



IMMIGRANT WORKERS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IN ITALY: IMPACT ON SAFETY AND HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The profound changes that have taken place in Italian society have led to very strong changes in the labor market which is segmented, heterogeneous, outsourced and characterized by the growth of medium and medium-small businesses where the implementation of current legislation on safety in the workplace is often neglected and occupational risks are underestimated.

The disadvantage in which immigrant workers find themselves is greater than Italian workers for various reasons, as well as for social issues also due to problems of linguistic understanding.

Understanding security measures is also a purely linguistic fact and this is certainly a crucial aspect especially in the early stages of job placement and in job changes, the perceived difficulties at the level of linguistic communication are particularly felt by immigrant workers, not by chance. the request for information in the original language appears widespread.

It would be advisable to build training courses tailored to the needs of immigrants, compulsory language preparation courses, specific courses connected in particular to the risk sectors in which they find themselves and aimed at making their culture of safety at work dialogue with the Italian one.

A characterizing element of globalization¹ is the quantity of flows of various kinds that cross our planet from side to side and which, on the whole, have no equal in history in terms of number, variety and intensity. Among these flows, the one constituted by those migrants that we can define international is of particular importance (Cesareo, 2015).

As stated by prof. Francesco Susi “immigrants represent the living and suffered testimony of the economic, political, social, ethnic and religious environmental crises that tear the planet apart”.

The profound changes that have taken place in Italian society have led to very strong changes in the labor market which is segmented, heterogeneous, outsourced and characterized by the growth of medium and medium-small businesses where the implementation of current legislation on safety in the workplace is often neglected and occupational risks are underestimated.

Furthermore, the average stay of workers in each single company has become shorter and atypical forms of work have become more widespread.

Italy is increasingly characterized as a country of immigration, the presence of immigrants in fact has grown at a uniform rate, from 2005 to 2011 the foreign population residing in our country recorded an increase of over two million units.

There are four areas in which the integration of immigrants is particularly relevant today:

- Widespread manufacturing industry;
- Buildings;
- Tertiary sectors with low added value and in particular services to families and care work;

- Agriculture, in particular seasonal agriculture. (Colombo Sciortino 2004)

The segmentation of the Italian labor market leads to inequalities in the levels of health and safety at work, foreign workers are more likely to suffer an injury than Italian workers.

The immigrant worker finds himself in a condition of weakness on the labor market, especially at the beginning of the employment relationship and his entry is often not accompanied by adequate information and awareness regarding some fundamental aspects of work and safety. connected.

Even when it comes to people with medium or high schooling, behavior at work can also be affected by numerous variables including basic training and practices in use in the country of origin. The personal, family and migratory projects that motivate and determine their presence in Italy also influence their perception of safety in the workplace.

The disadvantage in which they find themselves is greater than Italian workers for various reasons, as well as for social issues also due to linguistic comprehension problems.

Through the consolidation of some prejudices and stereotypes regarding the role of immigrants, the employer shows the propensity to hire workers in certain jobs that are labeled as “immigrant jobs”, is hired with less protection than the Italian worker and is often hired at the lowest levels with contractual forms considered “atypical” such as part-time or even illegal contracts, this determines in the worker a greater exposure to the risk of total avoidance of obligations regarding health and safety in the workplace.

¹ By globalization we mean the profound interdependence of economic, political and cultural processes that develop in regions of the world, even physically very distant from each other;

The foreign worker, for economic reasons and for fear of losing his job, often tends to accept such requests without too much resistance, the central problem is that of the vulnerability and blackmail of the migrant worker.

A survey conducted by the Cariplo-Ismu2 Foundation in 2007 highlights that there are many differences between the subjects who enter the undeclared area, for which it may be a temporary opportunity for gain, a temporary stage awaiting regularization, of a useful experience waiting to start one's own business or of a lasting destiny from which one cannot get rid of when not even a trap that hinges on exploitation and oppression.

The migration project makes the immigrant available to accept conditions, rhythms and intense workloads that aggravate the already heavy working conditions and ensures that the issue of health and safety is perceived as a factor not immediately necessary compared to other variables such as: work, residence permit, accommodation.

From the point of view of work organization, he is also hired in sectors characterized by riskier jobs and high physical effort and forced to accept often very long working hours which reduce the time dedicated to both the family and social relationships.

The construction sector is the one with the largest number of immigrant populations, in recent years this sector has seen the presence of these workers increase exponentially (more than 400%).

The accidents are attributable both to the nature of the work itself, such as working at high altitudes, the use of lifting machines and electrical material and the failure to use or supply personal protective equipment, as well as to problems of organizational type such as very long working hours and last, but certainly of no less importance, the lack of training and information of the worker or training inadequate to his language skills.

The construction sector is strongly characterized by discontinuity and job insecurity and this certainly plays an important role in the attitudes and behaviors concerning safety, moreover, small businesses very often do not have a sufficiently organized system for safety at work.

Within a construction site, compared to a fixed company it is certainly more demanding to govern the prevention and safety of workers for various reasons, the construction site, not being a fixed workplace and therefore not subject to constant physiological transformations, determines real organizational difficulties on the part of the employer, moreover, the inability of the supervisory body to follow the work cycle slavishly causes the non-timeliness of interventions to protect the worker from the risks present in the workplace.

Working outdoors also introduces risk factors related to external climatic conditions (rain, lightning, etc.) and to particular occupational situations (for example, falling objects from above).

Frequent movements from one site to another lead

to unquestionable discomfort linked to transport, a difficulty in adapting to different workstations and very often lead to accidents on the way.

The prevention of accidents and occupational diseases in the construction sector has always been very delicate due to the numerous technical and managerial implications so as to represent a social and human problem.³

This assertion is constantly confirmed by the results conducted by some institutes such as INAIL and ISTAT which show a high accident frequency rate in the construction sector.

From INAIL data from recent years, it emerges that most of the injuries to foreign workers are concentrated in this sector.

The problem has been strongly underestimated, in fact "submerged" accidents are not detected, ie those linked to illegal work involving many companies that use workers who do not comply with the residence permit because they often come from non-EU countries.

Furthermore, the great theme of unreported accidents should not be underestimated and in this context, certainly, accidents that cause temporary shortages or impairments that can be ascribed to ordinary living are more easily placed.

The construction sector holds the sad record of fatal or highly disabling accidents even if in recent years we have witnessed a sharp decrease in this record.

In addition to minor accidents, even the most serious ones tend not to be reported by the immigrant worker and we can obtain indirect confirmation of this from the analysis of data relating to immigrants' access to hospital care (Fortino, 1998) which for the first time provided a study on a national basis of hospital admissions where injuries and fractures are recorded as a second cause, after that linked to maternity and pregnancy.

A dynamic integration policy must be accompanied by interventions in the training field, necessary to build those widespread cultural bases, without which any civil coexistence between natives and immigrants becomes impossible (Santarone, 2001).

The training carried out in the countries of origin is considered one of the most qualifying tools to ensure greater professionalism, a better job investment but above all greater protection for the risks associated with work, this also allows the worker a greater perception of the risks present.

An article has been included in the construction contract of employment which expresses the desire to start a professional training activity in other countries, managed by trade unions and entrepreneurs.

In Lombardy and Emilia Romagna,⁴ projects have been activated that have allowed the opening of qualification schools in Moldova to teach in addition to the language also the regulations on work and safety in force in Italy.

Confartigianato, thanks also to the funding made available by Inail, has already implemented since 2004 the Training Project called Extrateam, which

² Ismu was founded in 1991 on the initiative of the Cariplo Social Works Foundation with the name of Institute for the Study of Multi-ethnicity with the mission of promoting studies and research and carrying out documentation, information and training on the many aspects connected with the multiethnic and multicultural transformation of society

³ Professional update on health and safety at work monthly pag. 5, Milano, 2002;

⁴ Foreign workers and the challenge of quality in the construction sector, according to the Fillea Cigl dossier on work and immigrants in construction, 2004;

concerns the creation of an information website and a manual written in four languages to inform this category of workers on occupational risks.⁵

To have an even more direct message, the material has been made available through documentation, comics and audio lessons, translated into Spanish, Arabic, Albanian and English.

It proposes the various verifiable dangerous situations and the means and precautions to be applied in order to work on site without running unnecessary risks.⁶

In this group of workers, on the other hand, the prevention of accidents is hindered by different types of factors: firstly, the immigrant's difficulty in perceiving the risks associated with situations that are, for him, completely new and therefore difficult to read, bearing in mind that the difference between ethnic groups is very strong in this area.

Naturally, this new reality poses unprecedented problems both on the economic, social and on the cultural and educational side.

Understanding security measures is also a purely linguistic fact and this is certainly a crucial aspect especially in the early stages of job placement and in job changes, the perceived difficulties at the level of linguistic communication are particularly felt by immigrant workers, not by chance. The request for information in the original language appears widespread.

It is true that immigrant workers tend to carefully observe and copy what others are doing, but it is certain that learning appropriate safety rules and practices cannot be entrusted solely to the example of their colleague, also because they cannot always the attitude of the colleague is commendable.

It therefore appears appropriate that training is as timely as possible, concerning work issues, aspects concerning the risks associated with the specific

activity and taking into account both the culture and the skills and linguistic knowledge of the worker.

It would be advisable to build training courses tailored to the needs of immigrants, compulsory language preparation courses, specific courses connected in particular to the risk sectors in which they find themselves and aimed at making their culture of safety in the workplace dialogue with the Italian one (Savona, 2008).

In the New Consolidated Law on Safety in the Workplace of 2008, training is defined as an "educational process through which to transfer to workers and other subjects of the company prevention and protection system knowledge and procedures useful for the acquisition of skills" and mentions in art. 36 paragraph 4: "The content of the information must be easily understandable for workers and must allow them to acquire the relevant knowledge. Where the information concerns immigrant workers, it takes place after verifying the understanding of the language used in the information process".

It is difficult to reach the goal through messages centered solely on the protection of health and physical safety, when the recipients of the communication are people whose life is characterized in all respects by insecurity, by a socially and economically problematic background, from living conditions and environments that are still undignified, from the difficulty of building a life project, from the lack of emotional and family ties and sometimes from social prejudice.

Therefore, a campaign for occupational safety in this area could also identify contents and methods aimed at increasing the self-esteem of the immigrant worker, aiming first of all at the recognition and enhancement of his personal dignity and therefore of his professional growth.

⁵ www.confartigianatobolognaimola.it, accessed 6 december 2014;

⁶ www.lavorosardegna.it accessed 15 november 2015;

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