulatory issue then arises both at the national level (the ongoing debate on the introduction of a statutory minimum wage) and at the subnational one, where some specific contractual forms (traineeships regulated by the region) end up reproducing a grey area of circumventing of labour standards with regard to the youth workforce.

Trade unions themselves may take the opportunity to rethink their practices, even in the face of challenges due to the characteristics of the sector. Understanding which forms of power resource to mobilise is crucial, so as not to limit intervention to albeit important *ex post* legal disputes to recover unpaid salaries and wage differentials. The information aspect on workers' rights should not be overlooked, since the most exposed segments of the workforce (young people, asylum seekers) can be easily reached with targeted activities in schools or refugee reception pathways run by public institutions or cooperatives. A virtuous combination of mobility power practices at the individual level, renewed trade union action and regulatory interventions may have greater cumulative effects, especially if they will be able to influence the orientations of at least some of the firms in the sector towards longer-term arrangements (in order to keep the industry attractive for workers) rather than short-term excessive deregulation (Wright 2004). The goal should be to promote decent work and uphold the value of dignity in tourism employment, as also highlighted by other contributions in the literature (see, for instance, Winchenbach et al. 2019).

The challenges will likely remain significant, particularly due to the predominantly seasonal characteristics of the sector studied. However, there are opportunities for individual, collective, and institutional actions, which this contribution has sought to explore in their various dimensions.

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APPENDIX

List of interviews

Table 2. List of interviews.

Interview sequence	Date	Respondent's category	Nationality	Pseudonym
1	19/05	Worker	Italian	Giulia
2	23/05	a) Hotelier; b) Hotel director [both members of Aja]	Italian	a) Dante; b) Fiorenzo
3	23/05	Worker	Bangladeshi	Imran
4	27/05	Hotelier [member of Confcommercio]	Italian	Mattia
5	05/06	Trade unionist, Adl Cobas	Italian	/
6	05/06	Union official, Uiltucs [Lawsuit office]	Italian	/
7	14/06	Worker	Bangladeshi; Italian	Nafis
8	16/06	Pro-migrant activist, Key informant	Italian	Tommaso
9	17/06	Union official, Filcams-Cgil	Italian	/
10	20/06	Worker	Italian	Elisa
11	08/07	Worker	Italian	Paola
12	09/07	Worker	Pakistani	Hamza
13	10/07	Worker	Italian	Carlo
14	11/07	Worker	Pakistani	Bilal
15	12/07	Worker	Italian	Luca
16	13/07	Worker	Tunisian	Tarek
17	15/07	Worker	Italian	Barbara
18	15/07	Worker	Italian	Francesca
19	16/07	Worker	Italian	Dario
20	26/08	Worker	Italian	Alessandra
21	26/08	Worker	Italian	Rossana
22	26/08	Worker	Italian	Adriano
23	27/08	Employee of public employment service office	Italian	Cecilia
24	27/08	Worker	Italian	Morgana
25	28/08	Worker	Italian	Celeste
26	29/08	Worker	Romanian	Maria
27	29/08	Worker	Bangladeshi	Abdul
28	29/08	Worker	Moroccan	Omar
29	30/08	Worker	Bosnian; Italian	Lejla
30	30/08	Worker	Bangladeshi	Shakib
31	11/10	Worker	Tunisian	Mahdi