

Seasonal Migrant Workers in Scottish Agriculture



Research Purpose

This research focuses on agricultural seasonal migrant workers in Scotland and was commissioned to address four research aims, namely to:

1

estimate the number and demographic characteristics of agricultural seasonal migrant workers in Scotland,

2

understand the experiences of agricultural seasonal migrant workers, including their general wellbeing, ease of obtaining work permits and visas, working conditions and pay, and how these compare with other European countries,

3

understand the experiences of employers in the sector, including recruitment practices and requirements, administrative challenges associated with EU Exit and COVID-19 and delivering high-quality employment opportunities,

4

consider the long-term prospects and viability of the industry - wages and employment standards, the sector's and Scotland's competitiveness, regulations and requirements relating to COVID-19 and EU Exit.

Methods

Five research methods were designed to gather views from workers, employers and other stakeholders:



Evidence review, with 40 sources in total

Stakeholder interviews, with 14 individuals



Employer survey, with 1089 respondents

Worker survey, with 439 respondents



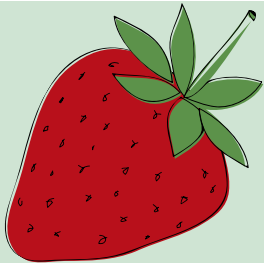
Worker interviews, with 3 individuals

Key Findings

Drivers for agricultural seasonal migrant labour

Both the literature and stakeholders explained that the agricultural sector in Scotland experiences insufficient domestic workforce resulting in high dependency on migrant workers.

In interviews, people noted how demand, or even dependency, on seasonal migrant workers particularly applied to farms managing crops which cannot be mechanically harvested.



Most (81%) workers were employed in the fruit sector



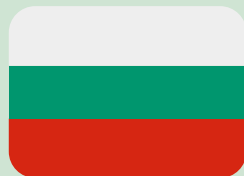
Employers may have to downscale or cease current activity should they not be able to access seasonal migrant labour

Number and demographic qualities of agricultural seasonal migrants in Scotland

Previous studies focus on shifts in demographics, especially country of origin of workers. Large proportions of workers responding to the Worker Survey were from:



Romania
(21%)



Bulgaria
(18%)



Ukraine
(17%)

Most migrant workers come to Scotland because it has been personally recommended to them however many have beginner level English speaking ability.

There were also variations in the age and gender of workers:

Average
age of
workers:

33
years old



Male:
58%



Female:
42%

Experiences of employers in the sector

Employers are dealing day to day with managing their farms, their crops and their resources in order to fulfil orders.

Labour restrictions represent a significant risk to this sub-set of the agricultural sector, with employers and recruitment agencies calling for more notice on any restrictions and quotas.

Experiences of agricultural seasonal migrant workers

Stakeholders reflected that the unpredictability of the sector had implications for workers.

On the one hand, they may be needed to work overtime and they could earn extra through productivity. Alternatively, employers may not have tasks to deliver and there will be fewer opportunities to top up the minimum wage. This was seen to affect worker satisfaction.

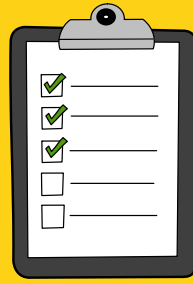
“Agriculture brings a good income. To be able to do a lot, to learn new things and feel that you can is a very pleasant feeling, especially when you can earn!”

Primary research with workers found that:

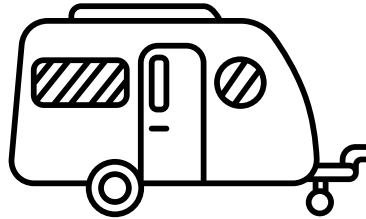
Respondents worked for an average of

43
hours

in a typical week
(and 46% would prefer more hours)



Those in Scotland for their first year carried out a different range of tasks compared to those with any previous experience.



Workers reported they were paid on average

£ 10.22

per hour

Workers paid an average of

£ 62

per week for accommodation



Two out of five respondents had found their employer through a friend or family member

Long-term prospects and viability of the industry

Around half (53%) of workers completing the survey were returnees, while 47% were non-returnees

Farmers touched upon their responsibility as employers for not only pay and work, but workers' living conditions and their well-being. Measures such as inspections, audits, and the competition for labour were seen to have led to improvements.

Continued joint efforts between private, public and third sector stakeholders to further improve the experience of workers in line with Fair Work dimensions are recommended.

Recommendations

Through this research we recommend:

UK Government

- closely involve Scottish agricultural representatives in shaping future policy and schemes,
- ensure measures are evidence and experience-based,
- consider whether any scheme should include minimum English language requirements,
- give sufficient notice of changes to visa schemes.

- gain key data year on year directly from farms on numbers of seasonal migrant workers,
- consider how the 'tolerable standard' regulations should be applied to temporary accommodation and who should be best place to conduct inspections,
- promote and clarify support available to agricultural seasonal migrant workers is the responsibility of any organisation interacting with these workers.

Scottish Government

Recruitment agencies

- be as clear as possible on wages and what is included in terms of other living costs,
- offer more targeted and quality recruitment in fewer countries,
- ensure that Fair Work is at the forefront of practices.

- adhere to the Fair Work First Guidance by Scottish Government and always treat workers with dignity,
- be as clear as possible on wages and what is included in terms of other living costs,
- continue to upgrade on-site accommodation including shared areas and invite workers' suggestions to feed these into improvement planning,
- enable workers to communicate regularly with absent friends and family,
- promote sources of support to their workers.

Employers

Third Sector Organisations

- offer support around the pressures on workers due to insecurity of income. Possible collaboration with debt advice organisations may be beneficial to inform this support.
- offer workers the chance to give anonymised feedback of how experiences relate to the Fair Work Framework.