

THE COLLECTIVE RECRUITMENT MANAGEMENT IN THE ORIGIN OF TEMPORARY COLOMBIANS IN THE PROVINCE OF LLEIDA¹

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The economic growth of the past decades has favoured that in the incorporation into the labour market there has been a greater tendency to occupy jobs in sectors such as services and industry at the expense of the primary sector. The working conditions and the cyclical nature of the agricultural activities remain a differentiator that makes them unattractive. This situation has resulted in a lack of manpower to meet various tasks generated in the field, making it necessary to articulate a specific recruitment procedure for foreign seasonal workers in their countries of origin. Lleida's entrepreneurs in the fruit sector were the ones who conducted the first pilot experiments in 1999 and are, after the farmers of the province of Huelva, those who employ more labourers in this way.

Work after exposing the background showing why Lleida arose the need to contract day labourers in their home countries analyzes the implementation of these seasonal contracts, their evolution and finally its current situation, with special attention to the preferences

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shown by employers regarding the nationality of the labour force, as embodied substantially in the recruitment of Colombian workers. The reason for it and the profile of the contracted worker is approached.

To achieve these objectives various methodological techniques have been used. The fundamental starting point was the information provided by the Provincial Labour and Immigration Unit of the Prefectures in Lleida, the analysis of the generated rules to regulate these contracts and revising various official statistics, technical reports and literature. This work has been complemented by field work supported by interviews with stakeholders, to reflect the views of employers, unions and the government.

As noted, the lack of sufficient manpower to meet farm work imposed the adoption of several legal instruments that allowed contracting foreign workers as labourers. The first step was taken with the non-legislative proposal concerning the situation of foreigners in Spain of 1991. In 1993 the quota policy was adopted, which set a number of non-EU foreign workers who were allowed to enter Spain on an annual basis. However, the quota did not fulfil the needs of the farmers.

That is why in 1997 the Framework Convention for Collaborative Management of Internal Migration in Different Campaigns Temporary Agricultural Employment was signed, which definitely solves either the lack of labourers, and expanded with the Additional Protocol of 1999. In 2000, the new Law on Foreigners incorporated the contents of the Convention and its Additional Protocol, the figure of the quota and seasonal activities recognized as a special regime, which increases the seasonal quota, with the approval of Law 2/2009 is called collective contract management at source. It is a mechanism of labour recruitment that allows contracting labourers from outside the EU residing in their own countries.

They arrive by a specific procedure for seasonal activities, which includes special processing times, in line with the particular campaign. The worker is contracted according to the needs of the employer, based on what is known as the national employment situation, so it is not a competition for the Spanish labourer or other foreigners already residing in the country. This explains why in the socioeconomic context which Spain is currently facing, characterized by high unemployment, authorized shares are significantly reduced (in the case of Lleida, from 3,787 in 2005 to 628 in 2012), while still approving to move forward the crops in provinces as Huelva and Lleida, being the two most important examples.

After the province of Huelva, Lleida is the province that contracts the most labourers through this system of labour recruitment, being intended basically for the collection of sweet fruit, cherries, apples, peaches, nectarines and pears in spring and summer, and the grapes as of September. One advantage of this contractual procedure is the stability posed by the need to provide the necessary number of workers during the campaign, with experience in rural activities.

The profile of an employee demanded by the farmers in Lleida is characterized by a predominance of male workers, given the hard work in the fields, while women are engaged in tasks in fruit storage. In terms of nationality the preferences are focused on Romanians and Colombians, mainly for economic and cultural reasons and the ease when making the selection in the countries of origin. Romania, to join the EU and acquire full freedom of labour flow, remained outside the collective recruitment management at source, so this country no longer appeared in the official statistics until 2012, which does not imply that there is no

recruitment there . This has reinforced the relative weight of Colombia, although in absolute terms the contracted volume is similar and it is even reduced in the last years because of the economic situation, in order to give priority to local unemployed, whether domestic or foreign.

As indicated, the recruitment of temporary Colombians to work in the fields of Lleida began with the pilot experience of 1999 and has been maintained with more or less intensity until today. The existence of a recruitment organization in the country, as the Program of Temporary Colombian Peasants in Spain, provides an advantage for the agricultural entrepreneurs from Lleida, to avoid travelling to Colombia for the recruitment.

Another reason is because they have established ties between the authorities of the country of origin, Colombia, and the country of destination involved in the contracting process, specifically between the Colombian NGO TierraUNA and the Farmers Union of Catalonia. These ties have been articulated through training programs for temporary contracted employees originally to become development agents when they return to Colombia. At the same time, these agencies have boosted agricultural development projects in the countries of origin, mainly Colombia, and to a lesser extent Morocco and Bolivia.

The season workers often come back for the next period. This means that they come via an offer for having participated in previous campaigns and have complied with the commitment to return to their country of origin once the employment relationship has ended. For Colombians, the length of their contracts (usually between 6 and 9 months) and the possibility of working again soon contribute remarkably to their return and therefore, the fact of coming back. The farmer demands them because he is satisfied with their job performance, and also with his little vindictive nature. Moreover, doing so he recovers the investment in human capital formation (situation of the farms, harvesting techniques, etc.).

The entry into recession of the Spanish economy since 2008 has not changed the need for temporary labour in the agricultural sector of Lleida. However, there have been significant reductions in the volume of contracted workers through the collective management of contracts in origin. Labour mediation efforts undertaken by the Catalanian authorities to boost the employability of the unemployed in fruit harvesting activities have resulted in poor performance, which has led to the current reduction to a seven months contract for the non-communitarian employees. These tasks are still not attractive, despite the unemployment. Meanwhile, agricultural employers prefer contracting at home, offering them higher guarantees: ensuring the necessary labour throughout the campaign to collect fruit and the employee has the experience that is required for this type of job, because in many cases they are employees who were already contracted in previous years.

