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DIREZIONE GENERALE DELL'IMMIGRAZIONE  
E DELLE POLITICHE DI INTEGRAZIONE

# FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

**THE ILLEGAL GANG  
MASTERING'S PROFILE  
IN THE ITALIAN PRESS.  
VISIBILITY, MEANINGS,  
REPRESENTATIONS**





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MINISTERO del LAVORO  
e delle POLITICHE SOCIALI  
DIREZIONE GENERALE DELL'IMMIGRAZIONE  
E DELLE POLITICHE DI INTEGRAZIONE

## RESEARCH ABSTRACT:

# “The illegal gang mastering’s profile in the Italian press. Visibility, meanings, representations”

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## Introduction

The aim of this survey was to carry out a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the press articles published in the major Italian newspapers on the theme of the illegal gang mastering between March and November 2020.

The analysis of the articles was aimed to make a precise reconstruction of the way the press dealt with the following aspects:

- Economic sectors affected by the phenomenon of illegal gang mastering (agriculture, services, construction, industry, etc.)
- Places (cities, shanty town, areas) associated with the facts told by the press
- Protagonists (Italian and foreign workers, companies/enterprises, public institutions, trade union representatives, activists, etc.)
- specific issues addressed by the articles (forms of fight against illegal gang mastering, working conditions, companies and supply chains, migration, worker support projects, worker housing conditions, health conditions, gender status, etc.)
- Representations, narratives and images through which the phenomenon of illegal gang mastering is publicly narrated.

### Newspapers' selection criteria

To ensure the representativeness of the data analysis, the newspapers were identified on the basis of the following criteria:

- Circulation of the newspapers.
- Political characterization of newspapers.

With respect to the first criterion, both the national and regional distribution of the newspapers were considered. With reference to national circulation, the four most popular newspapers in Italy were selected. With reference to regional distribution, the local newspaper with the highest circulation was selected for each of the partner regions of Su.Pr.Eme. Italy (Puglia, Campania, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicilia).

The four newspapers with the highest national circulation were: “Corriere della Sera”, “La Repubblica”, “Il Sole 24 Ore”, “La Stampa”. Local newspapers with the highest circulation in the regions covered by the Su.Pr.Eme. programme activities were:

"La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno" for Basilicata and Puglia, "Gazzetta del Sud" for Calabria, "Il Mattino" for Campania, "Il Giornale di Sicilia" for Sicilia.

As for the second criterion, the articles selected come from the following newspapers: “Avvenire” (catholic area), “Il Fatto Quotidiano” (polemical press), “Il Manifesto” (left-wing political orientation), Libero (right-wing political orientation).

12 newspapers were monitored.



## Articles' selection criteria

For the selection of the articles, in addition to the already mentioned period of publication, the other criterion was the presence in the title or in the text of the article of the term illegal gang mastering. In total, 479 articles were analyzed.

Based on the data collected, 35 graphs and a map of the locations of the illegal gang mastering were developed, summarizing the analysis of the main social and statistical information contained in the first four sections of the protocol. In particular, the qualitative analysis of the survey was based on the results of the two final sections. This long abstract presents the main results of the survey.



## Press and illegal gang mastering: space and visibility of the phenomenon in national and local newspapers

The data presented in the first chapter describe the issue of visibility of phenomenon of the illegal gang mastering in both the national and the local Italian newspapers' narratives. These are, first of all, data that help to understand how much space is reserved for this topic within the agenda of printed media. Another aspect highlighted by the data is how media give visibility to a number of processes and policy changes affecting this social problem and, at the same time, help to define them through a series of discursive frames and narratives.

The first chapter focuses on the numerical consistency of the articles published between March and November 2020 (479 articles).

The months when more articles on the subject were published on average were not those of mid-summer, as one would expect due to the seasonality of the phenomenon which is linked to the harvest period in the countryside, but in particular the month of May (34.03%), followed by June (15.45%), months in which the question of the regularization of foreign citizens involved in irregular employment relationships in agriculture, or as caregivers for the elderly or as domestic help was addressed in the so-called Decree "Relaunch" (DL 19 May 2020, n. 34).

From a qualitative point of view, there is a general tendency to make reference in article titles to a very wide variety of thematic frameworks related to the phenomenon of labour exploitation, in which the use of terms without a negative connotation prevails, which certainly contributes to the construction of a less alarmist narrative at a social level.

If we look at the kind of articles published by the national newspapers, compared to the average of all the newspapers examined, we observe an increase in terms of the space reserved to generic information and editorials (72,74 %). A homogeneous element shared by all three groups of newspapers analyzed concerns the absolute prevalence of editorials compared to other forms such as interviews, articles and investigative articles. A final consideration of interest relates to the fact that, although the reference to illegal gangmastering appears to be the main theme or at least a theme of a significant level of importance in 56.37% of the articles, a large part of the articles identified on the subject, almost half of them, actually contain only minor references, mainly of a secondary or occasional nature, to the subject.



## **Illegal gangmastering: new and old meanings of the term. Forms, contexts, social actors, images in the history of the newspapers.**

In the second chapter we reconstruct the different connotations of the meaning of the term illegal gangmastering, and the new contexts in which this term is introduced and used in the Italian press. For a long time, the expression referred to a precise system of recruitment of labour with forms of illegal intermediation between workers and employers in the agricultural sector, mainly in southern Italy. The phenomenon, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century in the political debate, has gained a sad fame in the public discourse over the years in the, being referred from time to time to a profoundly social issue of complex economies and becoming almost synonymous with concepts such as labour exploitation, the legacy of the large estate system with masses of day labourers without rights, of organized crime and informal economy.

In the course of time we have therefore transitioned from a historical illegal gangmastering, the one "of the squares", fought by politicians like Giuseppe Di Vittorio, to an illegal gangmastering connected to the agro-industry and the European market.

In the last years, the term has also begun to be associated with other working sectors, like the construction sector.

From the data that have emerged from this survey, it can be argued that there has been a crucial change in the narrative regarding illegal gangmastering, compared to the past.

This has also probably resulted from the lockdown period and the social distancing measures due to the Covid 19 pandemic, and from the emergence of a special attention by the institutions to the new forms of flexible work that have gained momentum during that period. In this regard, large surveys have been conducted on the so-called riders involving Uber and delivery companies. Unlike illegal gangmastering, in which the names of the companies are not mentioned (or, if mentioned, these names are not known), these companies names now appear in the narratives, they are all very well known, have an impact and call for precise responsibilities. But another element that seems to have disappeared in this new narration of illegal gangmastering is the separation between the countryside and the city: hence illegal gangmastering also becomes a typically urban phenomenon, perfectly visible within the walls of big cities.

Even with regard to the protagonists of the articles we no longer speak only of day labourers. Foreigners, however, remain the main protagonists of the articles (they appear in 44% of the articles analyzed), but there is also room for other types of subjects that have become more vulnerable during the pandemic. Significant room, as already said, is



given to companies, protagonists of 21.8% of the articles. The status of women is less visible.

80% of the articles are accompanied by images. The types of images that accompany the articles are emblematic and contribute to the construction of specific images on the theme of illegal gangmastering.

In line with the data on use of images, we observed that the most used images are those depicting men at work in the fields (28.6%). The other two images mostly used are those of bike riders with their famous heat-insulated backpacks with the logos of delivery company (24.47%) and photos of former Italian Minister of Agriculture Teresa Bellanova (15.38%).



## Themes, representations and production of imaginary on the illegal gang mastering in the speech of the press

In the last chapter we present the qualitative analysis of the topics covered by the articles examined and we deepen the analysis of the representations and of the production of collective imagination of illegal gangmastering in the press discourse.

Most (68.15%) of the articles published had illegal gang mastering as their main topic or at least as their relevant topic when dealing with two or more themes at the same time. The topics most covered were mainly those related to the fight against illegal gangmastering (34.91%), the working conditions (24.88%), companies and supply chains (14.76%), migration (8.11%). Other topics covered by lower percentages (from 5 to 0.7%) of articles were: plans to support workers, housing conditions, health conditions, social repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, gender issue, episodes of crime/ violence, episodes of racism, urban conflicts.



## Conclusions

In conclusion, on the basis of the analysis developed, the following trends appear to be emerging in the Italian press:

- The theme of illegal gangmastering is dealt with, in most of the cases analyzed, as a known social fact. What prevails is the use of terms without a negative connotation and a narrative mainly focused on the political-institutional debate linked to this phenomenon and on the tools to fight it (in the first place, laws and judicial investigations).
- Illegal gang mastering is now understood as a phenomenon with a national dimension and multiple geographical and territorial locations. Creation of some narrative poles: not only South-North, but also countryside-city, agriculture-industry, backwardness-modernity.
- Illegal gangmastering used as a term to describe working conditions in different economic sectors and working and entrepreneurial contexts, which involves and draws to itself different types of subject more or less characterized by a condition of vulnerability, in some cases exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic (young people, older Italian workers, foreigners, women, etc.)
- Illegal gangmastering used as a term to indicate different aspects of the business world (problems encountered, supply chain, large-scale distribution, paths and worthy projects)
- There is a general tendency in discussing the issue of "caporalato" to focus on certain aspects of crime and the analysis of the political and institutional debate on the phenomenon, with little attention to socio-economic aspects related to the knowledge of local contexts (gender issues, agricultural and economic production models, migration policies, housing policies).



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