



RightsLab - Towards Transnational Labour Rights? Temporary Work Agencies and Third Country National Workers in the EU

Migrants account for a significant part of the European workforce, counting over 22 million third-country nationals and more than 17 million EU citizens working in an EU Member State other than their own. Often finding work in informal sectors such as agriculture, construction, and domestic and care work, migrants have come to fill the EU's growing demand for a low-cost flexible workforce. Employment of non-EU migrants through temporary work agencies is a common solution to allow for the smooth supply of workers both in core EU Member States and in central and eastern Europe. The EU-funded RightsLab project will study the employment conditions of transnational workers and propose ways to protect their labour rights. Specifically, it will provide empirically grounded research on the employment of Ukrainian workers in Poland, Hungary and Italy, a key destination country for Ukrainian migrants since the late 1990s.

The last two decades have seen the EU grappling with a direct conflict of interests; the securitization of its external borders and the demand for a low-cost flexible workforce which in various sectors of the economy, has been increasingly occupied by migrants. Employment of third country nationals (TCNs) through temporary work agencies (TWAs) became a common solution to allow for the smooth supply of workers both in core EU member states, and in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region, which is in itself effected by considerable emigration and labour mobility. RightsLab will look into the employment conditions of transnational workers employed through TWAs and ask: how can we develop mechanisms of effective transnational labour rights protection for agency workers? It will provide empirically grounded research into the employment of Ukrainian workers in two CEE countries – Poland and Hungary plus Italy. Both Poland and Hungary, recently has become a laboratory for TWA forms of flexible employment, and Ukrainians represent a large segment of the TCN workers there. Italy – a key destination country for Ukrainian migrants since the late 1990s – offers an important perspective into female employment. The novelty of RightsLab's contribution is threefold; 1) existing research on the TWAs predominantly focuses on registering labour rights violations: RightsLab makes a step further by exploring the possibilities of creating better mechanisms for cross-border labour rights protection; 2) methodologically, RightsLab combines several qualitative methods, and takes an engaged, participatory stance, actively searching and connecting various participants of the research for a possible social dialogue; 3) by focusing on various levels (national (labour inspectorates), meso (trade unions, workers' associations, NGOs) and local (TWAs and workers themselves)) it provides a multidimensional picture of emerging transnational employment regimes and transitional labour struggles.

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