

28/06/2022

**The Vulnerability of Women
to Forced Labour:
Evidence from the Southern French
Agriculture Sector**

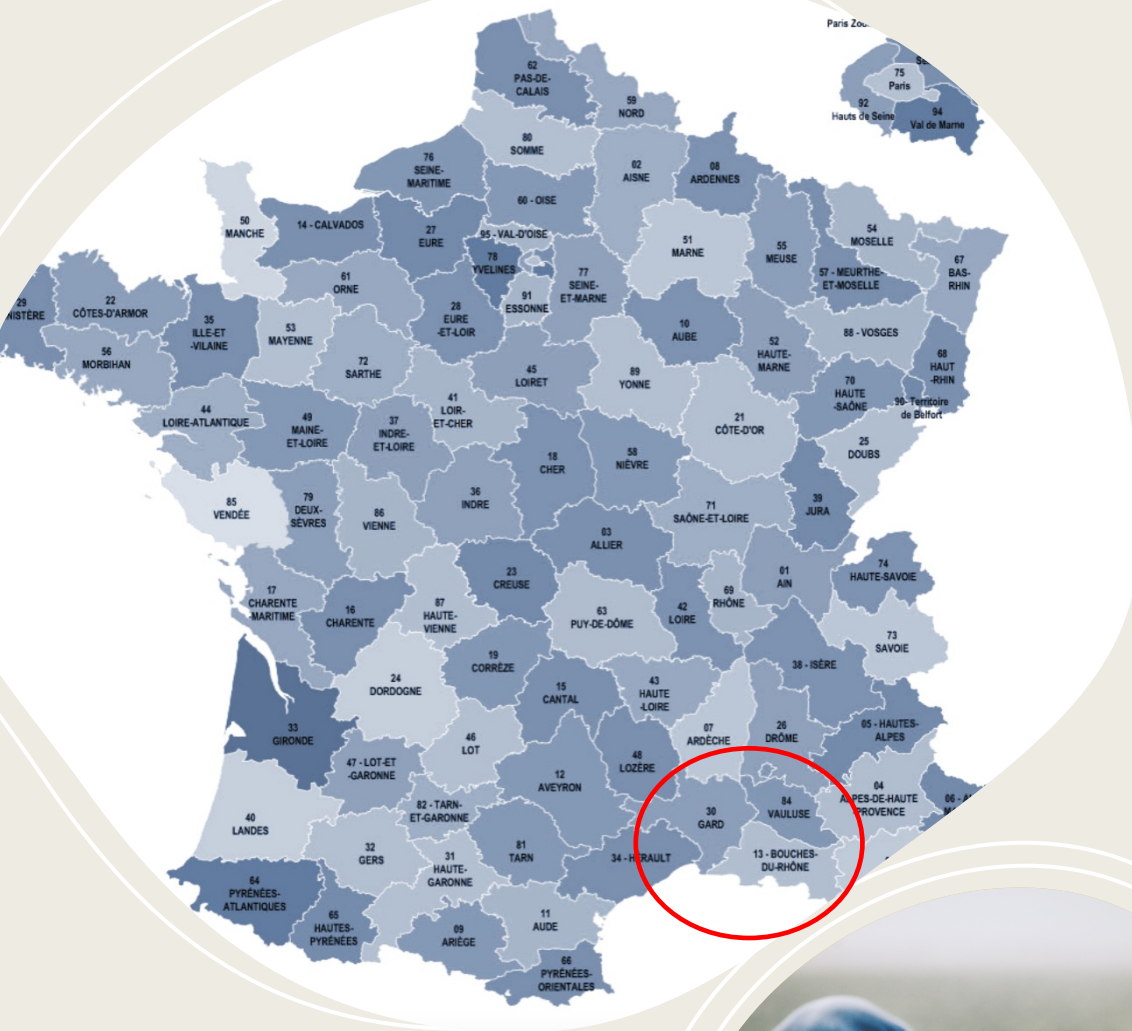
Charline SEMPERE

PhD Researcher

University of Sheffield

Methodology

- Data collection: October 2021 – June/July 2022
- Qualitative approach and methods
- Nine months of immersion involving: observation in farms, workers social events, controls with labour inspectors, and participations in worker-led initiatives and field association providing free legal advice and social support to migrant farmworkers in the region
- As well as 59 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with, farmers, recruiters, farm managers, auditors, lawyers, labour inspectors, trade unions members, migrant defenders and migrant workers




Extended Definition of forced labour



According to the ILO [Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No. 29\)](#) *forced labour is: 'all work or services which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.'*

- Boundaries between free and forced are not always clear cut. Labour arrangements can be complicated and keep changing over time
- Economic deprivation, threat of starvation, social relations and structural constraints are missing in this definition despite significantly shaping workers freedom within the labour market

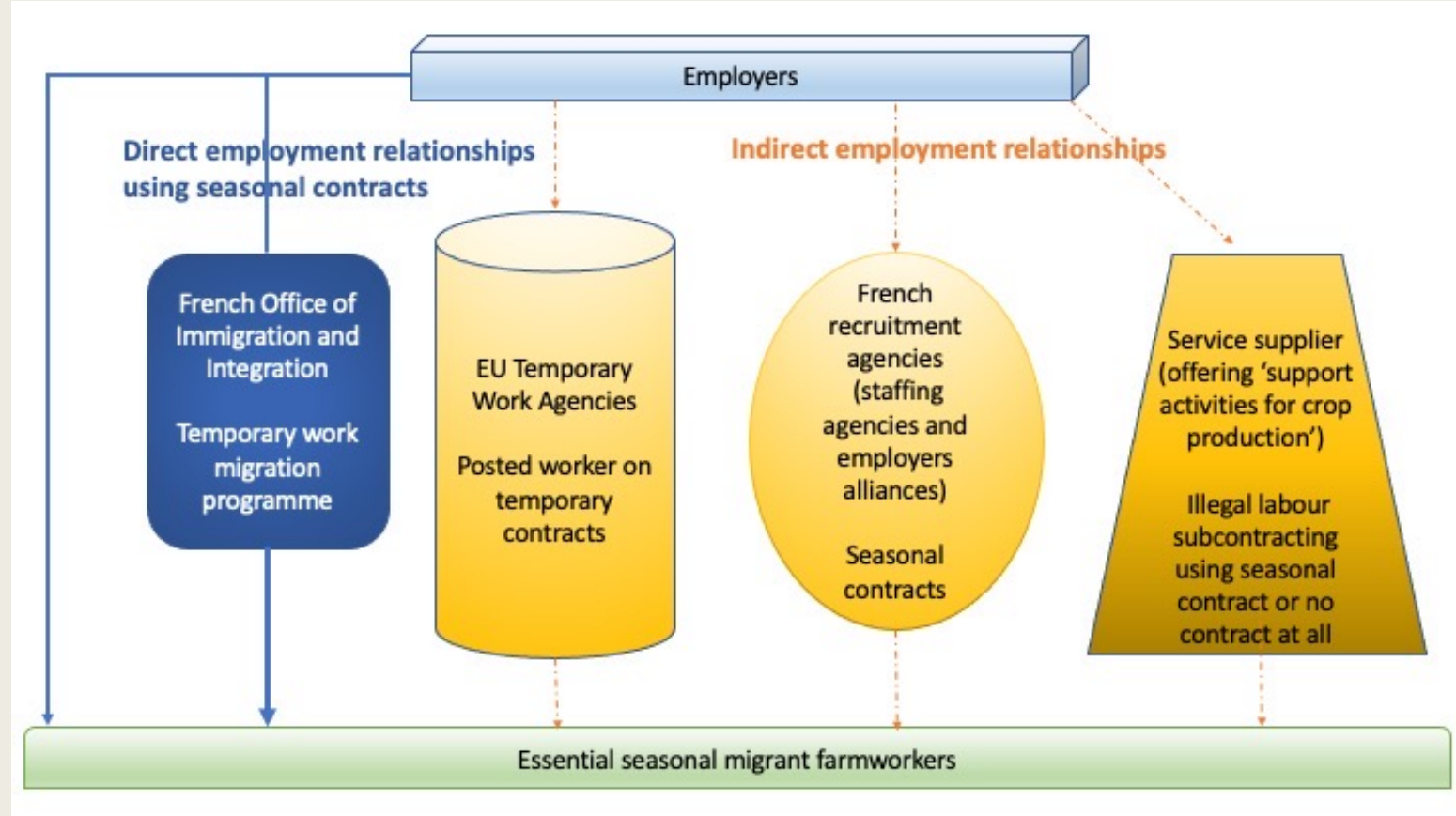


“Working with EU (migrant) posted workers is a great opportunity for us. (...) So, for them what happened was that we would say to the agency: “voilà, we need 10 persons. Send me 10 people.’ We receive them 3 days later.

Let's imagine we work and one day we finish all there is to do at that time... Then we would just call the agency back and say: “We're finished, we don't need them anymore”. They would come and pick them up within the day(...)

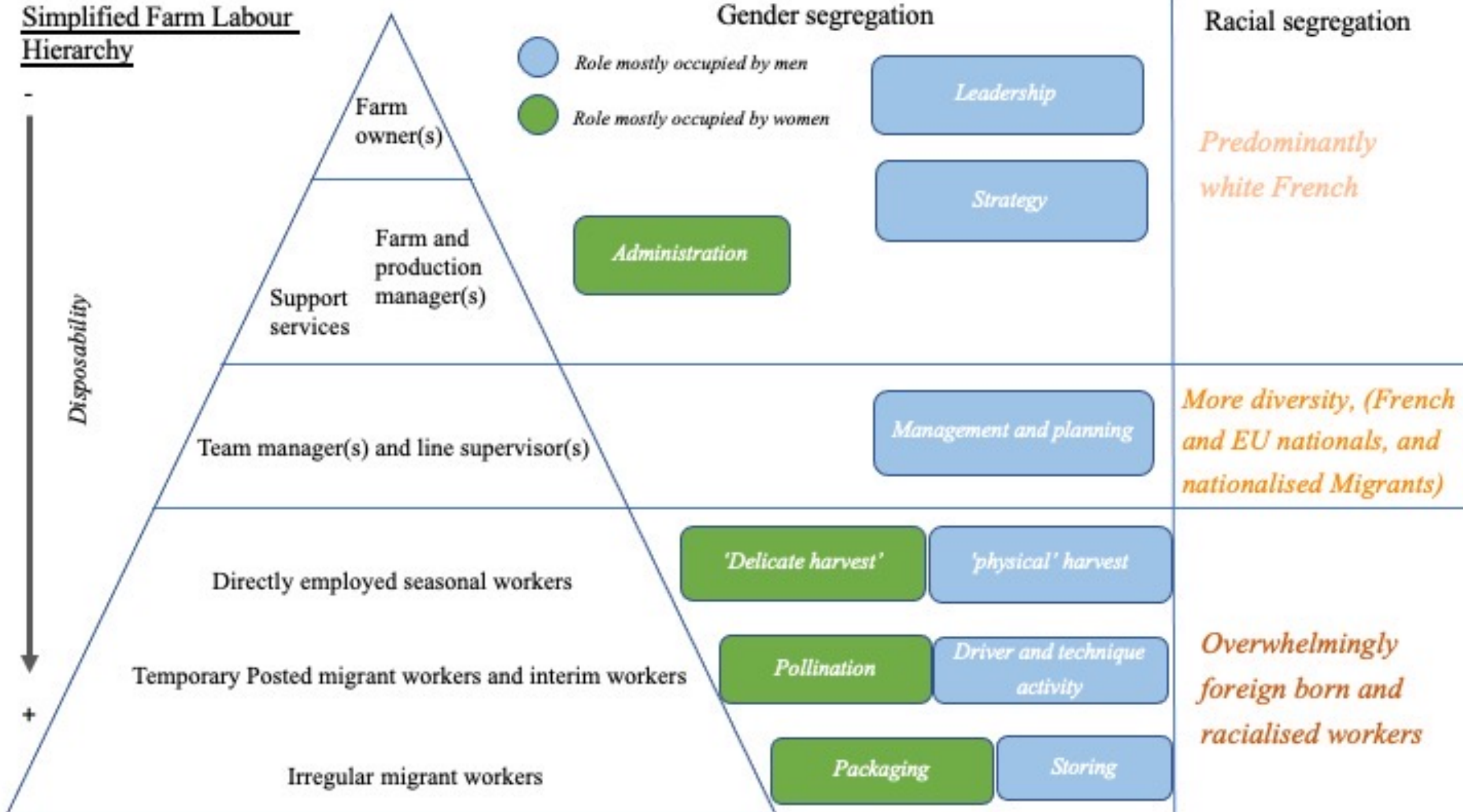
This scheme provides us with a lot of flexibility which is really convenient. As soon as we have a low activity, or the activity is completed, a weather issue or anything else, a big contract, or sales that drop and too many workers, we call them and, just like that, we stop, 10, 20, 25 people or how many we need to get rid of.”

Farmer, interview 22



Different recruiting avenues in the southern French agricultural sector

Simplified Farm Labour Hierarchy





GENDER INEQUALITIES

- Additional economic, livelihood pressures, and time constraints due to unequal share of family responsibilities
- More barriers to secure a job and a stable income due to gender discrimination
- Greater isolation and exposure to violence in a male-dominated industry

“Men with most power in the workplace are the ones who took advantage of their position to abuse women the most.” Worker, worker interview 10

“I asked my husband to go to work and I told him: ‘please help me to look after the house and my children, for the food I go to work.’ He didn’t go to work. He said no, that this was not his job, that this is the work of the underling. So all my children depended on me, even for a bag of salt, my children depended on me...” Worker, worker interview 3



CONSEQUENCES

- Greater vulnerability to economic coercion
- Restricted mobility within the industry
- Greater dependence upon recruiters, employers, and labour intermediaries
- Compulsion to keep silent, worker harder to prove their worth and accept bad treatment, harassment, and abuse to maintain an income or a safe living place

‘We have no power to talk. We are exploited, we know full well, but that is all we can do and we keep silent.’ Worker, worker interview 9

*‘Women and men work the same and do the same work on farms, but often women have to carry more or as many boxes as men just to prove their strength.’
Worker, worker interview 16*

Indicators of forced labour

Abuses of vulnerability	Concerned 76% of interviewee sample (19/25)
-------------------------	---

Deception	(48% - 12/25)
-----------	---------------

Abusive working and living conditions	72%
---------------------------------------	-----

Debt-bondage	N/A Concerned 1 interviewee.
--------------	---------------------------------

Excessive overtime	72%
--------------------	-----

Intimidation and threats	68%
--------------------------	-----

Restriction of movement	40%
-------------------------	-----

Isolation	48%
-----------	-----

Retention of documents	N/A Concerned 1 interviewee.
------------------------	---------------------------------

Violence	36 % <u>Corresponds to 1/3 of all women interviewees</u>
----------	---

Thank You

Charline Sempéré, PhD Researcher at the University of Sheffield, SPERI, LEST, Re: Structure Lab

charline.sempere@sheffield.ac.uk



@ChSempere



@charline-sempéré



<i>Type of data collected</i>	Participants	Number	Gender
<i>Semi-structured in-depth interviews (between 45min and 3hours long)</i>	Migrant Workers	25	Women: 15 Men: 10
	Employers (farmers, farm managers and recruiters)	13	Women: 1 Men: 12
	Retail buyers	1	Women: 0 Men: 1
	Certification and auditors	2	Women: 0 Men: 2
	Trade unions, <u>NGOs</u> and social services	11	Women: 5 Men: 6
	Public and law authorities (lawyers, inspectors, mayors, politicians)	7	Women 5 Men: 2

<i>Fieldwork encounters and observations: involving informal conversations, and</i>	Migrant workers: Informal conversations during social events, legal and social assistance, attendance to weekly worker-led rights associations, observations of working and living conditions while shadowing labour inspectors	Approximately 200 workers	N/A
	Professionals: observed labour inspectors, social workers, trade unionists, police officers, farmers in their workplace and during controls in the field	Approximately 50	N/A

