# Essential workers or Dangerous bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eastern European temporary labour migrants outside the public

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The global pandemic of COVID-19 has highlighted the interconnections between the mobility of capital and labour and existing modes of exclusion and exploitation. What we have witnessed is that transnational labour supply chains play a major role in the global spread of the virus and its effects on social and economic life.[1] While certain migrant workers have become clearly undesirable, others have entered the dual position of essential, but dangerous labouring subjects.

Drawing on the case of Eastern European temporary migrants within the European Union, this paper traces the fault lines and contradictions in their position as workers and citizens that became even more apparent in the current crisis. Through the lens of effects of the pandemic and the different degrees of restrictions and necessities, it looks at the contradictions and multitudes of structural conditions that define the workings lives and the social reproduction of migrant workers with various types of temporary or informal work arrangements.

Temporary migrants play a double role in the COVID-19 global pandemic. On one hand, migrants in low-skilled and lower paid jobs are more exposed and vulnerable to the effects of the virus and by being mobile during the pandemic, they themselves might contribute to the wider spread of the virus. At the same time, labour migrants proved to be essential in certain sectors. Special exceptions were made for short-term migration of low-skilled workers in critical sectors – primarily agriculture, slaughterhouses, and care work. The temporary migrants are thus placed in a paradoxical position in which they are potentially both affected by the impact of COVID-19 and are part of the response. On one hand they are held accountable by both sending and receiving countries for the wider spread of the corona virus. While at the same time they are also actively encouraged through lifting of restrictive mobility measures to be more mobile in order to enable the functioning of certainvital industries and for the social reproduction of Western states.

These contradictions are not caused by the pandemic*per se*. It only makes them more visible and highlights the inherent contradictions and faultlines of how capitalism functions within and beyond the logic of nations states. What the COVID-19 crisis made even more apparent than before is the inherent contradictions of the logic of differential inclusion and exclusion that temporary labour migrants are facing in their daily working lives.

Starting from the different COVID-19 related measures taken towards temporary migrants from the European Union in several EU countries, I will trace the roots and the structural conditions that enable this duality of the temporary migrant in Europe. The focus is primarily on Eastern European migrants from the newest and alsothe poorest member states – Bulgaria and Romania – who joined the European Union in 2007 and have provided ever since a wide pool of freely available, cheep, and highly exploitable labour force. They are differently

[1] https://spectrejournal.com/how-just-in-time-capitalism-spread-covid-19.

positioned than the so called Third country nationals – migrants from outside of the European Union – whose experience differs in some ways due to their different status in the EU labour and mobility regimes. While the comparison and the interaction between these two categories of migrant workers is important, the main focus here will be on the inherent contradiction in the position of Eastern European temporary migrants who have the right to freedom of mobility and labour by means of their EU citizenship , but experience various degrees of exclusion from social and political right by means of their status of temporary formal or informal workers. (Amelina et al. 2019). The temporariness of their sojournexcludes them from access to rights not only in their position as migrants, but also as local citizens in their own countries. In this way their citizenship is not fully realized in any of the localities and political entities that they reside.

The COVID-19 pandemic made ever so clear the lines of exclusion and the limited foundation for inclusion.The majority of these migrants experience critically restricted access to health care, very limited possibilities to contest their labour conditions, and little or no access to welfare support that was made available for citizens. Moreover, they were and continue to be made the scapegoat for spreading the corona virus by being mobile, for not conforming to quarantine measures and for living in unhygienic conditions. Through the lens of the pandemic, the report will trace how Eastern European migrants engaged in temporary labour mobility experience the unevenness of the European Union space.More specifically, it will look at some of the ways in which they have experienced various degrees of differential exclusion both by their host and by their home states. In order to understand the long-standing roots of the current crisis that migrant workers find themselves in, I will outline the main issues, barriers and openings for labour migrants engaged in temporary work in the sectors of agriculture, care-work and industrial labour. I map the policies both in sending and in receiving countries that condition the various degrees of inequalities and exclusions from social and political right for different categories of labour migrants. The main fields of discussion will be access to housing, access to health care, and access to labour rights. The three main categories to be discussed are workers hired through temporary agencies, posted workers, and workers engaged in informal labour relations.

The other inherent contradiction is between the bodies of the citizens and the bodies of the migrants. Citizens' bodies are to be protected by all means byimposing restrictive measures on going out, working in public spaces, travelling and any form of socializing. Social distancing as a prescribed survival measure aimed at protecting nation-states' own citizens.Every state imposed slightly different measures depending on the gravity of the spread, on the condition of the health-care system etc. Most states also restricted mobility of people who are not citizens or hold a long-term residence permit. Borders were effectively closed for the first time and control regimes imposed on check-points that have not been active for over a decade. At the same time, the bodies of the temporary migrants are excluded from these state care measures: first, by being allowed to be mobile and to travel under unsafe conditions; second, by working and living in close proximity; third, by not being provided with proper access to health care; fourth, by not being supported financially by any of the states and thus being at risk of extreme impoverishment and even famine. In addition, upon return to their home countries, many of these migrants experienced quarantine and even whole villages or neighbourhood lockdowns, which additionally restricted their access to any

form of income. The health and the physical survival of some of the migrants was at a serious risk in a moment where funds have been redistributed in each state to support its citizens during the hardships of the pandemic, the lockdown, and the accompanying economic downturn. In this sense, what we saw even more clearly, is the dual exclusion of temporary migrants that is made possible by the very nature of the structural conditions of the EU mobility and labour regimes. What became visible is that these migrants are neither here, not there, and that they are invisible for all the systems in which they are partially incorporated. This paper aims at unpacking the conditions that allow this invisibility and dual exclusion.

I start with a discussion of the analytical framework that allows us to better understand the case. I propose to look at the question of citizenship disaggregation and marektization which ultimately results in producing partially or fully rightless citizens. Formal status of being a citizen – in the case here, and European Union citizen – does not guarantee access to rights and entitlements, to protection and equal treatment in practice. The concept of internal statelessness demonstrates these disjuncture between being formally a member of a polity and a substantive participation in this polity. Then, I move on to discuss three types of temporary migrants that were affected by the contradictions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic: slaughterhouse workers in Germany, agricultural workers in Austria and Italyand informal workers in construction and other sectoracross the EU. I conclude with a discussion onthe divide lives of temporary migrants and the consequences of being 'neither here, nor there' for their position of invisibility and internal statelessness.

I argue that the pandemic emergency measures made visible long-existing inequalities, and the uneven and heterogenous nature of the EU space in a drastic way. This heterogeneity, along with the complex processes of differential inclusion and various restrictions to full rights, has been unfolding over the last decade to a new extent with the accession of the newest and poorest member states. The work-citizenship nexus is more clearly identifiable now, when we see how those who do not fit in the narrow requirement for a worker-citizen, are practically excluded from social and health protection. Bulgaria and Romania entered the Union in 2007 and have ever since provided a cheap and exploitable pool of freely and legally mobile labour force. This paper aims to unpack the roots of the current crisis looking at the configurations of labour, state, and capital that occurred with their accession.

**Disaggregation of citizenship and the work-citizenship nexus**

In recent decades welfare systems have been undergoing transformations in almost all advanced industrial countries with privatization and retrenchment of public services, marketization of healthcare, new contractual relations on insurance principle. All this has reconfigured the relationships and the distribution of responsibilities between states, markets, families and individuals for the provision of security (Kingfisher 2002, Pierson 2006). While these processes take different shapes in different parts of the world, Nikolas Rose (1996) suggests they pose similar questions about the new strategies of governing, which have at their centre discrete and autonomous actors, rather than society as a whole. With the welfare state being a major embodiment of social citizenship, the issue at stake then is how can we transform social rights by individualizing social problems without destabilizing the basis for citizenship and social membership, as Giovanni Procacci (2001) points out.

There is a striking gap between studies of irregular migrant labour and studies of precarious labour conditions of local citizens. The concepts of regularity and irregularity have been widely discussed in the migration literature. However, a large part of this research replicates the view of migration management policies in adopting a pre-given distinction between legitimate and illegitimate mobility. It thus discusses irregularity through an objectivist perspective defining it as a pre-given status of illegitimacy (Squire 2011). 'Irregular', 'illegal', 'clandestine' or 'undocumented' migration is commonly framed in a discourse of securitization and criminalization describing illegitimate forms of international migration in which the irregular migrant is perceived as a non-citizen who enters or resides in a nation-state without authorization, or works without authorization. This approach positions the migrant in opposition to the 'regular' subject of the nation-state, i.e. the citizen or the authorized migrant, through categories crafted by the state (Jordan and Düvell 2002). Such emphasis on status produces vulnerability in terms of access to rights and provisions (Willen 2007), propensity to exploitive conditions of work, precariousness, (Block, Sigona and Zetter 2009, Calavita 2005) and coping strategies in the interplay between provisions and exclusion (Chmienti and Achermann 2007, Coutin 2003, Ellerman 2010). This understanding fails to capture the in-between state of various types of irregular conditions of work within a regular status, which might affect migrants and citizens alike. The cases under scrutiny here present workers who experience precarious working conditions and limited access to citizenship entitlements despite their regular status as citizens and EU labour migrants.

These modalities of labour and citizenship unfold in the context of the process of citizenship transformation, where which there is a growing discrepancy between formal (legal status) and substantive (practices and enactments of rights and obligations) citizenship. Coded as a 'disaggregation of citizenship' (Behnabib 2004, 2007) or 'mutations of citizenship' (Ong 2006), this is the process in which citizenship rights (political, social, civil, cultural etc) – once bound together as an ensemble and depending on legal status and a territorial bond in a nation state – are being fragmented and detached from each other. One effect of this disaggregation is the prevention of certain individuals with formal status from enjoying full citizenship rights. In this way formal citizens can be excluded from access to social rights for example and become what Margaret Somers calls the 'internally stateless'(Somers 2008).

Somers highlights the grave effects of market fundamentalism on civil society. She argues that the market logic displaces "civil society's ethic of inclusion, membership, solidarity, and egalitarianism." Further, she says: "As the relationship between the citizen and the state turns into a contractual one, citizens are converted into quantities and qualities of human capital, while families and communities are increasingly viewed as sources of social capital. Their worth, value, and inclusion, are accordingly determined by contractual success or failures in relationship to utility. Those without marketable skills or those whose jobs are no longer available become incapable of engaging in contractual relations, which in turn marks them as morally unworthy"(Somers 2008:41). Market fundamentilsm and market-driven governance are turning right-bearing citizens into "socially excluded and internally rightless and stateless persons". This erosion of right is happening through what Somers calls *contractualization of citizenship – reorganization of the relationship between the citizens and the state, which moves from universal non contractual rights and obligations to a market exchange following the principle and practice of quid pro quo. "*Contractualizing citizenship distorts the meaning

of citizenship form that of shared fate among equals to that of conditional privilege. The growing moral authority of both market and contract makes social inclusion and moral worth no longer inherent rights but rather earned privileges that are wholly conditional upon the ability to exchange something of equal value. This is the model by which the structurally unemployed become *contractual malfeasants*." (Somers 2008:3) Somers describes this process as 'marketization of citizenship', in which the relationship between citizens and the state becomes contractual and based on the value of the citizen as a tax-paying productive worker, thus wiping away the universality of rights conditioned by holding a status.

While Somers focuses exclusive on the tendencies in the United States, Aihwa Ong (1999, 2006) analyses the transformations of welfare provision in the wider context of the changing way the neoliberal states are functioning. By doing this, Ong brings together two concepts – neoliberalism and exception. She shows how components which used to be tied to citizenship (rights, entitlements, territoriality) are now becoming disarticulated and then rearticulated anew following an economic logic which postulates protecting only certain categories of subjects. This neoliberal exception means that the state operates through calculative practices which work against universal rights, but instead filter and prefer certain citizens over other. Meanwhile, other segments of subjects are exempted from the citizenry. This process leads to blurring between local and foreign population, while at the same time deepens inequalities. People who are defined as lacking in "neoliberal potential" are categorized and might be treated as less worthy citizens. This is especially true for low-skill workers, whether from the local population or migrants. They become an exception to neoliberal mechanisms and are framed as excludable population in transit, in between zones of economic growth. More recently, Bryan S. Turner (2016) has developed the concept of Denizenship Type 2 to point to the processes described by Somers and Ong. Denizenship Type 2 refers to the erosion of social citizenship as citizens begin to resemble denizens or strangers in their own societies and describes the attenuated social and economic status of citizens under regimes of austerity and diminished rights and opportunities.

EU citizenship in particular favours the understanding of the citizen as a worker (Hancock 1999, REF) and relies on a narrow conception of work as regular paid employment, which excludes a large number of work categories like part-time work, care work and reproductive labour, non-standard forms of employment like temporary contracts and self-employed, and informal work from access to citizenship entitlements (Ackers 2004, McGlynn 2000, Stychin 2000). In this way citizenship provisions become conditional rather than universal, in a similar process of marketization and contractualization as described by Somers (2008), which favours an individualistic view of the citizen as autonomous agent and regular worker. While scholars have researched this process in the context of migration, my contention is to point at new contexts and show how this narrow definition of citizenship, depending on a particular type of work, effectively excludes citizens and migrants alike from access to rights. It also renders certain categories unworthy and illegitimate, positioning them outside the domain of recognition and access to entitlements based on their position as non-workers.

The concept of "differential inclusion" has been used to explain the modalities anddegrees of migrants' inclusionwithin society.Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2012: 68) have introduced this notion topoint to a 'substitution of the binary distinction between inclusion and exclusion withcontinuous parametric modulations – that is, processes of filtering and

selecting that refer tomultiple and shifting scales, ratings and evaluations.' Thinking through this concept about temporary migrants, allows us to see the different degrees in which they are simultaneously included and excluded from society. Included as labour, but excluded from the social contract with various degrees of restrictions on access to welfare, voting and social support…

In the absence of straightforward EU legislation and explicit government policies, administrative actors use their discretion to draw indeterminate boundaries enforcing conditionality and temporariness of status for EU citizens in precarious work arrangements, therefore often increasing the pressure on them to take further precarious jobs. Under the conditions of precarious employment, not even migrants with privileged access to citizenship rights are protected from processes of boundary enforcement that institutionalise the ambiguity of statuses and produce precarious citizenship (Simola 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic made governments across the glove mobilize their welfare states much more generously and some analyzers see this as a potential long-term trend that might last even as the pandemic recedes (Sandher and Kleider 2020; Lu et al. 2020; REF)[2]. Civic solidarity (McGregor 2020) and a social economy model (OECD 2020)[3] have been expanding to mitigate the harsh economic effects of Covid-19 on citizens. Yet, in the context of differential inclusion and the marketization of citizenship, the effects of these expanding welfare measures have been selective and far from inclusive. Temporary migrants have been systematically excluded from these measures both as migrants and as citizens in their home countries, along with other excluded categories of precarious workers, informal workers, long-term unemployed, the urban poor etc. In Germany, for example, a legally precarious groups like vulnerable EU migrant citizens with unclear residency status and non-EU citizens with irregular status have remained excluded from emergency welfare measures and full access to the healthcare system. Yet, other sources of social support like NGO's have expanded their support to such groups that remained out of their outreach until now (Bruzelius and Ratzman 2020)[4]. What we observe then, is that while welfare measures have been expanding, the figure of the temporary migrant remained largely excluded and ever more precarious by virtue of their status of differential inclusion.

**Temporary migration in the European Union: Precarious labour, precarious citizenship**

Temporary labour migration increased significantly in 2017, reaching 4.9 million. Temporary migration is characterized by the constant mobility of migrants across borders and their partial incorporation in both states of origin and states of destination. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on temporary migration was immediately felt both for migrants' whose mobility and hence access to work was curtailed, and for industries relying on migrant labour

[2]https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-has-brought-the-welfare-state-back-and-it-might-be-here-to-stay-138564

[3]http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/social-economy-and-the-covid-19-crisis-current-and-future-roles-f904b89f/

[4]https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/socialpolicy/2020/04/30/the-social-consequences-of-covid-19-for-vulnerable-migrant-groups-in-germany/; https://uni-tuebingen.de/fakultaeten/wirtschafts-und-sozialwissenschaftliche-fakultaet/faecher/fachbereich-sozialwissenschaften/politikwissenschaft/institut/lehrende/comparative-public-policy-professor-seeleib-kaiser/research/misp-migration-and-social-protection/

like the agri-food industry.This logic entails a managerial approach to temporary migration to ensure the transience and non-integration of labour migrants in host societies on the one hand, and the durability of remittance transfers to left-behind families and continual investment in home countries on the other. (Collins, F.L. and T. Bayliss 2020). Low-waged labour migrants tend to be excluded or only partially incorporated into welfare support systems, labour protection laws and have generally limited access to the range of rights available for citizens *(*Rosewarne 2010). The degrees of incorporation might differ according to the status of migrants -whether they are say EU migrants or Third country nationals, with regular status or undocumented in the case of the European Union. Yet, the commonality is that exclusion is bound to the temporariness of labour arrangements and that temporary migrants are perceived to be outsiders to the public with no right to belong beyond the sphere of work (Rudnyckyj 2006, and others). Covid-19 lockdown measures have put social protection measures to an unprecedented test (OECD 2020)[5], but measures targeted at migrant labour have been minimal and when at place designed to meet urgent needs rather than address structural issues of exploitation and inequality underpinning temporary migration schemes (Yeoh 2020).

While we can draw many lines of differentiation between temporary migration within political unions like the European Union and migration across international borders without special mobility regimes, the pandemic showed the many similarities of vulnerability and precariousness of temporary migrants' lives. The legal status, the requirement for residence and work permits, the types of contracts with temporary work agencies, subcontractors and intermediaries might vary and create different degrees of risk, but there are principles that can be observed across those differences. By taking the example of intra-European temporary migrants I aim to show how despite the fact that they are EU citizens with a series of rights and entitlements, their experience of exclusion and precarity, exacerbated by the lockdown and the economic restrictions speaks to a wider set of commonalities with other categories of temporary migrants outside the European union on a more global scale.

Intra-European labour migration is exceedingly coloured by various types of non-standard non-permanent forms of mobility. Temporary migration is an umbrella concept that contains a number of novel forms of mobility. Eastern European citizens in particular engage in various modes of labour migration that can be differentiated by the type of labour arrangement or by it temporary cyclical pattern. Without being exhaustive, some of these are informal work, short-term temporary contracts, seasonal contracts, sub-contracting, self-employment, service contracts, zero-hours, paid-per-piece contracts. These temporary labour arrangements might be one-off, or more regular – seasonal, pendular or circular (every few months of weeks, or even every weekend). Their commonality is that there is no permanent full-time standard employment that workers enjoy in any of the localities where they reside. Many of these temporary labour arrangements unfold in a context of hyper-mobility and 'liquid migration' (Engbersen 2013, 2018). Liquid migration describes the temporary, flexible and unpredictable character of mobility that many Eastern European low-waged workers engage in, while trying their luck in different EU labour markets, moving between different countries and cities, performing often informal, paid-per-piece, or short-term labour.

[5] https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=132_132985-hrr3dbjimj&title=Supporting-livelihoods-during-the-COVID-19_crisis%20oe.cd/il/30z

Migrants engaged in liquid migration also alternate between times abroad and time at home, sometimes in very sthortstretches of time. For that reason, this type of migration can also be characterized by hyper mobility. One consequence of such movements is that many intra-European migrants only partially integrate in their destination countries, while also remaining excluded in their home countries.

The importance of borders and border regimes for enhancing such liquid migration within the European Union cannot be underestimated. While EU citizens unlike Third country nationals, are able to freely travel and work across the European Union, borders have been drawn on the inside of the polities (Apostolova 2017 and others) through modalities of differential inclusion. The case of EU internal temporary migrants reveals exactly these internal borders and lines of differentiation that are drawn between different categories of citizens. The pandemic triggered the intensification of these internal borders and showed us the consequences of decades long policies of neoliberalization of citizenship and labour.

**Essential Workers with Expendable Bodies: the COVID-19 effect on EU mobility**

All these categories of Eastern European temporary workers provide essential labour for the functioning and reproduction of western societies at a low price, working under exploitative conditions. At the same time, they are available only when needed, always ready to leave back to their home country. A mobility regime enabling extreme flexibility of the worker. The temporariness of their stay makes these workers expendable. When not needed any longer, they are expected to leave and not burden the welfare system, whether we talk of seasonal workers, posted workers, or informal day-labourers. What these workers have in common is that they work in essential areas - food production, construction work, cleaning. But they are only used for their productive bodies. Their bodies are expelled from regular social rights. Health care is rarely fully accessible given their non-permanent position; housing is deplorable; children are going sporadically to school or live in divided families away from their parents. The social reproduction of these bodies is scarce and limited exactly because of their mobility and the dispersed lives they live.

The COVID-19 epidemic highlighted the duality of these workers' bodies as both essential and expendable, by adding an extra layer of meaning to it. They became not simply redundant, but also dangerous as potential virus spreaders. Two current examples demonstrate this claim. The role of temporary migrant workers in the meat industry and in agriculture.

***Agriculture***

The strict lockdown measures overlapped with the crop season. Strawberries and asparagus needed to be picked upwhile the usual seasonal workers coming from Bulgaria and Romania were trapped in their own countries because of the global restrictions on mobility. While mobility was restricted, borders were closed and flights were cancelled, Western European governments decided to allow special measures to bring Eastern European migrants to the fields. Some employers organized charter flights to enable the arrival of the workers.[6] Scenes from the airport in the Romanian town of Cluj showed hundreds of Romanian workers,

[6] https://jacobinmag.com/2020/05/migrant-workers-strawberry-farms-england-bulgaria-eu-coronavirus

unprotected and not in a position to observe social distance, who were crowded to board special charter flights to Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and the UK, where they would be deployed to asparagus and strawberry fields and kept under quarantine for two weeks.[7] With no possibilities to find work in their home countries in the period of strict lockdown and with restrictions on regular travel, many Eastern Europeans were desperate to get on one of these flights.[8]

The conditions in the agricultural sector have been long known as very poor and exploitative, even prior the COVID-19 pandemic. Eastern Europeans make a large share of the labour force in this sector and are predominantly from Bulgaria and Romania. Whether it is strawberries in Spain and the UK, grapes or tomatoes in Italy, or asparagus in Germany and Austria, the conditions described by scholars and in the media are similarly dire.[9] Wages are low and often below the legal minimum, they tend to be delayed or not fully paid. What has been negotiated with the hiring agency, is then renegotiated to a lower wage once on the spot. In many cases, the pay is not per day or per week, but per piece, which forces workers to work without breaks and overtime, thus posing health risks. The working hours as a rule are extremely long – 10-12 hours shifts, often above what has been negotiated. There are illegal deductions for meal and accommodation at exaggerated costs. The living conditions are poor, such as containers, caravans or even tents made of plastic covers, with 10-12 people crammed in a space designated for two. (see a most recent study by Schneider et al. 2020)[10]

Labour force containment is a common practice in this sector, where workers are packed in separated spaces and regulations and rights are frequently suspended (Peano 2012 and many others). The circles of control of kin and village networks might result in sexual abuse and further exploitation like in the case of the agroindustry in southern Italy.[11] Social benefits and access to health care are limited or non-existent based on the working contracts with subcontractors like temporary work agencies and the type of service temporary contract. Finally, being tied to a single employer increases vulnerability due to the fear of losing one's job and accommodation. The lack of language skill additionally makes workers dependent on the subcontractor regarding information on rights and entitlements and access to institutions.

The pandemic exacerbated these vulnerabilities and made them more visible. While exceptions were made for workers to fly in, accommodation conditions remained the same, despite the new regulations. The dependency on the employer became even stronger with restricted mobility, no commercial flights and generally closed borders. Crucial access to healthcare was not extended to the workers. In the case of falling sick, social benefits support was not made available.[12] Moreover, the conditions of temporary contracts have been changed. For example, in Germany most seasonal contracts are set for a period shorter than

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[7] https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/only-frequent-flyers-left-migrant-workers-eu-times-covid-19/; https://twitter.com/FEHBender/status/1248924797800796162

[8] https://www.dw.com/en/germany-drafts-romanian-farm-labor-for-coronavirus-pandemic/a-53066735

[9] For Germany, see reports of FaereMobilitaet: https://www.faire-mobilitaet.de/en/ueber-uns/++co++1553ebf6-697b-11e2-8499-00188b4dc422

[10] https://www.iss.nl/en/media/2020-07-are-agrifood-workers-only-exploited-southern-europe-20200715-report

[1111] https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/containment-resistance-flight-migrant-labour-in-agro-industrial-district-o/ - Irene Peano

[12] https://taz.de/Ausbeutung-in-Corona-Krise/!5676706/

70 days which exempts employers from making social contribution for health care, unemployment and pension, and leaves workers outside of the social security system. Currently, the exemption period has been extended to 115 days.[13] By doing this, the German state aims at limiting additional movement and thus containing any possible contamination spread to the bodies of its citizens, while at the same time strips the temporary workers from the benefits that should accompany this extended stay. "The pandemic has now made it easier to extract more labour from seasonal workers without the obligation of increased welfare provisions."[14]

The agricultural farms quickly became pandemic hotspots.The deplorable working and labour conditions and the fact that employers widely did not comply with new hygiene and social distance regulations resulted in many cases of outbursts, especially in farms with migrant labour. In June 2020, for example, 231 workers were infected with Covid-19 at a vegitables and fruit farm in the Bavarian town of Mamming.Most of the workers were Bulgarian, Romanian and Ukrainians.[15]500 people were quarantined for 2 weeks on the farm. The farm was subsequently sealed off with a fence to block workers from leaving. The farm owners were accused of not abiding by the strict hygiene and social distance requirements and thus endangering both their employees and the whole municipality and the region with a virus spread and a strict local lockdown.

The virus soon spread to a nearby can-factory, connected to the farm, where another 166 people were infected also affecting predominantly migrant workers. The factory was also guarded by security forces so that no one leaves while under quarantine. The agro-food industry mostly serviced by migrant workers is a hot spot for the virus spread. Only in Germany, the reported outbursts in different food factories and farms were numerous. Infected migrants who also reside on the premises of the farms, are easily contained physically and sealed off from the rest of the society. The local population of Mamming did not have reasons to worry, local government officials said, and the massive spread was indeed held within the limits of the work compounds. But the toll was paid by migrant works, living in close proximitywotking 10-12 hours shifst every day, without a chance of social distancing, work from home or any other form of protection. The migrant labour force remained physically and symbolically sealed off from the public and but paid a price with their own healt without social or public support.

In the meantime in Italy the army stepped in to enforce a 'coronavirus barricade' around a community of Bulgarian farmworkers near Naples. The compound was declared a 'red zone' and fences were set up around apartment buildings to bar residents from leaving. This incident exacerbated the tension between migrant workers and the locals. Hundreds of Bulgarian took the streets with the closed-off area protesting the lockdown, insisting they should get back to work. Their argument was that they cannot sustain themselves if they do not work, even though the local government arranged for food to be delivered. At the same

[13] https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/muncitori-romani-germania-monitorizati-gps-2953178?fbclid=IwAR0zwD5ty9QLo8dhdO_VwAYl92CHe4NopXUDukAxQDcfBTK-PKGfxuwUKXk
[14] https://verfassungsblog.de/covid-19-and-disposable-migrant-workers/
[15] https://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/gesundheit/coronavirus/mamming-174-erntehelfer-in-bayern-mit-corona-infiziert-16876663.html; https://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/mamming-corona-ausbruch-auswirkungen-1.4988606

time, local Italians demonstrated around the blockade against the Bulgarians claiming migrants were posing a threat to their health, and emphasized this by smashing vehicles with Bulgarian registration.[16]Local citizens and authorities claimed that migrants must have brought the virus from their home countries.[17]Similar cases were reported across Europe, for example Spain, where local citizens blame migrant farm workers on spreading the virus.

The case of temporary agricultural workers shows us the separations of two categories of subjects: the foreign workers and the domestic citizen. One category deserves to be protected and the other does not. The bodies of the migrants are valuable as working bodies, but they are also considered dangerous for contaminating the bodies of the citizens, hence need to be kept separated and contained. Expendable bodies versus deserving bodies is the conflict that we clearly witness now, but what has been in the making for decades.

***Slaughterhouses:***

Bulgarian and Romanian workers are largely represented in the meat industry in Germany, the Netherland, and Belgium. The extremely poor and exploitative working conditions have been repeatedly criticized by the media, by the unions, and by researchers, in what has been qualified as modern slavery.[18]Most employees do not have a permanent contract, but work on service contracts, usually hired not directly, but through subcontractors. Subcontractors recruit directly from Romania and Bulgaria and function like temporary work agencies. The service contracts are for one-off services and do not provide labour security, nor access to the usual social benefits like pension, unemployment, sick days etc. In addition, subcontractors often also hire workers informally, or change their contracts often, so that they do not have consistent contributions and hence are exempted from social benefits based on work. The working conditions are extremely exploitative with 10-12 hours shifts, six days a week, in refrigerated rooms. Overtime is rarely paid. Subcontracted workers often have to do piecework, paid-per-piece, rather than paid a wage for the actual time spent. Or there are norms that workers are obliged to fulfil in order to receive their daily wage that take much more than 8 hours.[19]

Workers report that they are often made to work even when sick in very low tempreatures in the factory cold roms, which is particularly pertinent to the current health crisis and has been reported as an ongoing practice in various sectors. In some cases, the salary consists of a base salary and a bonus, but the bonus is only received upon uninterrupted periods of work– usually the whole month, which means in practice, that workers are financially penalized for sick days. In the context of a global pandemic, the push to work while sick, stops being an individual problem of exploiting the workers, but becomes a threat to public health. And still, even in these conditions, 'working while sick' continued to be a norm in many sectors.

[16]https://www.cbsnews.com/news/italy-coronavirus-mondragone-outbreak-soldiers-enforce-barricade-bulgarian-migrant-farm-workers/
[17]https://segabg.com/node/141014
[18]Deutsche Welle*Corona-Ausbruch in Coesfeld: 'ModerneSklaverei' | DW | 09.05.2020*. Retrieved 17 June 2020, from https://www.dw.com/de/corona-ausbruch-in-coesfeld-moderne-sklaverei/a-53382903;
https://www.dw.com/en/help-for-eastern-europeans-in-germanys-meat-industry/a-38036330
[19]Worker report consistently the same type of transgressions on various facebook groups for work abroad.

The poor conditions extend to the area of accommodation which is presumably organized by the subcontractor in military barracks or poor but overpriced housing where people are crammed in small overcrowded flats, paying unrealistically high rent.[20]Whether in crowded containers or tents on an agricultural farm, or in crowded flats, covered in mold, peeling walls, and old braking furniture, the accommodation provided by employers to migrants is usually reported as below-standard if not dreadful. Yet, temporary migrants are forced to accept whatever the employer is offering, because of the temporary nature of their stay residing in the country only for limited periods of time and/or working in distant localities. They are

In most cases, the temporary workers are completely dependent on the subcontractor who arranges their documents, provides them with accommodation and 'translates' for them, since very few of them ever have the chance to learn the language (Birke and Bluhm 2020 etc.) My own research on Roma labour migrants in Germany and the Netherlands demonstrates the dependency relation with the intermediary – in this case, naturalized Turks with whom the Roma communicate in Turkish. (Deneva 2014) The networks of dependence around an intermediary or a subcontractor keep workers docile and compliant and block possibilities for struggle and mobilization. Workers are not in a position to request better labour or health conditions, not least because often they do not speak the language and cannot communicate directly to the employer or during checks of German inspection agencies.[21]Subcontracting through multiple companies shifts the responsibility from the business owners to the chain of subcontracting firms, which also makes it difficult to negotiate with the sector as a whole on labour conditions. Subcontracting not only makes negotiating working conditions extremely difficult, it is also a barrier for any form of unionization and common interests between workers - a problem common for temporary agency workers across Europe (e.g. Andrijasevic and Saccheto 2018, Meszman and Fedyuk 2020, etc).

The COVID-19 took is taking its toll in slaughterhouses around Europe.Epidemiologists warned that the massive facilities in the mead industry with their running fluids, packed assembly lines, poor ventilation and oft-touched surfaces, are the perfecto environment for infection spread. But it seems the industry did not take into account this warning. Already in May and June 2020, there were numerous cases of corona virus outbreaks in slaughterhouses and meat factories in Germany, where the majority of workers are from Eastern Europe. The outbreak in the factory Tönnies, in Gütersloh, Germany, attracted the public attention to the dire conditions that workers are forced to work and live in. More than 1500 employees tested positive over one week in June. Local authorities forced 7,000 employees and their families into quarantine in the crowded accommodation provided by the factory and mobilized police and other security official to enforce the lockdown.[22]

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[20]https://webcafe.bg/obshtestvo/klanitsi-zemedelie-i-rabotata-koyato-nito-edin-germanets-ne-iska-za-sebe-si.html ; https://www.dw.com/en/help-for-eastern-europeans-in-germanys-meat-industry/a-38036330 ; https://www.dw.com/en/eastern-europeans-in-german-meat-industry-decry-conditions-pay-hours/a-41840480

[21]90 Corona-Infizierte: Mehrals 1.000 Mitarbeiter von Müller Fleischwerdengetestet. (2020, April 17). *BadischeNeuesteNachrichten*. https://bnn.de/lokales/enzkreis/90-corona-infizierte-bei-mueller-fleisch-in-birkenfeld-mehr-als-1-000-mitarbeiter-werden-getestet

[22]https://www.rferl.org/a/coronavirus-outbreak-threatens-germany-s-local-lockdown-strategy/30684736.html

With subcontractor negotiating pay and accommodation with the workers, employers were only responsible for paying the wage, without bearing responsibility for the rest, thus avoiding legal responsibility for what has happened. Workers in the Tonnies factory reported to journalists the horrid conditions under which they are employed. Working for the minimum wage, with rent for a bed in a shared room and other 'incidental costs' deducted from their salarly, overtime often not paid and if paid, often cash and undeclared. Many employees say their payslips show they earn between €700-900 per month. The accommodation is reported as crammed, with leaking ceiling, mold etc. These are the condition under which workers were quarantined by the police.

This incident and the many that followedstirred the public debate about the role of migrants in the spread of the virus. Some politicians outright blames migrants for bringing the virus from their home countries (an unfounded allegation, given that most of them did not return to their home countries in the meantime or kept the initially require quarantine upon entry) or for living in inappropriate housing – too crowded, dirty, ungygenic. The fact that the employer did not secure the necessary protective equipment or the required social distancing measures at the workplace has been skipped from these allegations. [23] In the meantime, in June 2020 the German Food, Beverage and Catering Union (NGG) requested elimination of this type of service contracts for the meat industry as a model of grave trespassing of labour rights. [24]As a result, Germany's Minister of Labour Hubertus Heil presented a new law, which should take effect in January 20201, to ban the outsourcing of labour to subcontractors and obliging the meat industry in Germany to commit to minimum labour standards for its workers. A special commission was established to investigate illegal contracts for workers brought into Germany from Eastern Europe, subcontracting chains and poor working and living conditions provided by employers in the meat packing warehouses.[25]

The numerous outbreaks reported across Germany demonstrated what are the effects of these limited labour and social rights. While healthcare measures require social distancing and wearing protective gear like facemasks and gloves as the only certain mode of protection, essential workers in the food industry live and work in close proximity in horrendous conditions to support the economy and to make some income to support their own families risking their lives. Essential workers then have nonessential and dispensable lives, which are however critical for sustaining the lives of the rest of the population

***Informal work***

Over the last decades, work has become more flexible and precarious with many categories of work not fitting the definitions of productive labour and standard employment both in the post-socialist countries and in the post-industrial Western Europe. This has created the conditions for an omnipresent irregularity of work, especially at the level of the low-skilled. The work that is available to the category of the low-skilled, impoverished, and ethnically

[23] https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2020-06/toennies-fleischfabrik-corona-ausbruch-guetersloh-armin-laschet?fbclid=IwAR3Y8O7PL01EynsmlT1csyOi_Aw8ldrOlqNDm5z_wDrEoWFQeL67OKkelp8

[24] https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2020-06/fleischindustrie-toennies-corona-werkvertraege-ngg-gewerkschaft; https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-meat-industry-germany-t%C3%B6nnies-working-conditions/a-54252645

[25] https://www.dw.com/en/german-police-raid-meat-industry-firms-over-illegal-workers/a-55022253

discriminated does not allow them access to standard employment, both in their position of citizens and of migrants.

Some of the temporary migrants work informally without any contract, or have surpassed the legal period of their contract and continued working for the same employer. In addition to the discussed above sectors of agriculture and slaughterhouses, there are many informal workers in construction work, in industrial cleaning, retail shops, the tourism sector and domestic services. What they share is a pattern of exclusion from any labour rights and very limited access to social benefits and health care, combined with extremely precarious labour conditions. Work is usually paid either per day, or per-piece. There are often intermediaries and mediators included.

My own research on Bulgarian Roma migrants who are engaged in hyper-mobility between Bulgaria, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. Some work irregularly in short-term jobs ranging from domestic services, construction work, road repairs, and factory work – in arrangements bordering legality. Others find a source of income in regularized forms of begging, selling street newspapers or playing music in designated street spots. Back in Bulgaria, they live in a region where the few available activities are extremely precarious, flexible, and in most cases irregular: gathering and selling of herbs, working seasonally in agriculture, cutting trees, and other short-term seasonal jobs, all paid per piece, without any contracts or even day wages. For these Roma, making a living is a transnational endeavour. The informal workers are often engaged in a highly-intensive mobility patterns and a form of "liquid migration' as described above in which they alternate short periods of work abroad with periods of stay at home, sometimes traveling back and forth every few weeks. The reason for this is the combination of insecure and very low income that they can generate with their labour and the absence of access to social protection, which is conditioned partially by their informal labour relations and partially by their hyper-mobility through which they are not settled for long enough periods in either country. This, of course, creates a vicious circle, in which the more they travel for work, the less likely it is to gain access to formal work or to full welfare support.

Intermediaries are key for informal workers. For the Bulgarian Roma in Germany and the Netherlands these were local second or third generation Turks with whom they shared a common language. The intermediaries find employment, arrange documents and secure accommodation. Because of the temporariness and informality of the labour arrangements, accommodation is never fully regular or long-term. Most people would pay for a night for a bed in a room with another 5 people, sharing the flat with up to 20 people at a time. The advantage being that one pays per night and can leave at any given point, if there is currently no work. Not having proper accommodation creates further problems with address registration and access to social benefits, and often leads to various forms of fraud.[26]

With the outbreak of the pandemic and the strict lockdown, many of these migrants remained jobless. Reports on the numerous return migrants towards Bulgaria and Romania suggest that those workers not only lost their jobs during the lockdown, but also did not have access to the available emergency social protection. With no access to socialsecurity, no employment, and

[26] I have addressed this issue in an forthcoming article.

no accommodation, they were forced to immediately leave back to Bulgaria. Surviving under lockdown in such conditions clearly would be impossible.

Informal migrants are invisible – they are often literally invisible for the public – working in the back of stores, hidden away in factories, working on internal construction sites, as not to be noticed by inspectors. More importantly, they are invisible for the state, not being registered in social security schemes, not paying taxes and not figuring in employer's reports. As local citizens in Bulgaria, they are equally invisible for the Bulgarian state and society. Despite the fact that they spent long periods of time at home, they do not exist as citizens in the welfare, health care system or in the tax system. During the pandemic, this category of migrant became visible at the border. They became visible and made the border visible through its selective impremiability….

The sudden lockdown triggered a crisis for many migrants who tried to return home. The crisis unfolded at destination, at transit and at home. The next section is devoted to those temporary migrants, who were forced to return back home, stretching their productive and reproductive lives across borders and between states that do not want them.

**Neither here, nor there: migrants and the public**

EU mobility and labour regimes have created a separation between the space of labour and the space of social reproduction. Temporary migrants are placed in a position to spread their lives between geographic spaces, and what is more – outside the space of state social protection. While labour is available through migration, social reproduction is shifted to the space of the family and the kin networks. Astemporary migrants, Eastern Europeans have limited or no access to health care, consistent education for their children, and key social benefits like unemployment, sick leave, pension schemes. At the same time, due to their absence, they are excluded from these social provisions in their home country. This means a shift to 'kinfare' (Deneva 2017) where the tasks of social reproduction are taken by the kin members - be it care arrangements for the children and the elderly, financial support in times of crisis, and payments for health care, when needed. The family becomes the institution of social support, while the state is withdrawing (Apostolova and Hristova2020, Monova 2015).Moreover, while labour takes place abroad, social reproduction is located at home. Instead of enjoying their rights as EU citizens which on paper allow them to be socially and even politically included as migrants within the European Union, temporary migrants become doubly excluded, while providing cheap labour.

The COVID-19 outbreak shows us that it is not only migrants' social reproduction that is at risk, but also their biological reproduction. With higher risks of infection and with no appropriate access to healthcare, temporary migrants are risking their lives, without any of the social gratitude for essential workers like health care workers. On the contrary, as we speak the German premier of the most numerous German state North Rhine-Westphalia,Armin Laschet, has openly blamed Romanian and Bulgarian migrants for importing the virus and for endangering Germany's citizens and their bodies. The accusation came in the midst of the outbreak in the above mentionedslaughterhouse Tönnies. The reaction is similar to the one of Italian citizens protesting against the migrant workers near Naples and may other reaction of local citizensexpressing dear and anger against the

"dangerous migrants". This demonstrates not only a mechanism for blaming the foreigner for the threat of infecting the national body. It also demonstrates a full disregard for the essential role that migrants have for the reproduction of the citizens by working in the food industry under conditions that no local would accept.

Those migrants who returned, have fled from the places where there was no work for them and where lockdown measures put them at an even larger risk in their overcrowded accommodation and lack of social support networks. Because of their precarious position and their contracts or lack thereof, they had restricted or no access to any of the social measures made available for local citizens and long-term residents. Upon return they were equally excluded from social benefits and if at all they have access to healthcare, they would have to rely on a healthcare system that is unprepared to handle a large outbreak. Temporary migrants often remain outside the welfare system, by contributing only for the periods in which they are employed as migrant workers (if formally employed) but skipping benefits contribution in either of the two countries in the periods between jobs. Seasonal workers are particularly affected by this. One reason to skip benefits contribution in Bulgaria is the complicated system for self-employment, the relatively high rates and the difficulties with combining it with periods of time as migrants. Moreover, for some of the Bulgarian workers I have talked to in my own research, the possible advantages of being part of the Bulgarian welfare system are way too negligible. For them it is not worth participating in a system where support is so little, one can hardly survive on it. The end result for the returning migrants, escaping the pandemic and the related lockdown, was that they were excluded from any form of potential support provided by the state for its citizens who lost their income or needed access to social support and healthcare.

Return itself was made extremely difficult in the early months of the pandemic. In March 2020 migrants globally attempted to return home after having lost their jobs and not having access to welfare or extensive support networks. The EU freedom of mobility principle was abruptly withheld, while international borders were closing for non-citizens. Bulgarians and Romanians were among the many who attempted to return to their home countries but had to cross several borders that were suddenly reinforced before they can reach their own state-borders. While countries allowed citizens and long-term residents to enter, they did not initially allow any transit migrants to cross their territory. This created long queues of stranded EU citizens trying to use their European citizens' right of free movement and their Romanian or Bulgarian citizenship right to return to their home countries.[27] Stranded for days on the borders of Austria and Hungary, they were effectively placed in a position of statelessness, despite the fact that de-jure they had full rights to be moving across borders. Thus, Eastern European migrants experienced two transgressions against their status. Lack of welfare protection in their place of residence and labour despite their status of EU citizens, and a sudden upheaval of the principle of free movement.

This experience of being simultaneously members de-jure, and rightless transgressors de facto, is similarly described by Ranabir Samaddar in his "Burdens of an Epidemic" paper.Similarly to the Eastern Europeans, Indian temporary migrants were on the road for

[27] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/16/stranded-or-shunned-europes-migrant-workers-caught-in-no-mans-land

days trying to escape the lockdown and reach their homes, some on foot, some trapped in trains, some closed in quarantine camps. And similarly to the Eastern European migrants, once the Indian migrants reached home, there was little public support available for them. "*The outbreak of the epidemic and the sudden emergence of thousands upon thousands of migrant workers on the roads trying to escape the trap of lockdown signalled the end of the mythical safety of a society of settled population groups and of the state that guards this insularity,"* arguesSamaddar (2020b:3)

Similar tothose migrants who remained in Western Europe, those who returned are now the focus of punitive and surveillance measures in their home countries. The Bulgarian prime-minister Boyko Borisov repeatedly blamed the Bulgarian migrants for 'not being able to stay in one place and endangering the health of the rest of us'[28]. He added that *everyone* coming from abroad brings back the virus and spreads it massively. The public reacted in a similar manner against the return migrants both in Bulgaria and in Romania, with people threatening on social media to block the Burgas airport in March 2020 as to not allow return migrants to enter the country.[29]The pandemic triggered a field of contention surrounding the identity of these migrant workers, as diasporic community and as medium of virus transmission, as the short video "Don't come home this year" by Stefan Voicudemonstrates. It shows the conflicting field of Romanian diasporic identity and their right of participation of a wider Romanian public. Videos of migrants on the borders arguing their right to return home should be respected are paralleled with videos of local Romanians dismissing the participation of these migrants into the Romanian society and the need to keep them outside as a safety measure against the spread of the epidemic.[30]

Bulgarian and Romanian temporary migrants who are settled neither here nor there have been effectively excluded from the social and welfare support of any of the states they reside and work in. Be it the informal workers, or the temporary workers, they often had no continuous health insurance. While states provided welfare support for workers who lost their jobs, these workers could not qualify for support by virtue of their temporary labour status as migrants or lack of incorporation in the welfare state as citizens at home. Again, similarly to the Indian migrants who received minimal or no public health or social support, having no health insurance or social security. These return migrants do not belong to the 'public' having been outside as migrants. Yet, since they also do not belong to the 'public' in their host societies as migrants, they have been ultimately excluded and became outsiders *per se*, without having a place where they belong.

This is an accusation not simply against the returning migrants, butcontains a racist and ethnic assumption against the Roma, who have been continuously blamed and made into scapegoats in the epidemic not only in Bulgaria, but also in countries like Romania and Slovakia. Using epidemic control as a pretext, whole Roma neighbourhoods have been blocked, cutting the inhabitants from access to essential services and from any possibility to

[28]https://www.actualno.com/politics/borisov-obvinjava-vryshtashti-se-bylgari-za-covid-19-ako-ne-bjaha-tezi-shtjahme-da-se-dvijim-20-30-na-den-news_1459714.html
[29]https://bnr.bg/post/101245251/burgas
[30]https://allegralaboratory.net/dont-come-home-this-year/?fbclid=IwAR2lJSaOMGQSTClXuDxjm41vGgu_evZzAcTV-nVum08SDKZFqdr6YcFOP4I

make a living.[31]The arguments, used by the authorities, were that the return migrants have been predominantly poor Roma and that the Roma do not observe self-isolation measures or live under proper hygiene conditions, something that is a recurrent anti-Roma racist argument. Hence, the spread of the virus would be much larger, if they were not literally kept under control. Returning migrants have become subject of control and surveillance through various measures, including citizen's policing of neighbours' and relatives' self-isolation, drones measuring body temperatures[32]and spreading warning instructions above Roma neighbourhoods etc. These techniques do not efficiently prevent the spread of the virus, but instead "deploy the militarized aesthetics of othering and depersonalized, dehumanized targets of intervention".[33]

Thus, what we see here is a case of citizens who de-jure should be include in the *public* – whether Eastern European migrants inside the European Union as both migrants and citizens, or Indian migrants who never really left the border of the nation-state. Yet, in practice, due to their position as workers and due to their unsettled status of mobility, they are effectively left out of the body of the public. Hence, there is no form of protection for them. Taking this one step further, this category of migrant workers is unveiled as internally state-less, despite their status of members.

What Eastern European temporary workers come to show us is the heterogeneity of the European Union space and the differential inclusion that low-skilled workers experience both as citizens in their home countries and as migrant workers in their host countries. In the current pandemic, they are the epitome of the tensions between essential work and disposable lives. They demonstrate how capital is reproduced at the intersection of labour exploitation, restricted social rights and disciplinary measures of control.

## Conclusion

Temporary migrants inside the European Union and their experience of the pandemic disclosed the crisis of citizenship that scholars have been talking about over the last decade. Here, I was only discussing labour migrants, engaged in some form of labour relations, that are non-standard – temporary, informal, self-employed, sub=contacted etc. The figure of this labour migrants does not fit well into the ever more restricted figure of the citizen-worker. The pandemic demonstrated this clearly – full time workers and permanent residentsreceived various forms of emergency welfare support. Yet, the categories of those excluded from the public even in a situation of a global health crisis, have been multiplying. There is fragmentation of the spaces of citizenship, as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) have argued. The flexibilization and fragmentation of labour has made this connection more fragile both for citizens and for migrants.

In the wake of the Covid-10 pandemic the unbundling of the citizen-worker nexus presented itself in the simultaneous moves of sealing-off European borders, but leaving them

[31] https://news.bg/bulgaria/zhandarmeriya-blokira-tseliya-romski-kvartal-na-yambol.html
[32] https://bnr.bg/post/101244534/dronat-s-termokamera-zaseche-chetiri-dushi-s-visoka-temperatura
[33] https://identitiesjournal.edu.mk/index.php/IJPGC/announcement/view/43

differentially permeable for critical workers, but not critical citizens. Yet, the illusion of the invisible migrant workers came to the surface. The separation of migrant workers – invisible, contained, separated from the rest of the citizens, and excluded from the public – could not be sustained during a pandemic. Migrant workers became visible through the threat that the condition under which they are working and living are actually a threat for the wole society – both in their host countries and in their home countries. It is not simply exploitation, because we saw that it affects society as a whole. Both by the realization of how migrant labour sustains society and of how migrants' conditions of life and work affect the whole society. I would like to conclude with Ranabir Samaddar's eloquent point that *The question of labour is a question of life and a question of society as a whole.*