

Migrant workers are flipping the script and using Photovoice to tell their own stories

May 10 2022, by Reena Kukreja



Migrant men work in the strawberry fields. Credit: "This Is Evidence," Author provided

What happens when undocumented Bangladeshi and Pakistani men in Greece pick up their cell phones to record their lives as migrant agricultural workers?

"This will let the people learn how we live our lives here," said one of the men, referring to the photos and videos they were taking. For the

workers, these serve as evidence of their migrant existence.

COVID-19 and worries about [food security](#) have resulted in increased [media coverage](#) about [migrant agricultural workers](#), with stories usually told on [their behalf](#). Four sets of South Asian migrant men in Greece wanted to flip the script and tell their own stories.

They used [Photovoice, an arts-based social justice tool](#), to present themselves and their concerns directly to people. This eventually transformed into a traveling multi-media exhibition [and a digital archive](#), "This Is Evidence."

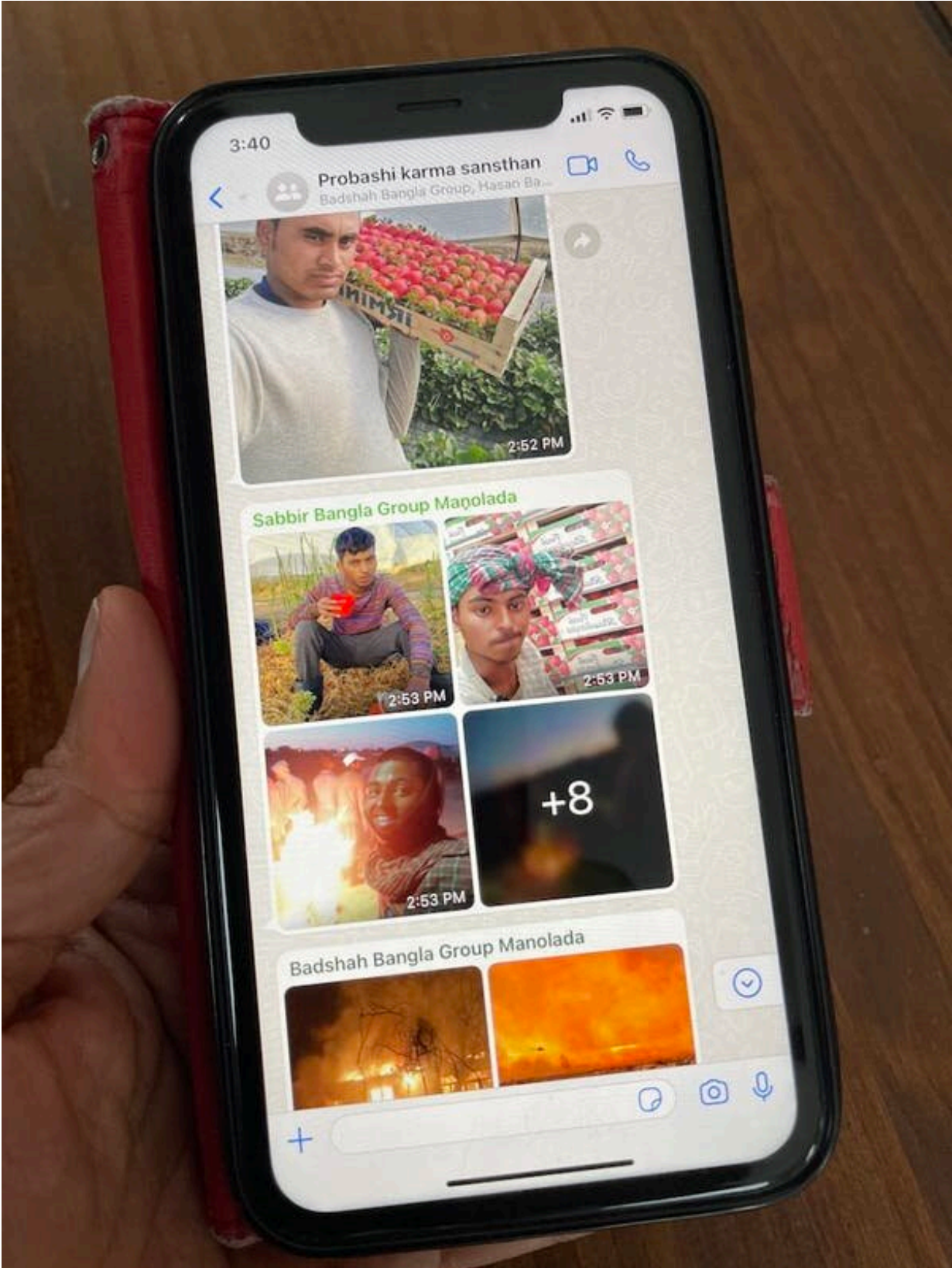
Long hours, low wages

Each year, thousands of young South Asian men arrive in [Greece, Europe's frontier](#), often driven by poverty, [climate change](#), political unrest, or ethnic or religious violence in their home countries.

Undocumented and hence "illegal," they end up in Greece's agrarian and urban informal economy as [flexible workers](#). Despite 90 percent of Greek agriculture being dependent on [migrant labor](#), they are paid low wages, face wage theft and are forced to work long hours without breaks.

Since 2017, I have been conducting research with many of these men to study how their "illegality" and [restrictive immigration policies](#) shape [labor outcomes](#) and the men's [masculine aspirations](#).

The process behind the exhibition emerged organically as the men used WhatsApp to send me images of their lives. I suggested the use of Photovoice so they could share their lives with a wider audience.



A screenshot of one of the WhatsApp groups, 'Migrant Workers Welfare Collective' (the names of participants are pseudonyms). Credit: "This Is Evidence," Author provided

Photovoice is a participant-oriented visual research strategy used to collaborate with [socio-economically and politically marginalized populations](#).

Participants take images of what they consider important and not what researchers wish to highlight. The photos are accompanied by texts that emerge through conversations among Photovoice participants. These narratives are often used to [advocate for policy changes](#).

The unique insider perspective provided by Photovoice makes it highly valuable for [cultural mediation](#) and [self-representation](#).

Sharing their thoughts

Three groups of Bangladeshi men employed in the strawberry agribusiness, and one group of Pakistani men engaged in the informal economy in Athens, formed separate WhatsApp groups, including me in each. The groups were active from mid-2018 to late-2021.

They used their phones to take photos, to record video and voice messages about the precarity of life as migrant workers. They also spoke of workplace injuries, sub-standard housing and [worker activism for free access to COVID-19 vaccines](#). The ubiquity of cell phones made it easy to do without drawing attention to themselves.

Through this project, the men were able to communicate with each other and myself using WhatsApp groups as forums for discussion. So their

worries about being detained from gathering in one place, combined with unpredictable work hours, did not stop them from being able to document their experiences. This resulted in greater dialogue and collective decision-making.

The rules were simple: permission had to be granted from those photographed and all shared images implied fair use for exhibitions and other methods of awareness-generation.



Men come together to destress by singing Sufi songs. Credit: "This Is Evidence," Author provided

This Is Evidence

Their work resulted in a multi-media exhibition I helped curate. We worked together to select images, videos, soundscapes and plan a replica of migrant shacks from Manolada.

The exhibition, "This Is Evidence," was thematic, addressing [border crossings](#), backbreaking labor, COVID-19 and activism. Quotes were selected from their voice messages and interviews.

The exhibition premiered in early April 2022 at Technopolis City of Athens. It will move on to Canada to venues such as [Kingston, Ont.](#), [Toronto](#) and [Waterloo, Ont.](#)

While this project engages with a small set of migrant South Asian men in Greece, the visual articulation of their migrant experience resonates with other migrant workers across the world—including those employed under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in agrarian communities across Canada.

This project challenges the stereotypes of migrant men, often vilified because of their [gender identity, race and religion](#). It also serves to empower by allowing the experiences of ["disposable" migrant agricultural workers](#) in Greece to reach a wider audience through multi-city exhibitions and the [digital archive](#).

The men recognize that when it comes to being heard by ordinary people, policy and changemakers, many avenues are closed to them. "This Is Evidence" serves as an accessible mode of communication. By disrupting their ["othering,"](#) the men seek to give voice and power back to racialized migrant workers. For them, this project is a political act of resistance.

"We participate to get our voice heard. We want change in the way people view us and our plight."

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Migrant workers are flipping the script and using Photovoice to tell their own stories (2022, May 10) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-05-migrant-workers-flipping-script-photovoice.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.