

# Modern slavery in Italy: 4 migrant farmworkers burned alive in a minivan

Marc Wells  
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Four agricultural workers were burned alive in southern Italy on June 1, 2026, in an act of savage, premeditated violence. The victims—Waseem Khan, 29, a Pakistani national; and Afghans Amin Fazal Khogjani, 28, Ullah Ismat Qiemi, 19, and Safi Iayjad, 27—were locked inside a minivan at a gas station on the Statale 106 highway in Amendolara, a small municipality on the Ionian coast of Calabria, and set ablaze by two gangmasters they had dared to challenge over stolen wages.

The crime was captured on CCTV. Two farmworkers, identified and arrested within hours as Safeer Ahmed and Ali Raza, both Pakistani nationals, now charged with multiple aggravated homicide, allegedly poured flammable liquid over and into the passenger cabin, jammed the doors shut from the outside to prevent escape, threw a lighter inside and fled as the van erupted in flames. Firefighters recovered four carbonized bodies.

A fifth passenger, 35-year-old Afghan national Taj Mohammad Alamyar, survived only by shattering the rear window and crawling out, sustaining severe burns to his hands and right arm. A sixth worker escaped only because illness had kept him home that day.

According to Alamyar's testimony, the workers had been promised €45 per day for eight hours of picking strawberries in the intensive agricultural fields of the region. They had received nothing since April 20. Subsisting on minimal food and crammed 10 people to a room in accommodations controlled by their gangmasters, they had committed the offense of demanding their back pay.

Investigators also noted that 14 other vehicles transporting Pakistani migrants in Calabria had been set on fire in the preceding months, evidence of a violent criminal war for control over the most profitable commodity in southern Italy's agricultural economy: unfree human labor.

The *caporalato* system uses criminal intermediaries to recruit vulnerable migrants, monopolize their transport and housing, and hire them out to agricultural employers at coercive rates. It is the operational backbone of Italy's fruit and vegetable supply chain. It serves the profit imperatives

of the Grande Distribuzione Organizzata (the large-scale retail trade consortia that dominate Italian supermarket chains), which squeeze producer prices to the point where legal employment becomes financially impossible for farm owners to sustain.

The agricultural trade union FLAI-CGIL and the Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto estimate that between 400,000 and 430,000 farmworkers in Italy are subjected to irregular labor intermediation, making them potential or active victims of the *caporalato* system.

A number of distinguished researchers, among them Letizia Palumbo, Francesco Carchedi and Jean-René Bilongo, have extensively documented conditions of forced labor, trafficking and modern slavery in Italy. The most recent data from the Global Slavery Index (2023) estimates that approximately 197,000 people in Italy were living in conditions of modern slavery as of 2021. Labor unions and human rights organizations suggest the actual number may be significantly higher.

Alamyar testified that the gangmasters threatened workers with guns and knives to drive them into the fields. The siphoning of wages is so organized that *caporali* routinely escort workers directly to ATMs to physically reclaim cash paid out on formal payslips, leaving a clean paper trail while extracting every euro of their labor.

All four of the dead, and the survivor, held valid regular Italian residence permits and had been residing in the country for years with no criminal records. They were employed off the books, exploited to the point of destitution and incinerated when they demanded what was owed to them.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the fascist who has led the government in Rome for three and a half years, systematically targeting immigrants and driving the share of Italy's population in absolute poverty to a record 9.8 percent, issued a statement condemning the "horrific murder" and promising justice. Labor Minister Marina Calderone called the episode "unacceptable."

But it is Meloni who has drastically worsened the

conditions under which this slave labour takes place. She has sharply increased restrictions on asylum procedures, strengthened border controls and reduced social support mechanisms.

Meloni's 2023 Decreto Cutro abolished special protection permits, stripped integration programs and deliberately manufactured a class of isolated, legally precarious workers, exactly the class who end up in the hands of the *caporali*. The threat of losing legal status is the system's disciplinary trap: reporting wage theft or abuse means job loss, administrative irregularity and deportation.

On the other side of the parliamentary aisle, the Democratic Party's Elly Schlein announced she would attend a protest organized by FLAI-CGIL at the site of the murders. PD spokesperson Camilla Laureti declared that the tragedy had "wounded the entire democratic Republic."

The Democratic Party bears its own responsibility for the legal architecture that produces these conditions. The 2017 Minniti-Orlando Decree abolished second-instance judicial appeals for asylum seekers and pioneered the criminalization of Mediterranean rescue NGOs. The 2002 Bossi-Fini Law, which ties residence permits directly to valid employment contracts, has never been repealed by any subsequent Italian government of center-left or right.

The Amendolara massacre occurred days before a watershed in European migration policy. On June 12, both the new Common European Asylum System and the newly agreed EU Return Regulation come into force simultaneously. The regulation was drafted in close coordination between the conservative European People's Party and three far-right, neo-fascist parliamentary groups, marking the effective collapse of the supposed barrier separating mainstream conservatism from the extreme right.

Asylum rejections issued by any EU member state, including highly restrictive governments such as Poland or Hungary, will be automatically recognized throughout the Schengen zone without a domestic right of appeal. Migrants could face detention for up to 30 months, including families with children. Offshore deportation centers in countries such as Rwanda, Libya, and Mauritania are envisaged, alongside expanded police raid powers and welfare cuts to pressure migrants into accepting deportation.

The template for this offensive is not new. In the United States, the Trump administration has built a domestic gulag system of mass detention and deportation, targeting, as in Italy, workers who entered with valid legal status as well, using heavily armed, unmasked ICE agents who conduct warrantless workplace raids.

As in the EU, Washington provides employers with a powerful means of enforcing labor discipline and suppressing collective resistance by keeping millions of

migrants in a condition of permanent legal uncertainty. The Democratic Party, which constructed much of the deportation infrastructure Trump now wields, plays a similar role as Italy's PD, occasionally shedding hypocritical tears over consequences it helped create.

These measures deepen and institutionalize the vulnerability of migrant workers already trapped within the *caporalato* system. When the capitalist state treats migrants as outlaws subject to indefinite detention and deportation, it sends a precise message to the criminal syndicates and exploitative employers who depend on their labor: These workers can be abused, robbed and killed with impunity. The horrific murder of the four workers in Calabria is part of the structural violence of the EU border regime, like the war on immigrants being waged across the Atlantic.

Once democratic rights are stripped from one section of society, the precedent extends to others: youth opposing militarism, workers resisting layoffs and wage reductions, tenants fighting soaring rents. The disenfranchisement of migrants serves as a testing ground for broader attacks on the entire working class as Europe's ruling elites prepare for intensifying social conflicts.

The murders in Amendolara are the logical endpoint of a political economy that has systematically converted human beings into disposable objects, the product not of individual brutality alone but of decades of bipartisan legislation in Rome, Brussels, Washington D.C., designed to maximize the vulnerability and disposability of migrant labor in service of profits.

The working class cannot look to the same political establishment that expresses outrage over such crimes while creating the conditions that make them possible, alongside war, genocide and attacks on democratic rights. What is required is the development of an international socialist movement uniting migrant and native-born workers in a common struggle. Such a movement must defend full political and social rights for all, regardless of immigration status, and challenge the capitalist system itself, whose borders, labor regimes and profit-driven exploitation are the source of these abuses.



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