

Good morning.

Let me introduce myself. I am Nunzio Cellucci, Director of Confederdia, Association that represents and protects the interests of entrepreneurs and managers in the agricultural sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a health emergency but also caused a severe economic and labor market crisis, with a huge impact on people on a global scale.

The crisis caused by COVID-19 has increased unemployment around the world by hundreds of thousands of people. In the second quarter of 2020, estimates predicted a 17.3% decline in working hours worldwide. This reduction was equivalent to 495 million full-time jobs, with a greater impact on certain groups of male and female workers, increasing the inequalities faced by people in less protected and lower paid jobs: young and older workers, women and migrant workers.

Smart work has brought significant innovations to farms, giving workers the opportunity to experiment in new ways. The pandemic has accelerated a course of evolution and organizational renewal not only technological but also cultural, capable of revising and reorganizing the approach to work towards a more flexible perspective, receptive to change.

In the operation of smart work, businesses have worked hard to overcome distancing through a different way of relating that requires greater efforts of communication and contact so that employees continue to feel part of an organization.

Also we, as an Association, have faced the complexity of the evolution of our work. We had to organize a General Assembly to elect a new President and the articles of our constitution prohibited the organization of remote meetings. We turned to a law office, which enabled us to conduct the regular General Assembly, giving an opinion with specific references to the legislation.

The effects of the pandemic on the world of labour and businesses, especially in the agricultural and fishing sectors, are well known. The rapid spread of the pandemic in Italy triggered a crisis of large proportions, causing an immediate slowdown in productive activity, which was followed by a sharp contraction in domestic demand and trade.

On the other hand, agriculture was immediately classified under the category of "essential" activities. It had to face various difficulties, with more or less serious impact: technical, related to production, on trade channels, public markets (open or covered), on the degree of dependence on external factors of production and on the areas of establishment of enterprises.

Despite this, farms continued to produce and provide food for Italian families. They guaranteed, in compliance with hygiene standards, all activities of the agricultural and zootechnical agri-food processing sector, including the supply chains of goods and services.

The legal forms of protest after the authorities' decision on lockdown in our opinion had no reason to exist, because our Constitution provides that health is a fundamental right of all citizens, while it provides that the inviolability of residence (Article 14) and free movement (Article 16) may be restricted by law for reasons of public health.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the government has issued numerous decrees and laws, which have since been amended according to evolutions of emergency. According to these:

- all activities of the agricultural chain, were considered as essential and therefore were exempted from the stoppage or changes in production that generally applied to industrial and commercial activities in Italy.

- then a PD was approved, which enabled the resumption of other productive activities related to the agricultural sector, in particular related to the manufacture of agricultural tractors and other machinery useful for the agriculture or forestry and animal production.

- dismissals of all employees were prohibited, the prohibition also extending to managers and executives.

- for the agricultural, fishing and aquaculture sector, government has decided to give compensation to self-employed workers, if these people are not retired and not registered in other types of compulsory social security and compensation, for the month of March 2020, equal to 600 euros.

- establishment of the Integrated Promotion Fund, endowed with 150 million euros for 2020, to create an emergency communication campaign in support of Italian exports.

- establishment of a fund of 100 million euros, for 2020, to cover the interest on bank loans and housing loans for agricultural, fishing and fish- farming businesses.

- the carrying out of medical examinations, for the purpose of fulfilling the health surveillance measures in favour of agricultural workers, the results of which are valid for one year

- the extension until December 31, 2020 of the validity of the residence permits of seasonal workers in agriculture.

- implementation of the measures of the three-year plan to prevent employment shortages

- the development of an electronic platform, which matches the demand with the job offer.

- facilitation of return to Italy and extensions of migrants' permits.

- the fight against illegal recruitment includes the legalization of illegal workers.

- facilitating the recruitment of people who are currently unemployed.

The social and economic crisis has certainly intensified the inequalities between the two sexes that already existed in the labour market. The price paid especially by young women and young male workers as a result of this unprecedented pandemic crisis has been very high and profound.

The pandemic has not only slowed down youth employment, but also their vocational training, putting serious obstacles in the way of those seeking to enter the labour market, create their own self-employment and invest in themselves and in their future. In Italy as well as elsewhere in the world, young women are the most vulnerable to gender inequalities and lack of educational opportunities, which has roots already in early childhood.

The discomfort felt by young people during the pandemic adds to the uncertainty and lack of faith that distinguish younger generations in terms of their expectations for the future.

Another consequence of the pandemic is the second grade collective labour agreements, which are decreasing numerically, while there are changes in the issues negotiated, where more emphasis is placed on issues of work organization and hours and less space is left for financial requests.

In the period 2018-2021, a downward trend appeared: in 2018 12,099 Collective Agreements were signed, in 2019 this number fell to 11,615 and in 2020 due to the pandemic it fell to 6,784. 2021 saw a slight recovery in Collective Agreements signed, which however remain below pre-COVID levels (6,379 Collective Agreements were active on 17 January 2022). This positive trend continued (as reported by the Ministry of Employment there were 8,137 active ones on 16 May 2022).

Faced with the coronavirus pandemic, the European Union's agri-food sector has showed resilience and it continues to deliver safe and high-quality food to European citizens. Farmers and processors, however, are going through a difficult time and feel increasingly under pressure.

Now, as you all know, in Italy, since September 25, the Government has changed. Its executives used, in the election campaign, COVID-19 as a political weapon to capture all those employed in economic-productive sectors, who saw the rules and prohibitions as useless burdens, dangerous restrictions of personal freedoms, with arguments based on fake news, produced by using the art of "big brother".

What matters is that logic prevails as well as a sense of responsibility linked to a real goal, that of protecting citizens' health.

Thanks