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## **Title: Framing of policy responses to migrant horticultural labour shortages during Covid-19 in the Italian print media**

### **Abstract**

The Covid-19 pandemic led to a global food crisis. Like previous food crises how the debate is framed by food policy actors can have a bearing on policy outcomes. This study researches how the policy responses to migrant horticultural labour shortages, due to the pandemic, were framed in the Italian print media and how this relates to longer-term food policy making. Data were gathered from the six highest-circulation Italian daily newspapers. The coverage was dominated by left-leaning outlets and peaked in relation to Covid-19 recovery policies and political processes. Farmer industry bodies were the most quoted group, and the legalisation of undocumented migrant workers was the most frequently discussed policy response. A frames analysis was conducted and identified three principal frames: food security, worker exploitation and immigration. The worker exploitation and immigration frames were most frequently used by left-leaning newspapers, while centre-right papers used the food security frame the most often. The results suggest that media framing could contribute to both policy change, helping to open policy windows, as well as policy lock-ins, side-lining certain debates, actors and policy solutions. The research aims to contribute to growing empirical work which seeks to understand the impact of Covid-19 on migrant agricultural workers and food policy.

**Key words:** Agriculture; Covid-19; food policy; Italy; media analysis; migrant labour

## 1. Introduction

The public health crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic triggered a complex global food crisis. This led to increased political and public attention on food workers, resulting in fast-tracked policymaking to ensure that they could continue to pick and pack food and keep citizens fed (Barling, 2020; Neef, 2020). The food sector is the world's largest labour force and work is concentrated in the "off-farm" sections of the supply chain (Bohm, Spierenburg and Lang, 2019). However, as Covid-19 induced panic buying emptied supermarket shelves, the public, media and political attention turned to on-farm work and *who* is deemed an essential worker. In the EU agricultural workers were categorised as "essential" during the pandemic (Kalantaryan, Mazza, and Scipioni, 2020) but this has not necessarily led to a shift in policy and practice in terms of how workers are treated, and their rights respected.

Within food policy, crises can be moments of policy change. Previous crises have exposed the longer-term battles over competing approaches to how food is grown, transported, manufactured, governed, consumed and disposed of (Lang and Heasman, 2015). "In wars, propaganda prevails", write Lang and Heasman (2015), and the media's role and influence is enhanced. Covid-19, like wars, created a period of turmoil. The motivation behind this study is therefore to understand and analyse how, in a time of food system upheaval, media reporting links to either policy change or the maintenance of the status quo using the example of the Italian print media reporting on migrant horticultural labour (MHL). Covid-19, like earlier food crises, led to polarised responses from food policy actors, accentuating the longer-term food wars (Clapp and Moseley, 2020). Some think that the system's vulnerabilities were exposed by the pandemic, requiring systemic change, while others believe that the system showed resilience and current food governance and policy models should be maintained (ibid.). Italy was selected as it is one of Europe's significant horticultural producers. In 2017, the sector was valued at €10.6 million, accounting for 18.5%

of the total EU value, second only to Spain (Eurostat, 2019). It was also the first European country to be hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Migrant workers play a central role in the agri-food system in Italy and beyond, but it remains an under-researched area (Corrado, Castro and Perrotta, 2018; Bohm, Spierenburg and Lang, 2019). There is a notable absence of studies which specifically use a media analysis methodology to analyse how MHL is reported on in the media, despite the role of the media in exposing the conditions of Italian migrant farm workers (Corrado, 2011; Perrotta, 2015; BBC, 2018; Perrotta, 2021). Bauder's (2008) study of the framing of migrant farm workers in Canada is an exception to this. Iocco et al. (2020) study Italian far-right party, *Lega's*, party press releases and politicians' speeches. This isn't a media analysis, but its main finding that agriculture is used to invoke nationalism is of relevance here. There are media framing studies on related themes such as: migrants in Italian print media (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004; Taylor, 2014); media reporting on food scares (Ibrahim and Howarth, 2016); agricultural production methods such as GM foods (McCluskey et al., 2016) and policies related to antibiotic use in animal agriculture (Morris et al. 2016). These provide relevant methodological insights. This research therefore intends to contribute to filling the gap by focusing on how the media reports on the topic of MHL and the implications for food policy.

There are two other areas of relevant research which this paper aims to build on and compliment. Firstly, it aims to build on the nascent body of empirical research that seeks to understand the impact of Covid-19 on migrant communities and the agricultural sector in Italy. Tagliacozzo, Pisacane and Kilkley's (2020) stakeholder analysis assesses how local, regional and national networks of government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were able to rapidly mobilise to support migrants as the pandemic struck but note that longer-term, systemic responses were lacking. Meanwhile, Corrado and Palumbo (2022) have conducted a comparative policy analysis of Italy and Spain's legal and political responses to migrant labour conditions during Covid-19, how this relates to longer-

term restructuring within the EU agri-food sector and the dominance of buyer-driven supply chains. Lastly, using political speeches, press conferences and media interviews Perrotta (2021) has conducted a discourse analysis of the arguments and rhetoric used by key Italian political actors in the debate about the legalisation of undocumented agricultural workers during the pandemic. While these studies have different methodological approaches, they share the finding that the impact of the pandemic on migrant agricultural workers and the political debate surrounding the topic must be understood in relation to the longer-term trends in the Italian agri-food sector, detailed in section 2 below.

Secondly, it aims to compliment the body of research which focuses on the lived experience of migrant workers which use qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, to document the poor pay and working conditions of both EU (documented) and non-EU (undocumented) workers in the horticultural farms of Southern Italy (see for example Corrado, 2011; Perotta, 2015; Urzi and Williams, 2016). The invisibility of worker exploitation is a key theme in these studies (Rye and Scott, 2018); workers are literally and metaphorically hidden in rural areas far from public and political scrutiny. Protests organised by workers have helped to demonstrate workers agency and media reporting on demonstrations has played a role in rendering these often-hidden workers visible (Corrado, 2011; Perrotta, 2015; BBC, 2018; Perrotta, 2021). This study compliments lived experience research by using a different methodological approach (media analysis) to understand the role that the media can play in influencing the policies that affect workers lives.

Based on this existing research as well as wider food policy trends, detailed in section 2 below, this study seeks to understand how the Italian print media has framed the debate around policy responses to MHL shortages during the pandemic. Specifically, it studies the trends in media reporting, the frames that are used in the coverage and how this relates to longer-term food policymaking. Through this it argues that the media can help to both open

the window for food policy change on certain topics while side-lining coverage and debate of other policy responses.

Section 2 details the significant food policy trends related to MHL in Italy. Section 3 outlines media framing as a theoretical approach. Section 4 covers the methodology. Section 5 shares the results of the media analysis and section 6 provides the discussion followed by the conclusion in section 7.

## **2. Food policy trends and Italian migrant horticultural labour**

To understand how Covid-19 affected migrant horticultural labour in Italy, it is necessary to consider three significant policy trends – global value chains, migration policy and labour policies - which affect the politics and governance of rural labour forces in the sector. Each is reviewed in turn.

### ***2.1 Global value chains and supermarketisation***

Across Europe, the rise in migrant seasonal labour in the horticultural sector since the 1990s is linked to the EU-backed liberalisation of the agri-food sector and has become a core component of rural European societies (Rye and Scott, 2018). This has resulted in increased integration of small-scale farmers into international supply chains and, in turn, the reliance on cheap, just-in-time, migrant labourers for farmers to “survive” in these supply chains (Corrado, Castro and Perrotta, 2018; Rye and Scott, 2018; Friberg & Midtbøen, 2018). In Italy, this process of “supermarketisation” – the increasing dominance of buyer-driven supply chains whereby retailers dictate the terms of business – began in the 1990s (Dixon and Banwell, 2016; Clapp, 2016; Perrotta, 2015). The term *grande distribuzione*, which translates as big distribution, is used in Italian to refer to both the big retailers and newer discount supermarkets (Salvia, 2019). Policy measures to limit the impact of supermarketisation on producers include the 2019 EU Directive on unfair trading practices,

which forbids practices such as buying at prices below production costs, was transposed into Italian law in April 2021 (Corrado and Palumbo, 2022).

Retailers control 60% of the Italian fresh fruit and vegetable market (Salvia, 2019).

Unlike other agricultural commodities, small-medium sized farms still produce a significant proportion of Italian horticultural produce, particularly in the South (ibid.). For smaller farms, supermarketisation has led to a race to the bottom on workers' wages and conditions as farmers seek cost-saving mechanisms, attempting to stay "competitive" in the face of retailer price pressure and unfair trading practices (Rye and Scott, 2018; Corrado, 2011). This is particularly the case in the horticultural sector where a "just-in-time" labour supply is required for the intense harvest periods (Perotta, 2015; Salvia, 2019). In 2018, there were an estimated 346,000 documented migrant workers in the country's agricultural sector, with Romanians making-up the largest proportion (Coldiretti, 2018). There are a further estimated 150,000 undocumented migrants according to the Italian Ministry of Agriculture (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Those without the legal right to reside in Italy often work a "tour" of Italy's regions, following the seasonal harvests of different produce (Iocco et al., 2020) as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Map of Italian horticultural harvests throughout year. Source: Compiled by authors using Google Maps and inputs from Iocco et al. (2020)

## 2.2 Migration policy

Italy operates a seasonal worker scheme called “flow decrees” (*decreto flussi*), enshrined in 2002 as the Bossi-Fini law, which sets an annual quota for seasonal migrants (Colombo, 2013). However, the quotas are often insufficient to meet the demand for labour and they have been cut by almost half since 2011, creating a gap which is not typically filled by “local” labour, (Corrado, 2011; Open Society Foundation European Policy Institute (OSFEUPI), 2018). As such, there are limited legal routes for low-skilled, seasonal workers from non-EU countries to enter Italy. The presence of a large, undocumented rural migrant workforce has

thus become structurally linked to the Italian agricultural sector and rural communities. These workers are some of the most vulnerable to exploitation (Iocco et al., 2020).

At the EU level, freedom of movement under the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU permits EU workers, notably from the recent accession states of Romania and Bulgaria, to travel and work in the sector. EU workers experience obstacles to realising their rights (OSFEUPI, 2018), with farmers producing counterfeit paperwork to avoid the costs associated with declaring their production, for example (Urzi and Williams, 2016). In June 2020, five months into the pandemic, the EU deemed seasonal labourers as essential workers, thus permitting their travel to Italy (EC, 2020).

### **2.3 Labour rights policies**

Italy has no national minimum wage. Instead, unions negotiate collective bargaining agreements (CBA), (Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), 2015). In the agricultural sector, the CBA wages are typically set between €42-48/6.5 hours of work (Perrotta, 2015), but workers are often paid less than the agreed wage (ETI, 2015). Labour recruitment in the Italian agricultural sector is closely linked to the illegal gangmaster system called *caporalato*. *Caporali* are gangmasters who collaborate with farmers to supply labour, organise transport, temporary accommodation and pay wages to the workers after taking their cut. This illegal system is associated with the exploitation and suffering of vulnerable migrant populations (Iocco et al., 2020). A 2016 law banned *caporalato* by making abusive gangmasters and farmers liable but the practice is still widespread (OSFEUPI, 2018; Iocco et al., 2020).

There is a suite of policies at the EU level that seek to protect workers' rights. The EU seasonal worker directive aims to ensure workers' immigration statuses aren't tied to their employer contracts and that workers receive the same social security and other basic rights as Italian citizens for the duration of their employment (EU, 2014). The EU Directive on exploitation of agricultural labourers is intended to disincentivise labour abuse through

sanctions but its translation into Italian law has been critiqued as it fails to exclude liable farmers from EU subsidies (ETI, 2015). The 2030 update of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) also includes “social conditionality” measures for the first time which, when they come into force in 2025, aim to protect farmer workers’ rights (EC, 2021; FLAI-CGIL, 2020).

The impact of the pandemic on MHL must therefore be understood and assessed against this backdrop of wider food policy trends which influence both the reality of life as a migrant horticultural labourer in Italy as well as the Italian government’s policy responses during Covid-19 and media reporting on the topic.

### **3. Theories of framing**

The media influences policymaking and decision makers through what it does and doesn’t publish and how stories are framed (McQuail, 2013:14). Agenda setting and framing are two key concepts which theorise how the media influences policymaking. Agenda setting posits that there is a relationship between what the media covers, where it is positioned in the coverage, and the importance attributed to issues by audiences (Sheufole and Tewksbury, 2007:11). Framing pays attention to not only *what* is covered but also *how* it is covered, making some issues more salient than others (Entman, 1993). It is distinct but related to frames analysis as a methodology to study texts (see section 4 below). The relationship between what and how the media covers a specific topic, and the policymaking process is dynamic and can change over time (Yanovitzky, 2002). Short-term intense periods of media coverage can increase policymakers’ attention to an issue and generate short-term policy responses. Framing was selected here as the theoretical basis for the study, given the focus on *how* media reporting on MHL affects the policymaking process. It is also important to consider how the relationships between media and policy can change overtime.

Concepts of framing originate within communication disciplines, and news media is “the most prominent discursive site in which communication researchers strive to understand what framing is and how it works” (D’Angelo and Kuypers, 2010). However, theories of framing have been extended and used across other social science disciplines. For example, in policymaking the concept of consensus frames refers to how a rhetorical agreement over specific policies often masks conflict when it comes to policy implementation (Mooney and Hunt, 2009). Collective action frames have been developed in relation to the study of social movements and are used to legitimate certain sets of actions (Benford and Snow, 2000). What these concepts have in common is the conscious decision to decide what to include and exclude, thereby prioritising a particular problem definition and solution proposition (Entman, 1993). The interest here, therefore, is in how the media frames policy responses to MHL, how this relates to frames used by other food policy actors and actual food policies.

### ***3.1 Framing, food systems and policy change***

Food security and food systems are two significant frames used within food policy. Food security framing studies have typically focused on policy texts, as opposed to media sources, according to Moragues-Faus (2017). Shifts in the framing of food security have been linked to food crises at a global level as well as a national level in Italy. Internationally, Lang and Barling (2012) identify two main global food security frames since World War Two (WW2). The first focuses on productionism; increasing agricultural outputs to realise food security. This came under threat during the 2007-08 food price crisis, opening-up the discursive space for the second food systems frame which considers a wider range of social, economic and environmental dimensions. However, the authors argue that the latter failed to gain traction within mainstream policymaking. Brunori et al. (2013) identify three eras of Italian food security framing. After WW2, a productionist frame was adopted. In the 1980s and 1990s the increasing presence of multi-national food corporations combined with food scares led to the “quality” frame with an emphasis on “Made in Italy” produce and food

culture. The third iteration, triggered by the 2007-08 food price crisis, destabilised the quality discourse with an increased focus on global as well as domestic food security.

Food systems has gained currency among policymakers (Bene et al., 2019) and represents an attempted departure from the more traditional industrial agricultural food model, associated with the post WW2 food security frame (Lang and Barling, 2012). Food systems frameworks go beyond the supply chain process to consider the interconnections between the social, economic, environmental and other dimensions of the food system (Parsons, Hawkes and Wells, 2019). In relation to policy formulation, this requires understanding the *practical* interconnections between policy areas which are directly related to food production, such as food safety standards, as well as those that have an indirect but interconnected impact, such as migration policy. In relation to frames analysis, a food systems approach requires an appreciation of the *discursive* interconnections which exist between policy areas and actors. For example, Ibrahim and Howarth's (2016) analysis of UK media reporting on the 2013 horsemeat scandal identifies a discursive connection between food safety and immigration. The "othering" of Romanians was used as part of the meat contamination frame, despite the evidence that the contamination with horsemeat occurred in France.

To understand how shifts in food policy framing happen, the role of the media in this and the implications for actual policies, we can look to public policy and communications scholars. Concepts such as punctuated equilibrium theory (Cairney et al., 2019) and policy window theory (Kingdon, 2014) emphasise how unexpected events can punctuate the normally stable, slow process of policymaking, forcing decision makers' attention to turn to new issues. However, Yanovitzky (2002) cautions that increased media attention can lead policymakers to generate short-term policy responses, but not necessarily those which focus on the longer-term drivers and solutions to policy problems as media attention on a particular issue subsides. Covid-19 is an example of such an event, punctuating the equilibrium of MHL supply and wider food policies.

To understand why food policy change *doesn't* happen some food policy scholars have looked to lock-in theory (Mason and Lang, 2017; IPES, 2016), positing that European agri-food models are locked into the political and economic power of food retailers and manufacturers. Their influence over food governance results in feedback loops that reinforce certain models of production and consumption. Some researchers argue that one such lock-in is the presence of a cheap, flexible labour force. This locks farmers into a production model whereby they are reliant on processors and retailers to sell their produce, despite supermarkets' downward pressure on farmgate prices, requiring the exploitation of workers for farmers to "survive" (Perrotta, 2018).

From a media perspective, Yanovitzky (2002) notes that policy makers can be less susceptible to media framing and prescriptions of how a given problem is defined and the solution proposed, if the media frame does not fit with the policymakers' own beliefs, knowledge and vested interests. This, in turn, can influence why despite media attention of a certain topic, *does not* necessarily lead to specific policy outcomes, thus contributing to lock-in. An appreciation of how these wider drivers and obstacles to policy change related to MHL is necessary to identify if and how the media reports on and influences such challenges and the possible implications for post Covid-19 food policymaking.

#### **4. Methods**

Italian print media were selected due to their role in Italian media culture of influencing elite audiences such as policymakers (Rowinski 2017). Print media also offer an easily accessible form of data via news media databases (Morris et al., 2016). Italy's media system is closely linked to the political establishment and different papers have different political persuasions (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Hibberd, 2008). Among the right-leaning, high circulation dailies are *Il Giornale* (owned by Berlusconi's media group) and the centre-right *Il Corriere della Sera*. On the centre-left there is *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica*. *Avvenire* is a

Catholic Church-backed, high-circulation, left-leaning daily and *Il Sole 24 Ore* is the country’s mainstream financial focused newspaper and leans centre-right.

Italy has typically had low circulation and readership rates as print media is considered part of the elite establishment vis a vis more popular, mass-market broadcast media. For example, in 2012 Italy had just 121.4 newspaper readers per 1000 people compared to 408.5 in the UK (Rowinsky, 2017). The top six newspapers based on monthly circulation figures for May 2020 were selected to represent a balance between right- and left-leaning press as well as influential specialist groups (the Catholic Church with *Avvenire* and the financial sector with *Il Sole 24 Ore*), as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Italian print media outlets circulation figures for May 2020. Source: Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa (ADS) (2020)

Newspaper	Monthly circulation rates (May 2020)
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	274,912
<i>La Repubblica</i>	211,348
<i>La Stampa</i>	153,657
<i>Avvenire</i>	114,692
<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	102,465
<i>Il Giornale</i>	94,332

#### 4.1. Data collection

The Factiva database was used to retrieve articles from the Italian media. The search string “Braccianti AND (coronavirus OR covid)” was tested with the “all sources” function on Factiva. Note that the Italian word *bracciante/i* is a specific term to refer to farm labourers which is today considered synonymous with migrant farm labourers. The time frame was set for 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020–20<sup>th</sup> August 2020. The start date coincides with the start of Covid-19 lockdowns in Italy. The end date was selected to capture reporting during the horticultural harvest season but to allow enough time for results analysis within the research timeframe for this study. The initial search returned over 2,000 results including from irrelevant sources, such as online blogs. Following this, the same search string and dates were tested by

manually selecting the six national dailies. For all six outlets the print (labelled “Italian”) version was selected, not the online edition. For *Il Sole 24 Ore* the digital replica of the print edition was selected. This returned 199 results of which a sizeable sample were relevant, so no further search strings were tested.

The results were refined with inclusion and exclusion criteria. Duplicates were excluded. News and opinion and commentary articles were included given the role that the latter play in longer-term agenda-setting and the prevalence of commentary and analysis within Italian journalistic culture (Poletti and Brants, 2010; Rowinski, 2017). Letters to editors, book and TV reviews and live blogs were excluded. Articles focusing on labour shortages in other countries in the Italian press were removed. The remaining 82 articles were skim read to ensure relevance with search terms and research questions. For example, there were articles that included one mention of *braccianti* but the emphasis was on wider groups of migrant workers, including care and domestic workers, and did not focus on the agri-food system. 68 Italian articles were included in the final sample. See Appendix A for the full list of articles. The lead author speaks Italian and therefore the articles were not translated and were read in the original language. Quotes presented in the analysis were translated by the lead author.

#### **4.2 Data analysis**

To identify the trends in media coverage, Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) techniques were used to analyse the manifest content (Schreier, 2014; Wood et al., 2014). The manifest content (date, outlet, section, geographical focus, policy responses mentioned, and spokespeople quoted) were recorded in a spreadsheet for each article to identify relevant trends. To find the manifest trends in the policy responses that were reported, as opposed to the more latent content of how these responses were framed (Entman, 1993; Wood et al., 2014), the policy responses mentioned were recorded. The spokespeople quoted for each article were logged and organised into the three categories of Lang’s (2005) food policy

triangle (food supply chain, government, civil society) so that trends across different outlets could be identified.

To identify the frames used, an inductive approach was initially adopted, interpreting the data through descriptive coding to identify key concepts that summarise the topic (Saldaña et al., 2011). Using Wood et al.'s (2014) Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) approach, batches of articles were read and manually coded until no new codes were identified. This process found an initial 38 codes, see Appendix B. The second stage adopted Morris et al.'s (2016) use of Benford and Snow's (2000) three frame functions – diagnostic, motivational and solutions - to refine the codes and identify frames. For each article, the problem definition, motivational drivers and solution propositions were identified. This resulted in four codes for the problem definition, eight for the motivational causes and four for the solutions. Counter-frames are a rebuttal to the dominant frame (Morris et al., 2016). They were identified by noting if an article included a different solution proposition to the dominant one used in the article's frame. Counter-frames or positions were recorded but not coded into categories. Data were then entered into a spreadsheet, logging which codes the article referenced to identify trends.

### **4.3 Limitations**

Methodologically, the use of the Factiva database meant that not all Italian national newspapers were searched which could have a bearing on the results. This was mitigated by selecting newspapers which represented a cross-section of Italian papers. News databases only provide the text of the article, so news is read without the context of any accompanying images. When analysing the results, it became apparent that terms such as *stagionali* (seasonal worker) and *irregolari* (irregular) were often used. Using the term

*grande distribuzione* (a collective noun meaning “big retailers”) might have retrieved results with a focus on issues related to global value chains and supermarketisation.

To mitigate these potential limitations, subsequent search strings were tested, using the same time period and outlets as the final sample. The following search string yielded 134 results: *(atleast2 braccianti OR atleast2 irregolari) AND (covid OR coronavirus)*. The term *staionali* was removed as this returned results relating to other meanings of seasonal, such as seasonal viruses in the context of Covid-19. The 134 articles were skim read and 74 were of relevance, thus a similar sample size to the final one. The distribution of outlets across left and right-leaning outlets of this test sample was very similar to the final sample used here; 69% of the articles were in left-leaning outlets and 31% in right-leaning compared to 68% and 32% respectively in the final sample. A further search string was tested to understand the links between reporting on MHL and supermarkets/supermarketisation: *(atleast 2 braccianti OR atleast2 irregolari) AND grande distribuzione AND (covid OR coronavirus)*. This only returned eight results, indicating that this is not a topic that was widely covered in the media. See Annex C for further details and rationale for testing these additional strings.

Analytically, frames analysis is critiqued due to varying definitions of the concept of frames and correspondingly varying methodological approaches (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). To mitigate this, the analysis adopted an existing approach to focus the definition and analysis of the frames in a replicable manner by using Morris et al.’s (2016) method mentioned above in section 4.2. This provided a useful tool to break down and code a large volume of text. However, in some instances, it was hard to distinguish between the different frame elements, such as the problem diagnosis and motivational element. Frames analysis – particularly inductive approaches – can be compromised by the researcher’s bias. To counter this, articles were re-read by the lead author with weeks off in between readings to cross-check data interpretation. To address translation limitations, translation of search terms was done in context rather than literally (Taylor 2014). For example, the use of the

term *braccianti* as opposed to the direct translations of workers (*lavoratori*). Translation can also be time-consuming therefore only quotes which have been used in the final paper have been translated.

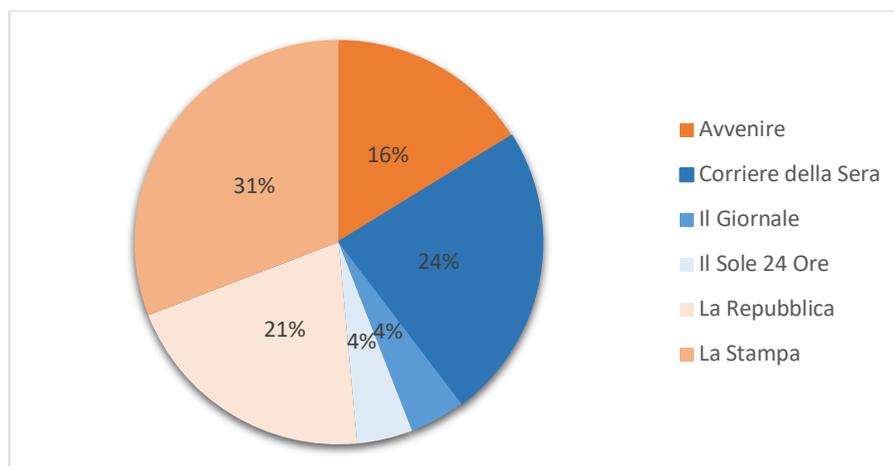
## 5. Results

The manifest content of the print media coverage was analysed to identify four significant trends, which are discussed in turn: (1) coverage (2) temporal and geographical trends; (3) spokespeople and (4) coverage of policy responses.

### 5.1 Trends

In total there were 68 articles on the topic. The coverage was split between the newspapers as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Distribution of media coverage across print media outlet. Orange shades – left-leaning; blue shades – right-leaning. Source: authors



Overall, most of the coverage was in left-leaning papers, with a total of 68% across *Avvenire*, *La Repubblica*, and *La Stampa*, compared with just 32% of coverage in right-leaning papers *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale* and *Il Sole 24 Ore*. The coverage peaked in May, with a total of 26 articles. This coincided with the political process surrounding the

Covid recovery law, *Decreto Rilancio* (“Re-launch Decree”) on May 19<sup>th</sup>. This law included a package of measures to legalise undocumented migrants in Italy, of which MHL represents a significant portion along with care and domestic workers (Governo Italiano, 2020).

In total there were 92 quotations used across the sample of 68 articles. Lang’s (2005) food policy triangle categories (food supply chain, government, civil society) was used as a framework to organise the data and then identify sub-categories of policy actors who were quoted. These are summarised in Table 2.

*Table 2: Spokespeople quoted in sample. Source: authors with inputs from Lang (2005)*

<b>Food policy triangle section</b>	<b>Spokespeople</b>	<b>Number of quotations in sample</b>	<b>Percentage of quotations</b>
<b>Food supply chain</b>	Farmer industry bodies	22	46%
	Farmers	11	
	Workers	6	
	Retailers & manufacturers	2	
<b>Government</b>	National government	10	24%
	Local/regional government	12	
<b>Civil society</b>	NGOs	9	21%
	Church	2	
	Trade unions	9	
<b>Other</b>	Academic experts	5	9%
	Local residents	4	

Within these 92 quotations, actors who frequently appeared as spokespeople are described in Table 3, offering an insight into the key actors who influence MHL policy in Italy. Note that the Italian Government during the research period was led by a Coalition of parties made up predominantly of the centre left *Partito Democratico* and the populist *Five Star Movement*.

Table 3: Key food policy actors on MHL in Italy. Source: authors.

Sector	Actor	Description
Industry	Coldiretti	Represents 1.5 million Italian farmers and has historical links with the Catholic movement.
Industry	Confagricoltura	Oldest industry body, which represents larger landholders and is historically linked to the right-leaning liberal party.
Industry	Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori (Cia)	Represents 900,000 farmers. Has historical ties to the Communist Party but today is part of industry coalitions with Confagricoltura.
National Government	Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forest Politics (Partito Democratico)	Lead ministry in charge of agriculture
National Government	Ministry of Interior (Independent)	Lead ministry for migration policy
National Government	Ministry of Labour (Five star)	Covers labour rights portfolio
National Government	Ministry of the South (Partito Democratico)	Portfolio covers the Southern Italian regions, including key horticultural hubs
Civil society	FLAI-CGIL	Trade union representing agri-industry workers, often works on the ground supporting migrant workers.
Civil society	Caritas	Catholic NGO which runs projects to support migrant workers

Food supply chain actors were the most quoted group with a total of 46% of the quotations. Within this, farmer industry bodies were the most cited with a total of 22 quotes. While the farmer industry groups traditionally have different political roots, as described in Table 3, their quotes were often united in their demand to government to implement certain policies to overcome MHL shortages. Supermarkets and food manufacturing companies were only quoted once each. After farmer bodies, regional politicians (12 quotes) were the second most quoted group followed by farmers (11), NGOs (9) and unions (9). Workers' voices were relatively absent with just six quotes from workers, all in left-leaning outlets. There were four quotes from local residents in articles about the towns of Saluzzo (Piemonte region) and

Mondragone (Campania region) where there are large concentrations of migrant farmworker communities. There were no quotes from consumers.

Different outlets appear to cover different spokespeople. For example, farmer bodies are the most quoted group by right-leaning *Corriere della Sera* while NGOs are the most quoted group in left-leaning *Avvenire*. This suggests that papers of different political leanings profile certain interest groups in their coverage.

To identify the trends in reporting on policy responses, for each article the different policy responses reported were recorded. This enabled the identification of four categories of policy responses. These are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of MHL policy responses reported on in media. Source: compiled by authors with inputs from Colombo (2013); Coldiretti (2020); Corrado and Palumbo (2022); INPS (2020).

<b>Policy response</b>	<b>Summary of measures</b>
<i>Legalisation of migrant workers</i>	<p>Process of “legalising” irregular employment relationships and undeclared work. Includes granting of legal status to undocumented migrants or migrants with “irregular” work contracts as well as Italians doing undeclared work (Corrado and Palumbo, 2022). Links back to “ex-post” legalisation of migrant workers which has been used periodically in Italian immigration policy (Colombo, 2013).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 200,000 workers from agriculture and care sectors eligible but this only represents a small proportion of the estimated 600,000 undocumented migrants in Italy (Corrado and Palumbo, 2020).</li> <li>• Two routes to legalisation: 1) Employers can apply to declare and conclude fixed-term contracts with undeclared workers, allowing undocumented migrants to receive a residence permit. 2) Undocumented migrants with expired residence permits can apply for a six-month extension, allowing them to legally look for a job in essential sectors, such as agriculture (Corrado and Palumbo, 2022).</li> <li>• Relates to article 103 of the Covid-19 “Relaunch Decree”. Legalisation was approved as part of this decree in May 2020.</li> </ul>
<i>Employment responses for Italian nationals</i>	<p>Two policy responses which evolved out of Covid-19, drawing on pre-pandemic policy mechanisms, to hire Italian citizens:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Industry-led and government-backed use of agricultural labour recruitment sites</li> <li>2) Vouchers: Italian farmers are currently able to hire certain seasonal workers (pensioners, unemployed and students under 25) through the government vouchers. With this scheme the government social security service provides contracts, insurance and payroll for workers, so farmers don’t have to deal with as much paperwork (INPS, 2020). Industry bodies Coldiretti, Confagricoltura and Cia called for extension of the scheme so more Italians are eligible (Coldiretti, 2020).</li> </ol>
<i>Safety of migrant workers &amp; local populations</i>	<p>Policy responses intended to contain and curtail Covid-19 outbreaks among MHL and local populations. Measures to adhere social distancing and ensure safety of workers and local populations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• worker accommodation,</li> <li>• quarantine facilities</li> <li>• deployment of army</li> </ul>
<i>Green corridors to permit travel during Covid-19</i>	<p>EU policy created at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure essential goods and workers could travel despite travel restrictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU seasonal agricultural workers were deemed “essential”, permitting their travel through “green corridors”</li> <li>• Farmers and industry bodies often paid for implementation, chartering flights to bring workers to Italy.</li> </ul>

As Table 5 illustrates, across the sample policy responses were mentioned a total of 94 times. Legalisation was the most discussed policy response with 31 mentions, followed by employment (24), safety responses (24) and green corridors (15).

Table 5: Frequency of policy response mentions across newspapers. Source: authors.

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Legalisation</b>	<b>Unemployment</b>	<b>Worker safety</b>	<b>Green corridors</b>
<i>Avvenire</i>	9	2	5	2
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	4	8	5	5
<i>Il Giornale</i>	1	1	2	
<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	1	1		2
<i>La Repubblica</i>	6	6	3	4
<i>La Stampa</i>	10	6	9	2
<i>Sub-totals (total mentions = 94)</i>	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>

Left-leaning outlets recorded the highest number of legalisation policy responses with ten mentions in *La Stampa* followed by *Avvenire* (9) and *La Repubblica* (6). This compares to only six mentions from the right-leaning papers of *Corriere della Sera* (4), *Il Sole 24 Ore* (1) and *Il Giornale* (1), demonstrating that there was more discussion of the legalisation policy response within the left-leaning press. Meanwhile, the discussion of employment measures and green corridors was highest in the centre-right *Corriere della Sera* with eight and five mentions respectively.

## **5.2 Frames**

The results from analysing the latent content to understand *how* the Italian print media report on MHL indicate that there are three frames used: food security, worker exploitation and immigration. The frames were identified by using inductive coding to note the different problem definitions, motivations and solution propositions for each article. For more detail, see the data analysis approach described in section 4.2 above and the codes identified in Annex B. The frames are summarised in Table 6. A detailed discussion of each frame,

describing the problem, motivation and solution frame elements, as well as counter-frames, follows. The section then concludes with a cross-frame comparison.

Table 6: Summary of the four frames used in Italian print media reporting on MHL policy responses. Source: Table adapted from Morris et al. (2016) with authors inputs.

<b>Frame:</b>	<b>Food security</b>	<b>Worker exploitation</b>	<b>Immigration</b>
<i>Problem diagnosis</i>	Lack of labour supply poses a risk to Italian domestic food supply.	Covid-19 amplifies pre-existing labour exploitation and risks worsening the suffering of workers.	Covid-19's impact on migrant labour opens up the longstanding political battle over immigration in Italy.
<i>Motivation / impetus for action</i>	Saving the agricultural sector from the risks labour shortages and unharvested crops pose to farmers' livelihoods.	End worker suffering and the associated illegal <i>caporalato</i> practices.	Motivation varies depending on position on legalisation, different sides use different motivations to justify their stance.
<i>Proposed solution</i>	Green corridors and employment measures to hire Italian workers	Legalisation of undocumented migrant workers	Depends on legalisation stance
<i>Key actors quoted in articles</i>	Farmer bodies & farmers	Unions, regional politicians & workers	National & regional politicians, industry
<i>Outlets associated with frame</i>	<i>Corriere della Sera, La Stampa, La Repubblica</i>	<i>La Stampa, Avvenire and La Repubblica</i>	All
<i>Percentage use across sample</i>	30%	32%	38%

### 5.2.1 Food security frame

#### Problem element

In the food security frame, the problem of MHL shortages is a food security issue; it risks causing a shortage of food supply with subsequent implications for consumer access.

*Corriere della Sera* uses this frame most frequently, applying it in nine articles, followed by *La Stampa* with five articles. *Avvenire* uses it the least with just one article. It is strongly associated with farmer bodies and farmers. 13 articles quote farmer bodies and six quote farmers. Workers are only quoted once in this frame. The diagnostic language used across the centre-left and centre-right papers often refers to the risk of crops going to waste. For example, in *La Repubblica* Visetti (2020) writes of the risk of “crops being taken over by weeds” and *Corriere della Sera* refers to “crops remaining in the fields and rotting” (Vigna, 2020).

#### Motivational element

Economic factors, namely saving the agricultural sector and farmers’ livelihoods as well as the wider economy, are the overwhelming motivational elements for tackling this problem and are used by 15 articles. For example, *La Stampa* quotes a representative of industry body Coldiretti: “Without the possibility of being able to face-up to the current economic challenges [of labour shortages], many farms risk being paralysed or even closing” (Vezzaro, 2020). Realising workers’ rights, ending illegality within the agricultural sector and humanitarian motivators are not used in this frame, further emphasising its economic, as opposed to social, focus.

#### Solution element

The focus is on short-term policy responses to ensure that there is sufficient seasonal labour to avoid food insecurity. Legalisation is only mentioned three times throughout this frame compared to employment measures and green corridors which are mentioned twelve and

eight times respectively. Often these short-term policy options are discussed in conjunction with one another and are associated with certain actors' policy positions. For example, in *La Repubblica* Amato (2020) writes: "While waiting for the 'green corridors' to be created for migrant workers to travel and for legalisation – which risks taking too long in relation to the strong demand for workers – industry bodies have decided to open an online portal to match job seekers with job offers."

### Counter frame

In none of the articles is there a clear counter-frame included but some of the articles include debate about the pros and cons of different policy responses. In articles focused on the seasonal labour challenges in the town of Saluzzo, a key fruit producing hub in the northern region of Piemonte, there is a counter solution that is included as quotes in some articles. Instead of focusing on the policy *outcome* it emphasises the policy *process*, calling for greater integration across regional and national authorities to tackle the public health challenges posed by large influxes of seasonal migrant workers. For example, an article in *Corriere della Sera* by Imarisio (2020) quotes the Mayor of Saluzzo: "It isn't right that the local authorities have to take responsibility and ever-increasing levels of risk when, according to the law those who are responsible, such as the State [national government] and the Regions, don't take any kind of action."

### 5.2.2 Worker exploitation frame

#### Problem element

The problem is about how Covid-19 amplifies the poor conditions, illegality and neglect of workers' rights, which pre-date the pandemic. For example, in a *La Repubblica* article which uses the experience of one migrant worker to tell a wider story Foschini (2020) writes: "Lesek is one of the slaves of coronavirus. Polish, he has lived in the province of Foggia for three years where he works as a seasonal picker... Since the lockdown started his caporali [gangmasters] took him and said, "you must come with us"".

Left-leaning outlets use this frame most frequently, with eight uses in *La Stampa* followed by seven in *Avvenire* and five in *La Repubblica*. Meanwhile centre-right *Corriere della Sera* only uses it once, indicating that the frame is associated with left-leaning publications. NGOs and unions are the most commonly-quoted spokespeople in this frame, with eight and seven quotes respectively. Despite the framing around workers' rights, workers are still only quoted four times within this frame, suggesting that their voice and agency is side-lined from the coverage. Farmer bodies and national politicians are the least quoted groups, with only two and one quotes respectively. The frequent use of this frame by left-leaning outlets and the limited use of spokespeople associated with right-leaning papers (farmer bodies) implies that worker exploitation is a left-leaning frame.

#### Motivational element

The driver for action in this frame is the “opportunity” that Covid-19 represents to end the long-term suffering of workers through legalisation, which is often closely linked to ending illegality and the *caporalato* system. Sixteen articles use ending worker suffering as a rationale for action and eleven use ending illegality. For example, in *Avvenire*, Minniti (2020) paraphrases a priest linked to an NGO project: “Recognising the rights of these workers, concludes Father Pangallo, remains the only way to prevent them from ending up in the hands of the gangmasters without doubt.”

Ten articles use humanitarian motivations to justify particular action on this issue and only three articles use saving the agricultural sector as a motivation for action, suggesting that the motivation for this frame is workers' rights and conditions compared to the economic focus of the agricultural sector in the food security frame.

#### Solution element

Legalisation is the main policy response associated with this frame and is used by twelve articles. It is often described as the route to decent pay, living and working conditions, and

access to public services such as healthcare for workers. In this context, Covid-19 represents the policy window to achieve legalisation and its benefits. A form of legalisation was approved in May 2020 as part of the Covid-19 “relaunch decree” as described above in table 4 in section 5.1. For example, as written in *La Repubblica* by Saviano (2020):

Integration, in this case of foreign EU workers, and legalisation, in the case of non-EU foreign workers, means giving documents and being counted, it means work and housing contracts, it means being able to check the health of workers, it means a social security safety net...it means not having to work when there are positive virus cases, it means avoiding slavery and caporali [gangmasters].

Green corridors are also discussed as a policy opportunity to fast-track workers’ rights improvements for EU workers. For example, in an interview by Cappellini (2020) in *Il Sole 24 Ore* the Romanian Labour Minister says “.... This is the moment to end black-market work. Including for Romanian citizens.”

Safety measures to protect workers in the short-term are discussed in ten articles in this frame, including two references to the deployment of the army in Mondragone to quell clashes between locals and Bulgarian *braccianti*. Employment measures to hire Italian workers are only mentioned in four articles, indicating that these policy solutions aren’t closely associated with the worker exploitation frame.

### Counter-frames

Six articles include counter-frames in terms of the solutions that they discuss. While the issue is framed as one of worker exploitation, the “preferred” policy solution of legalisation is a migration policy response. As such, some of the articles in left-leaning outlets use language and discursive devices to make pro-immigration points. For example, in a *La Stampa* article Perina (2020) challenges the argument against legalisation as a threat to jobs

for Italians: "...the biggest hypocrisy has been to link the opposition to an amnesty [legalisation] by presuming to defend jobs for Italian workers". This suggests that these articles are anticipating critique or attempting to rebut comments from anti-immigration groups and outlets by using these devices.

### 5.2.3 Immigration frame

#### Problem element

In this frame the challenge of Italy's MHL shortage is defined as a longstanding political battle over immigration policy. It is used by both left and right leaning papers. For example, in right-leaning *Il Giornale* a headline reads: "Fight over migrant farm workers 'no to amnesty, yes to voucher'; the left heads towards legalising 600,000 clandestines, no from the centre-right: "jobs for unemployed Italians." (Cottone, 2020).

Meanwhile, Guerrieri and Spagnolo (2020) write in left-leaning *Avvenire* (note that Italia Viva and the Democratic Party are centre-left parties while the Five Star movement is a party in right-leaning coalition government):

On the one hand, there will be the position of the Italia Viva and the Democratic Party, who prefer a "wide" measure that covers sectors other than agriculture and fish, including domestic work; on the other hand, there are doubts from the 5-star movement, who are resistant to casting the net wider.

*La Stampa* (8) uses this frame the most followed by *Corriere della Sera* (5). *Avvenire*, *Il Giornale* and *La Repubblica* each use it three times. It is not used at all by *Il Sole 24 Ore*. National and regional politicians combined are the most quoted group with six and five quotes respectively which is indicative of the political nature of this frame. Unlike the food security and worker exploitation frames, farmers (2) and unions (3) are not frequently

quoted. Again, this emphasises the politicised nature of this frame which focuses less on the economic impacts (food security) or labourers' conditions (worker exploitation) than the other frames. Workers are not quoted at all, indicating that despite immigrants themselves being the ones directly impacted by legalisation policies their voices are absent from the political battle over immigration.

### Motivational element

Unlike the food security and worker exploitation frames, there is a more varied set of motivational reasons used in this frame. Public health motivations to contain the spread of Covid-19 among workers and the wider population is used in 13 articles and mostly by left-leaning papers; suggesting they are using this argument to build discursive consensus for the legalisation policy response. For example, in *Avvenire*, referring to an initiative by Catholic leaders in support of legalisation, Lambruschi (2020) writes: "... [Catholic bodies] have returned to calling for the legalisation of migrants without resident permits not only for humanitarian motivations but also for public health reasons."

In some instances, the articles explicitly address the political battle and use economic arguments to attempt to quash the divide. For example, in *La Repubblica Ziniti* (2020) quotes the Interior Minister who backs legalisation: "This isn't a reform of either left or right – she explains – but a project that is common sense, now more urgent and necessary than ever. To kickstart the economy and for the safety of the country's public health." Ending illegality (5), worker suffering (8) and humanitarian (5) motivations are also used as an impetus for action. Apart from one article in centre-right *Corriere della Sera*, all the articles which use these additional motivational elements are in left-leaning papers.

### Solution element

Like the worker exploitation frame, legalisation is the policy solution most frequently mentioned in articles that use the immigration frame. 15 articles discuss legalisation compared to six articles which mention employment measures and seven articles which discuss safety measures. When the national political debate over immigration plays out in real-life in the towns of Saluzzo and Mondragone, with clashes between migrant horticultural workers and local residents, the policy response that is reported is the deployment of the army to control the situation as opposed to the national focus on legalisation.

The question of legalisation is framed in binary terms, as something one is either for or against. Therefore, in comparison with responses to other policy issues, it is easier to ascertain whether a given article is supportive, against or neutral to the legalisation policy. The articles which use this frame were coded according to these three positions: supportive, against or neutral. Eight articles are pro legalisation, and all these appear in left-leaning outlets. Twelve articles are neutral; either they don't clearly state a position, or they consider the pros and cons of different policy solutions. Indeed, ten of the twelve articles discuss at least two different policy responses. There are five neutral articles in *Corriere della Sera*, five in *La Stampa* and one each in *La Repubblica* and *Il Giornale*. There are two articles that are explicitly against legalisation, one each in *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Giornale*. In some cases, the same paper has articles that take a position on legalisation and others that are more neutral. All of the centre, top-circulation papers do this (*La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*). For example, in a *La Stampa* article Galeazzi (2020) writes:

Regarding the possible solutions to the dramatic shortage of agricultural labour, the political forces are divided and different legal measures to address work in the countryside include those who are on unemployment benefits and other benefits measures.

In all cases, the problem is still framed around the political battle over immigration policy. This could indicate that centre, high-circulation papers seek to present different aspects of the debate to appeal to the varying political persuasions of centre-ground policymakers and public audiences, be they left- or right-leaning.

### Counter-frames

Twelve articles include counter-solutions to the policy position of the article. For example, five articles from *La Stampa*, *La Repubblica* and *Avvenire* mention the unemployment of Italian workers or the lengthy process of legalisation as counterarguments to legalisation. There is explicit use of nationalist language by the right-leaning press linking to the protection of jobs for Italians and the virus to foreigners. For example, writing in *Il Giornale*, Cusmai (2020) links the presence of the virus to foreigners:

Covid is reappearing...currently it seems that the danger of Covid in Italy comes from abroad. The news from the last few days confirms this. Only yesterday 11 cases in Rome and 9 are linked to a flight from Bangladesh, a country where the virus is out of control.

Four articles, three in *La Repubblica* and one in *Corriere della Sera*, report on the cultural phenomenon of recently unemployed Italians returning to work in the fields. The articles estimate that between 20,000 – 30,000 recently unemployed Italians signed-up to agri-industry job recruitment sites for seasonal work (Borrillo, 2020; Brera, 2020). It is cultural in the sense that the articles compare this trend, to pre-industrial farming times when seasonal farm work would have been carried out by Italians, not migrants. They discuss this phenomenon in relation to migrant workers and thus it can be seen as a counter-frame to the immigration frame, specifically to anti-immigration stances.

The articles offer a counter-frame to the immigration debate in two ways. Firstly, they comment on the farmers who are chartering flights to bring across their regular skilled

seasonal workers. This rebuts anti-immigration and anti-legalisation positions; Italy needs the skills of migrant workers and producers are going to extreme measures to ensure they have the labour required by chartering their own flights. For example, Brera (2020) writes: “You need to know how to work in the countryside.... [The Italian knowledge of these] skills disappeared years ago”. Secondly, they question whether there is the quantity of Italian workers needed to fill the labour gap and whether Italians have the skills to do this work. While 20,000-30,000 sign-ups to the job websites is of newsworthy significance it doesn't replace the potential shortfall of the estimated 346,000 documented migrant workers in the sector (Coldiretti, 2018). This counters the anti-immigration argument that migrants are taking the jobs of Italian workers, and echoes Friberg and Midtbøen's (2018) work and Scott and Rye's (2021:473) study exploring how migrant workers are preferred and prized by low wage employers, while also being economically penalised.

Across the articles featuring in this frame, as well as in the entire sample studied, collective nouns are frequently used to refer to migrants, such as *braccianti*, (farm workers) *stagionali* (seasonals), *irregolari* (irregulars) and *extracomunitari* (non-EU migrants).

### 5.2.5 Cross-frame comparison

There are three dominant frames used in the sample and there is a relatively even spread across the three frames; 29% of the articles use the food security frame; 32% of articles use the worker exploitation frame and 38% use the immigration frame. The worker exploitation and immigration frames are most frequently used by left-leaning papers, while the centre-right papers use the food security frame the most. *Il Giornale* only uses the immigration frame, although there are only three articles from this outlet within the whole sample.

The top three circulation papers all use the three frames and, on some occasions, use different frames in close temporal proximity. For example, *La Stampa* published an article

using the immigration frame on 6<sup>th</sup> May, followed by one using the worker exploitation frame on the following day. Similarly, in *Corriere della Sera* the immigration frame was used on the 18<sup>th</sup> April followed by a food security article on 19<sup>th</sup> April, and vice versa on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> June. The use of all three frames by the politically centre ground papers, as well as the use of different frames by the same paper in proximity, could suggest that all three are examples of consensus frames which are deployed to build consensus on both the left and the right of the political centre.

## **6. Discussion**

By analysing the mainstream Italian media debate on migrant horticultural labour during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, this paper has explored how the policy responses to labour shortages were framed and offers insights about the role of the media in longer-term food policy making. The research identified key trends in the coverage. The reporting peaked in relation to the Relaunch Decree, sharing findings with similar media analyses that external events trigger media coverage (for example McCluskey et al., 2015).

The media reporting focused exclusively on policies related to migration and labour rights. Legalisation of migrant workers, which was already on the political agenda pre-pandemic (Perrotta, 2021), was the most mentioned policy response, suggesting that this crisis helped to create a policy window and move the issue up the political agenda (Kingdon, 2014). Meanwhile, the labour rights policy response focused on employment measures for Italian citizens as opposed to migrant workers' rights. There was no reporting on policy responses related to global value chains and measures to mitigate the impacts of supermarketisation, despite the importance and influence of such policies on the Italian horticultural sector (Perrotta, 2018; Corrado and Palumbo, 2022).

The spokespeople quoted largely fall into the three categories of the food policy triangle (Lang, 2005): food supply chain, government and civil society. However, some of those

quoted, namely expert academics and residents, don't obviously fall into these three principal categories. Farmer bodies were the most quoted group but there is a relative absence of quotes from retailers and manufacturers despite their influence and price-setting power. This also links to the lack of mention and discussion of global value chain policy responses. While the media reporting has helped to make the situation more visible, the relative absence of quotes directly from workers chimes with the lived experience research that notes the often hidden and invisible exploitation of workers (Rye and Scott, 2018).

The research identified three main frames which were used by Italian print media to report on the policy responses related to migrant horticultural labour shortages. The first food security frame suggests that this persists as an important discursive framework, echoing Lang and Barling's (2012) observation. While the existing literature focuses on its use within policy communications (Moragues-Faus, 2017), the results also find that it is used by Italian print media. This frame's emphasis on short-term policy solutions (employment measures and green corridors) suggests it remains embedded within a productionist discourse that focuses on maintaining agricultural output during Covid-19. The food security frame used here, with a focus on securing domestic supply and preference for "Made in Italy" produce, arguably represents a retreat from the internationalisation of food security which Brunori et al. (2013) identify and a return to the "Made in Italy" discourse of the 1990s.

The second worker exploitation frame focuses on the systemic pre Covid-19 drivers of labour exploitation in the Italian horticultural sector as the problem. However, it does not report on policy responses, which could help tackle the effects of supermarketisation on worker suffering, such as price-setting power and unfair trading practices, despite EU legislation (EU, 2019) and active civil society campaigns on this topic. Instead, the focus is on legalisation as a migration policy response, which, as Urzi and Williams (2016) identify in their lived-experience research, is seen to have a greater impact on workers' conditions than employment contracts or labour policies.

The third immigration frame echoes Ibrahim and Howarth's (2016) study of UK print media reporting on the 2013 horsemeat scandal in which they find that the framing went beyond the politics of food to the politics of national identity and migration. The way this frame is used in some articles from the right-wing press mirrors the findings of Iocco et al.'s (2020) study of agricultural discourse in populist Italian politics, specifically the idea of protecting agricultural jobs for Italian workers. Thirdly, the use of dehumanising language, particularly through frequent use of collective nouns such as *braccianti* (farm worker); *stagionali* (seasonal) and *irregolare* (irregular) share the findings of Italian media migration analyses such as Taylor (2014) and Sciortino and Colombo (2014). Like these studies, the results here indicate the media's framing of migration issues plays a role in framing public and political discourses of migration.

Taken together, the results from the trends and frames used in the reporting offer insights into the implications for longer-term food policymaking. Entman (1993) writes that frames are also defined by what is omitted or absent. In the case of the worker exploitation frame, there is no mention of potential policy responses to tackle the effects of supermarketisation on workers' wages and conditions despite noting the drivers and impacts of this process. Indeed, none of the frames veer from the four sets of policy responses (legalisation, employment measures, green corridors and worker safety). The relatively even spread of frames used across the sample, the use of the different frames by the same paper in temporal proximity and the absence of reporting on new policy ideas, suggest that all three frames are examples of consensus frames. They are used here as common discursive frameworks through which food policy actors (government, food supply chain, civil society, the media) seek to build consensus across left and right to push or prevent policy change around a status quo set of policy solutions.

There are differing interpretations of how these frames relate to concepts of policy change. On the one hand, it could be argued Covid-19 opened the policy window (Kingdon, 2014), enabling a pre-existing policy, the legalisation of migrant agricultural workers, to be fast-tracked. While the media reporting did not directly contribute to this, the spike in coverage in May as the legalisation policy was approved, and the use of all three frames in this month, arguably contributed to the public debate surrounding the policy. All the policy responses discussed in the media coverage relate to short-term policy solutions to mitigate the risk of labour shortages. This echoes Yanovitzky's (2002) thesis that periods of intense media coverage on a topic can generate short-term responses from policy makers who feel pressured to demonstrate action on an issue. On the other hand, the absence of reporting on new policy ideas and voices, specifically those aiming to tackle the impact of supermarketisation on workers, is an example of how the media could contribute to policy lock-in by side-lining certain problem definitions and solution proposals and overlooking debate and discussion about the longer-term solutions required from policymakers (Yanovitzky, 2002). This echoes Lang and Barling's (2012) observation that the food systems discourse failed to gain currency after the 2007-08 food price crisis and, more recently, Clapp and Moseley's (2020) warning that, like previous food crises, policy responses to Covid-19 risk entrenching and incentivising the continued expansion of an industrial agricultural model.

## **7. Conclusion**

To conclude, Italian print media coverage on policy responses to MHL shortages during the pandemic was dominated by left-leaning outlets and peaked in relation to key political events concerning the legalisation of undocumented migrant workers. Three principal frames – food security, worker exploitation and immigration – were used by the print media to discuss the policy responses to MHL shortages. These frames are specific to the topic, MHL, but share frame elements and discursive devices with existing research into media reporting on related

food policy topics. The focus of all three frames on the same set of four policy responses, suggests that the media simultaneously highlights and side-lines certain policy responses and voices, influencing both policy changes as well as policy lock-ins.

Kingdon (2014) writes that the media can help to shape and structure debate on a topic, but they don't create the topic itself. The implication here for practitioners and policymakers, then, is how to address the role the media appears to play in policy lock-in and broaden the media debate on this topic to consider the longer-term solutions to end migrant worker suffering. The framing findings could help understanding how this topic could garner more media coverage by framing it in certain ways, as well as by using established frames to introduce new policy ideas to the debate.

Further research into the role that the media plays in influencing food policy on the specific topic of MHL as well as the wider shift towards food systems policymaking could include: longitudinal studies to analyse how framing shifts over time; the incorporation of different media platforms such as broadcast or social media; and the use of mixed-methods research such as interviews with journalists and policymakers and/or comparative analysis of policy and media texts to better understand why in this instance the issue of supermarketisation was side-lined.

The motivation behind this study was to understand the role that the media play in influencing food policy during a time of food crisis. The findings here suggest that it helped open the policy window on the specific issue of legalisation of undocumented migrant workers, while side-lining policy debate and solutions related to supermarketisation and workers' rights. The Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing and debates about the appropriate policy responses continue to punctuate the policy equilibrium (Cairney et al., 2019). Food policy actors remain active on this topic and there are ongoing opportunities to influence the media and policy debates to help protect workers' rights.

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**Appendix A: List of titles of full sample of 68 articles.**

Source: Retrieved by authors via Factiva database.

Number	Date	Title	Author	Outlet
1	11/03/2020	La Lente: I 370 mila braccianti e quel rischio per i raccolti	Michaelangelo Borrillo	Corriere della Sera
2	27/03/2020	Bellanova "Raccolti a rischio. I lavoratori straniere vanno subito regolarizzati"	Giovanna Casadio	La Repubblica
3	30/03/2020	Coronavirus, nei supermercati scarseggiano frutta e verdura	Francesco Rigatelli	La Stampa
4	31/03/2020	L'agricoltore rimasto senza braccianti per il coronavirus "il raccolto di asparagi rischia di restare nei campi"	Maria Rosa Tomasello	La Stampa
5	01/04/2020	Nei campi serve il rischio zero	Paola Viana	Avvenire
6	02/04/2020	Arrivi fermi, ci sono timori per i braccianti nei campi	Giulio Isola	Avvenire
7	05/04/2020	Nei nostri campi senza piu' braccia costretti a buttare le primizie	Giampaolo Visetti	La Repubblica
8	16/04/2020	La grande sfida della regolarizzazione "necessaria per far ripartire il Paese"	Paolo Lambruschi	Avvenire
9	18/04/2020	Legge allo studi per 600 mila straniere; "sanatoria" in campagna	Goffredo Buccini	Corriere della Sera
10	18/04/2020	Lavoro in serra senza protezioni per gli illegali che portano frutta e verdura sulle tavole	Flavia Amabile	La Stampa
11	19/04/2020	Lite sui migranti braccianti "no sanatori, ok ai voucher"; La sinistra punta regolarizzazione 600 mila clandestini no del centrodestra: "il lavoro ai disoccupati italiani"	Sabrina Cottone	Il Giornale
12	19/04/2020	Migranti invisibili	Fabio Tonacci	La Repubblica
13	19/04/2020	"Noi senza braccianti a cause dei divieti e gli italiani si offrono"	Rosaria Amato	La Repubblica
14	19/04/2020	L'agricoltura - 800,000,000 chili	Andrea Rinaldi	Corriere della Sera
15	20/04/2020	2002	Alessandra Ziniti	La Repubblica
16	27/04/2020	Imprese agricole tre portali online salvano la raccolta	Rosaria Amato	La Repubblica
17	27/04/2020	Tra i braccianti di Foggia sequestrati dai caporali	Giuliano Foschini	La Repubblica
18	30/04/2020	Tavolo per l'emergenza sulla frutta: c'e' il si agli sgravi fiscali per le aziende che investono nella manodopera	Devis Rosso	La Stampa
19	30/04/2020	Emergenze va evitata una guerra di religione	Goffredo Buccini	Corriere della Sera

20	01/05/2020	Per gli stagionali romeni servono contratti e legalita'	Micaela Cappellini	Il Sole 24 Ore
21	03/05/2020	Foggia, blitz anticaporalato "schiavi" reclutati nei ghetti	Antonio Maria Mira	Avvenire
22	05/05/2020	Regolarizzare, questione di civilta'	Alessia Guerrieri & Vincenzo Spagnolo	Avvenire
23	05/05/2020	Un vertice tra quattro ministri per regolarizzare subito 600 mila colf e braccianti irregolari	Giacomo Galeazzi	La Stampa
24	06/05/2020	Migranti e lavoro nero, rissa sfiorata Pd-M5S sulla regolarizzazione	Alessandro di Matteo	La Stampa
25	07/05/2020	Tra i braccianti del Foggiano: "nei campi per 5 euro all'ora e non ci danno neanche le mascherine"	Valeria D'Autilia	La Stampa
26	08/05/2020	Niente intesa sui migranti i 5S: permessi di un mese e solo per gli agricoltori	Giovanna Casadio	La Repubblica
27	09/05/2020	Causa Covid scarseggia la manodopera agricola	Riccardo Coletti	La Stampa
28	09/05/2020	Braccianti in fuga per un lavoro "a ogni costo"	Federico Minniti	Avvenire
29	09/05/2020	Dalle zucchine alle pesche, la mappa dei raccolti a rischio	Michaelangelo Borrillo	Corriere della Sera
30	10/05/2020	I campi hanno bisogno di stranieri	Andrea Zaghi	Avvenire
31	11/05/2020	Regolarizzare i migranti che lavorano in agricoltura? In provincia di Cuneo il punto non e' questo	Mario Bosonetto	La Stampa
32	11/05/2020	Nelle banche dati delle principali organizzazione agricole si sono registrati in tanti nell'ultimo mese	Michaelangelo Borrillo	Corriere della Sera
33	12/05/2020	Regolarizzare il sommerso, la scelta della civilta'	Flavia Perina	La Stampa
34	12/05/2020	Di rilancio, riparte la trattative nel governo	Giacomo Galeazzi	La Stampa
35	12/05/2020	Intesa "in salita" sulle regolarizzazione i cinque stelle si rimangiano l'accordo	Angelo Picariello & Vincenzo Spagnolo	Avvenire
36	14/05/2020	In Lombardia il bando indette da Confagricoltura di Mantova per sopperire alla mancanza di manodopera nei campi "Abbiamo offerto un'occasione a tanti disoccupati" i nuovi braccianti	Giovanna Vigna	Corriere della Sera
37	14/05/2020	Baristi impegnati, guide I 24 mila italiani che si mettono in lista per fare braccianti	Paolo Brera	La Repubblica
38	15/05/2020	Prandini (Coldiretti): "Solo 2 mila nei campi, a settembre"	Michaelangelo Borrillo	Corriere della Sera
39	18/05/2020	Mancano braccianti e risorse, l'Sos della Coldiretti di Imperia. In provincia raccolti a rischio	Maurizio Vezzano	La Stampa
40	18/05/2020	Tra gli italiani tornati nei campi "E' l'ultima speranza"	Carlo Alberto Bucci	La Repubblica

41	20/05/2020	A Bolzano: Noleggia jet per far arrivare potatrici di viti della Romania		Corriere della Sera
42	22/05/2020	Il lavoro arriva volando. Su un charter "pagato dalle aziende"		La Repubblica
43	23/05/2020	Saluzzo, 3 mila braccianti cercano una casa	Danilo Poggio	Avvenire
44	29/05/2020	Vendemmia a rischio senza stranieri e voucher	Micaela Cappellini	Il Sole 24 Ore
45	30/05/2020	Migranti della frutta, il tempo stringe. E spunta l'idea di affidare alla Protezione Civile la gestione di eventuali casi di contagio fra i braccianti	Barbara Morra	La Stampa
46	02/06/2020	L'assessore Gabusi: "Il Covid ci ha spinti a preparare una situazione migliore per la campagna della frutta nel Saluzzese:	Mario Bosonetto	La Stampa
47	03/06/2020	I migranti e la raccolta della frutta: esercito in campo per controllare	Floriana Rullo	Corriere della Sera
48	05/06/2020	"In coda per chiederci un lavoro". Anche gli italiani raccolgono frutta"	Maurizio Tropeano	La Stampa
49	10/06/2020	Un Covid Hotel per accogliere i migranti della frutta che risulteranno contagiati nel Saluzzese	Babara Morra	La Stampa
50	19/06/2020	Migranti della frutta, i sindaci del distretto saluzzese: "Regione e prefetto adesso ci diano indicazioni precise"	Mario Bosonetto	La Stampa
51	20/06/2020	Primo piano la ripartenza i nuovi focolai; braccianti contagiati, e; caos a Mondragone "Restino nei palazzi" sedie lanciate in strada	Fluvio Bui	Corriere della Sera
52	22/06/2020	Lavoratori stagionali, l'estate piemontese non riparte	Floriana Rullo	Corriere della Sera
53	25/06/2020	La terra promessa	Mattia Feltri	La Stampa
54	26/06/2020	Il popolo degli invisibili che adesso ci fa paura	Goffredo Buccini	Corriere della Sera
55	26/06/2020	Schiavi, non untori	Roberto Saviano	La Repubblica
56	26/06/2020	Gli scontri di Mondragone tra italiani e bulgari "Noi a casa, loro lavorano"	Dario Del Porto	La Repubblica
57	26/06/2020	Allarme per due focolai; Esercito a Mondragone	Lodovico Bulian	Il Giornale
58	27/06/2020	La rabbia incendia Mondragone: "Siamo stati abbandonati da tutti"	Maria Rosa Tomasello	La Stampa
59	27/06/2020	"Costretti a vivere barricati in casa" La paura dei bulgari di Mondragone	Dario del Porto	La Stampa
60	27/06/2020	Il racconto: tra i braccianti senza un alloggio arrivati a Saluzzo	Marco Imarisio	Corriere della Sera
61	03/07/2020	Agricoltura: Frontiere aperte a 50mila stagionali extra UE	Micaela Cappellini	Il Sole 24 Ore
62	05/07/2020	Alloggi agli stagionali della frutta, si potranno usare anche fondi europei	Lorenzo Boratto	La Stampa
63	08/07/2020	Test e controlli per gli "invisibili"	Antonio Maria Mira	Avvenire

64	19/07/2020	A Saluzzo tornano gli invisibili	Paolo Lambruschi	Avvenire
65	18/07/2020	Il caso: virus dall'estero, e' allarme braccianti; gli stagionali il nuovo fronte dell'epidemia	Enza Cusmai	Il Giornale
66	05/08/2020	L'allarme Coldiretti "Col Covid mancano i venemmiatori"	Riccardo Coletti	La Stampa
67	06/08/2020	Primo piano La ripartenza l'emergenza la sanita'; il foccolaio nei campi del Mantovano "Difficile tracciare ogni bracciante"	Fabrizio Guglilmini	Corriere della Sera
68	11/08/2020	Vendemmia al via, rimane l'Sos stagionali	Matteo Trebeschi	Corriere della Sera

## Appendix B: Initial inductive codes

Source: authors

Code	Definition of code
<i>Consumer food prices</i>	How seasonal labour shortages could affect consumer food prices
<i>Farmgate food prices</i>	How seasonal labour shortages could affect farmgate prices
<i>Food shortages</i>	Risk of under-supply; food shortages
<i>Hunger</i>	How potential impacts of seasonal labour shortages link to wider issues of hunger and poverty
<i>Food abundance</i>	Reference to sufficient supply but labour shortages could prevent supply from reaching consumers
<i>Travel restrictions</i>	How coronavirus has affected travel of seasonal workers
<i>Workers returning home</i>	Seasonal migrant workers return to home countries at beginning of outbreak
<i>Immigration</i>	immigration is the issue that causes the problem. This includes Immigration status of workers prevents or poses risks to their ability to work, receive healthcare have enough to eat as well as wider political issue of immigration
<i>Supply chain logistics</i>	How coronavirus has impacted the practical logistics of the supply chain which enables seasonal workers to travel
<i>Wider supply chain challenges</i>	How seasonal labour shortage is linked to other supply chain challenges caused by coronavirus such as food gluts; specific to coronavirus impacts and distinct from wider food system challenges code
<i>Wider food system challenges</i>	Linking seasonal labour shortage to wider challenges related to food system outcomes such as hunger, climate change, food safety
<i>International</i>	Reference to how seasonal labour shortage is an international problem, how it is being experienced by other countries, mostly across the EU
<i>Cororpoate</i>	Reference to the role that key corporate actors, suppliers and retailers, play in influencing what is happening with seasonal labour shortage and/or wider worker conditions
<i>Links to other food and / or worker related crises</i>	Effects of Ebola on rice prices; WW2 and women's land army; links in horticultural sector to garment and meatpacking during the pandemic;
<i>Unemployment</i>	Motivation to fix seasonal labour shortage links to rising domestic unemployment as a result of Covid-19.
<i>Trade</i>	Reference to countries' trade status (importers or exporters), e.g. Spain as EU biggest exporter of fruit and veg as motivation for action; mention of trade standards and need to protect worker welfare; reference to risk of protectionist measures that Covid-19 could lead to
<i>Food waste</i>	Motivation to fix seasonal labour shortage is driven by risk of crops and food being wasted
<i>Worker health &amp; safety</i>	Motivation to find a solution to labour shortage involves ensuring health and safety risks of working as picker during coronavirus; concerns over safety of new domestic workers

<i>Worker conditions</i>	Reference to the conditions seasonal labourers work in - motivation to do something about this wider problem and concerns about solution of recruiting domestic workforce. Includes mentions of wages, accommodation, location of farms, exploitation; legalisation of workers immigration status
<i>Worker skill &amp; value</i>	Reference to the skill required to be a picker
<i>Agricultural sector</i>	Motivation to find solution to labour shortage is to protect the agricultural sector
<i>Consumer behaviour and impacts</i>	Motivation to act is to respond to new consumer behaviour (increase in fruit and veg consumption, stockpiling) and to protect consumers against decrease in choice
<i>Government</i>	regulation, free trade, keep supply chain moving, assistance, help agricultural industry survive, financial support
<i>Nationalism</i>	Motivation to find solution to seasonal labour shortage is linked to national identity. Reference to e.g. national produce, feeding the nation. Often used in conjunction with other codes such as short-term labour response. Nuance between "British farmers" (nationalism) and "Farmers in the UK"
<i>Immigration</i>	Motivation to do something about the problem stems from migration challenges - both immigrants who lack documents to work and receive healthcare legally as well as wider political immigration debates
<i>EU</i>	Reference to how the EU is responding to current crisis as well as longer-term links to Brexit. Motivation for certain solutions is linked to the UK's relationship with Europe.
<i>Ending crime and illegality</i>	Motivation for granting legal status to illegal workers is to end criminality and exploitation within agricultural sector
<i>Crime and disorder counter code</i>	Mention of crime and disorder linked with migrant groups presented as counter-code / frame to dominant frame of articles
<i>Humanitarian</i>	Motivation to legalise workers and improve their working conditions is matter of humanitarian endeavour, ensuring dignity for all
<i>Short-term freedom of movement:</i>	Deem farm workers essential workers; Green lanes for seasonal workers to move; charter flights for seasonal workers
<i>Short-term immigration:</i>	Visas / documents for illegal and undocumented workers;
<i>Short-term employment:</i>	Recruit national / domestic workforce through new labour schemes (Pick For Britain; furloughed workers)
<i>Short-term ag sector support:</i>	Financial assistance; hardship support;
<i>Short-term trade:</i>	avoid protectionism; "green lanes" for logistics; ensure smooth running of supply chain
<i>Short-term health &amp; safety:</i>	disinfecting premises; testing and tracing infected workers; food safety
<i>Short-term consumer behaviour:</i>	avoid panic buying
<i>Short-term corporate practice</i>	relaxation corporate competition law
<i>Long-term food system:</i>	future proof food system, can't go back to "normal"
<i>Long-term labour rights:</i>	protect and value workers; immigration rules that value workers

## **ANNEX C: Additional search strings tested**

To mitigate against the potential limitations of the search string used to collect the sample of articles studied in this research, the following search strings were tested. The same time-period (1<sup>st</sup> February 2020 – 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020) and the same six outlets were used for these additional tests.

The following string was initially tested to understand if including additional collective nouns, as well as *braccianti*, for migrant horticultural labourers would have yielded a different sample size and spread of articles across different outlets. Given that a wider set of terms were being tested, “atleast2” was added to ensure that the articles were of relevance.

*(atleast2 braccianti OR  
atleast2 stagionali OR atleast2 irregolari) AND (covid OR coronavirus)*

This retrieved a sample of 213 results. Upon an initial skim read of the most relevant articles (using the “relevance” search function on Factiva) it became apparent that the terms “stagionali” retrieved irrelevant articles referring to other meanings of seasonal such as “seasonal viruses” and “seasonal tourists” in the context of Covid-19. As such, “stagionali” was removed from the string and the following set of terms yielded 134 results:

*(atleast2 braccianti OR atleast2 irregolari) AND (covid or coronavirus)*

These articles were skim read to remove duplicates and articles according to the same inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in section 4.1 above. The final sample returned 74 relevant articles, so just 6 more than the actual sample used here. The relevant articles were then analysed according to spread across outlets. Again, the distribution of articles across left and right leaning articles was very similar to the final sample.

<b>Outlet</b> L = left-leaning R = right-leaning	<b>Number of articles in final sample (%)</b> "braccianti" AND (covid OR coronavirus)	<b>Percentage in left-leaning and right-leaning outlets, final sample</b>	<b>Number of articles in test sample (%)</b> (atleast 2 braccianti OR atleast 2 irregolari) AND (covid OR coronavirus)	<b>Percentage in left-leaning and right-leaning outlets, test sample</b>
Avvenire (L)	16	68	20	69
La Repubblica (L)	21		22	
La Stampa (L)	31		27	
Il Corriere della Sera (R)	24	32	21	31
Il Giornale (R)	4		7	
Il Sole 24 Ore (R)	4		3	

A subsequent string was tested using the term "grande distribuzione":

*(atleast2 braccianti or atleast2 irregolari) and "grande distribuzione" and (covid or coronavirus)*

This only returned eight articles on Factiva, indicating that the topic of supermarkets and supermarketisation and MHL shortages was not one that was widely reported on in the media.

