

# Hybrid Governance Against Labor Exploitation in Agri-Food Systems: Evidence from the NoCap Initiative in Italy

*Friday, 5 June 2026 14:30 (15 minutes)*

Labor exploitation in agri-food supply chains persists across Mediterranean Europe as a structural governance failure, not a criminal exception. In Italy, the caporalato system —illicit labor intermediation relying on migrant workers in precarious legal conditions —endures despite legislative prohibition, sustained by labor shortages, retailer price pressures, and dysfunctional public employment services.

This presentation examines NoCap, an Italian social innovation that integrates workforce management, ethical certification, legal assistance, housing, and supply-chain price negotiation into a single governance model designed to counter caporalato. Drawing on 22 semi-structured interviews with workers, farmers, distributors, NGOs, and experts, analyzed through the Gioia methodology, the study identifies the conditions under which such initiatives can improve labor governance while remaining economically viable for all supply chain actors.

Findings show that ethical certification redistributes informational asymmetries and creates reputational incentives for downstream actors, while structural constraints (limited scale, seasonal discontinuity, and weak institutional support) restrict transformative impact. The study argues that durable sustainability transitions in agri-food systems require hybrid governance combining social innovation with public institutional anchoring. It offers an empirically grounded contribution to European debates on fair food systems, migration governance, and social sustainability.

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**Session Classification:** Environmental Humanities & Societal Futures: Narratives That Shape Transitions

**Track Classification:** General sessions: Environmental Humanities & Societal Futures: Narratives That Shape Transitions