



THE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES INDUSTRY SERIES

10 Avril 2025



Session n°9

Impact of Labour Shortages in the Fruits and Vegetables Industry (F&V)



FRUIT AND VEGETABLES SCHEME



Seasonal migration in edible horticulture in UK

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The impact of labour shortages on UK food availability and safety

Impact of labour shortages: Labour shortages in UK food systems

The analysis we have carried out looking at the evolution of key occupations in the food supply chain in the UK has shown that labour shortages are now a



Menu



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Independent report

Defra led review of automation in horticulture

Reducing the seasonal labour needs of horticulture through increased adoption and accelerated innovation of automation, Agri-tech and robotic technologies.

From: [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#)

Published 27 July 2022

PDF

[Accommodation Offset, National Minimum Wage and Seasonal Migrant Workers \(Barbulescu and Robertson\)](#)

PDF, 406 KB, 31 pages

Details

Every year, the Low Pay Commission (LPC) invites proposals for independent research to inform its work. This page collects the reports from projects which informed the LPC's 2022 Report.

[Read the Low Pay Commission's 2022 Report](#)

The research published today includes:

National
Minimum
Wage



Low Pay Commission

Feeding the nation: seasonal migrant workers and food security during COVID-19 pandemic



Project team members:

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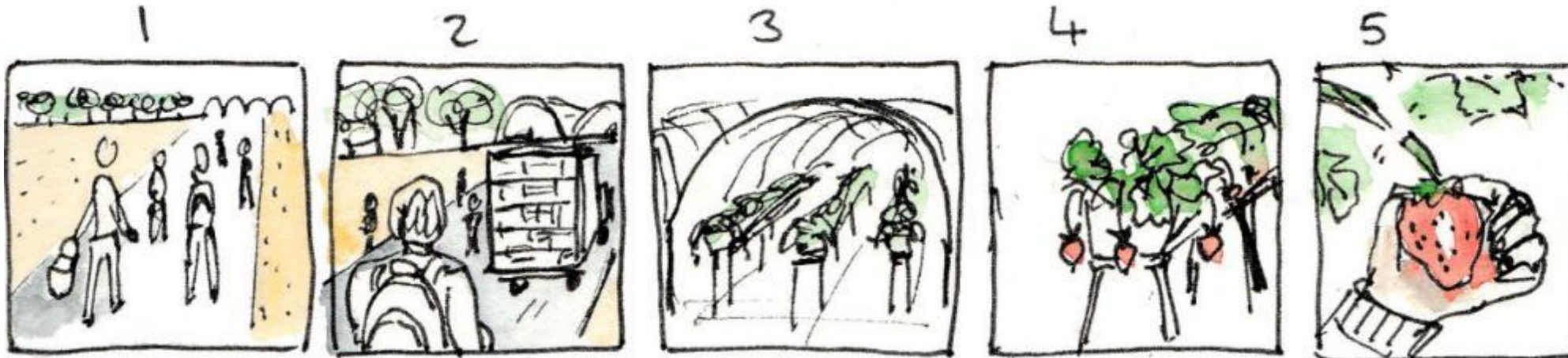
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<https://new europeans.uk/seasonal-workers/>



Twitter
@feedingnation

Website:
<https://feedingthenation.leeds.ac.uk/>

Hypothesis: we expect less agricultural seasonal workers

- Liberal paradox – (perceived) immigration levels than popular support (Hollifield)
- Weak support and fewer routes to immigration for ‘low skilled’ migration with an amplification of global talent visas (Sachar 2011; after Brexit see Favell and Barbulescu 2018)
- Dislocation of food production to Eastern Europe and the Global South
 - Automation, mechanisation of manual work
- **Pandemic deterrents:** international travel restrictions, suspension of consular activity to issue visas, additional health risks taken by migrants and farmers in the pandemic

Methodology:

Migrant Seasonal Workers:

Interviews with 80 seasonal migrant workers

Interview type: phone, online and in person in 3 sites in Lincolnshire

Language: Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, Indonesian and English (for Bulgarian, Greek and Polish domiciliated farm workers).

follow up interviews October 2022

Farmers:

Postal survey and follow up interviews with 53 farmers,

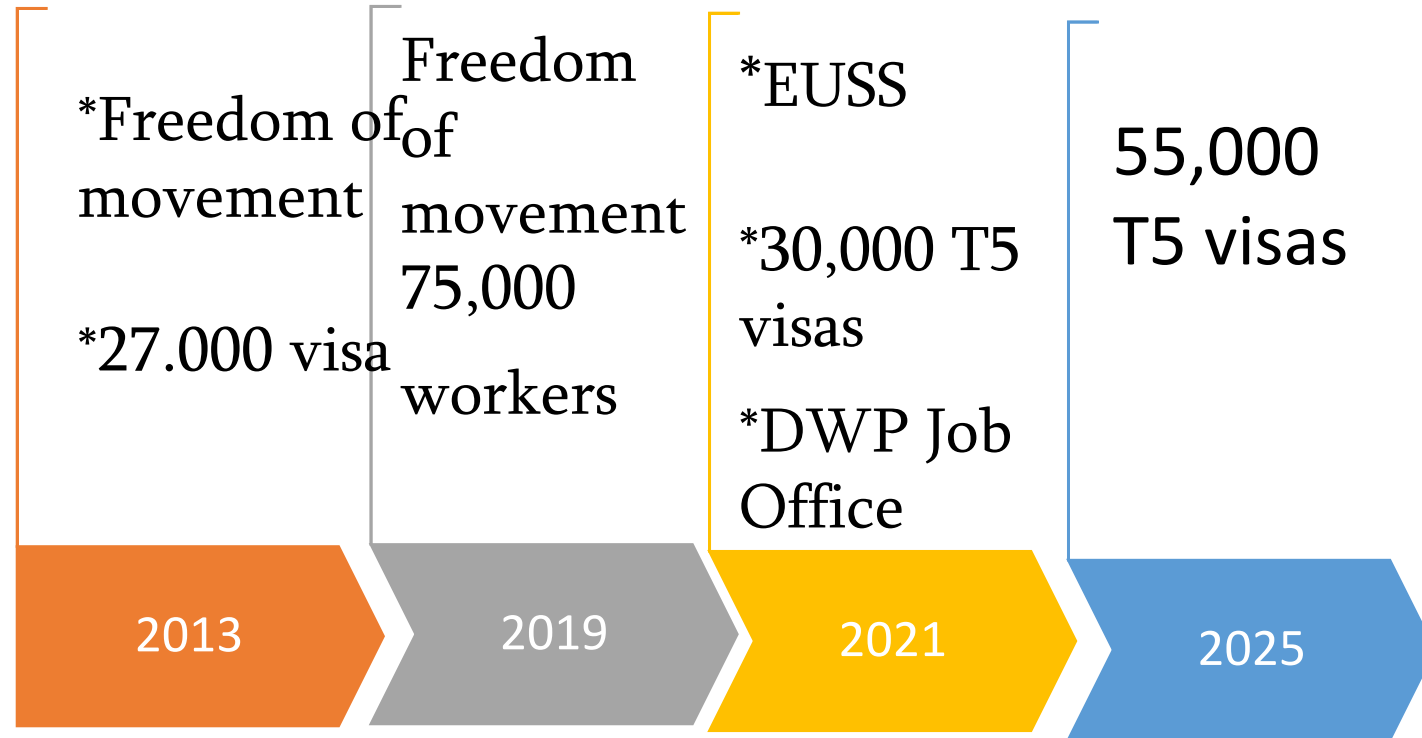
Response rate 29% oversampling for devolved nations

Other methodologies:

Photo diaries

Data collection: July-October 2021,

How is the demand for seasonal workers met in the UK



- Continuous overseas recruitment since 1945 to 2013; restarted in 2019; **UK's oldest immigration programme**
- Over **90% of the seasonal workers** in farming are migrants domiciliated migrants with EUSS and T5 visa holders (EFRA Select Committee 2018, NFU 2018 and AHDB)
- T5 Seasonal workers visa is the **only sectorial based visa** in the post Brexit points based immigration system and the **only immigration route for 'low skilled' migrant workers**

Public opinion and support for migrant workers





UK agriculture

+ Add to myFT

Labour shortages cause £60mn of food waste on British farms, survey finds

National Farmers' Union decries 'travesty' as growers contend with post-Brexit visa rules and hot weather

Farmer, from near Attleborough, loses £50,000 over shortage of workers



Seasonal labour shortages in edible horticulture (n=

- Farmers/farm managers across devolved nations
- Range of producer sizes – SMEs according to permanent staff and 20–1500 seasonal workers

Shortages of seasonal farm labour in 2021

- 46% of farmers had a shortfall above 11%

Recruitment of seasonal farm labour in 2021 compared to 2019

- 76% farmers said it was 'more difficult'

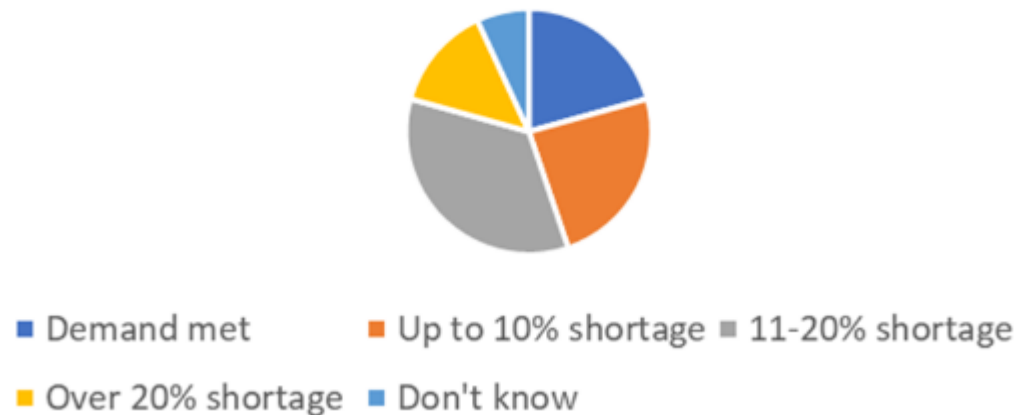
British seasonal workers recruited in 2021 compared to 2019

- 78% farmers said the number was 'about the same' or 'less'

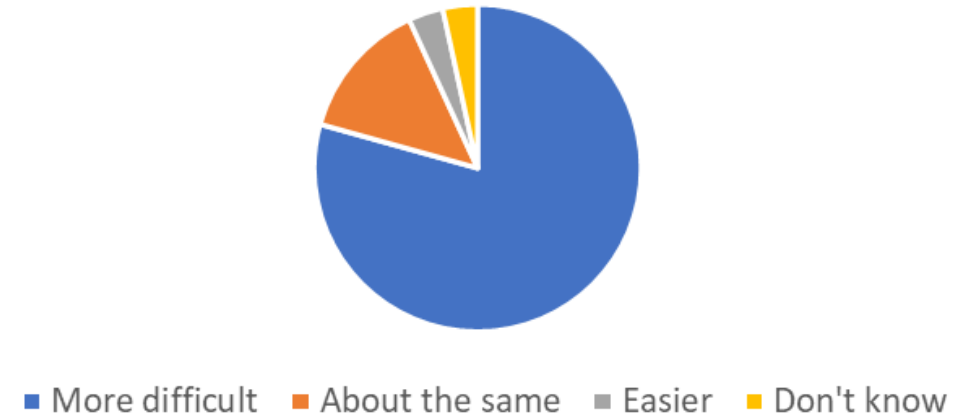
Seasonal labour in edible horticulture (n=41)

(Barbulescu, Vargas Silva and Robertson, 2021)

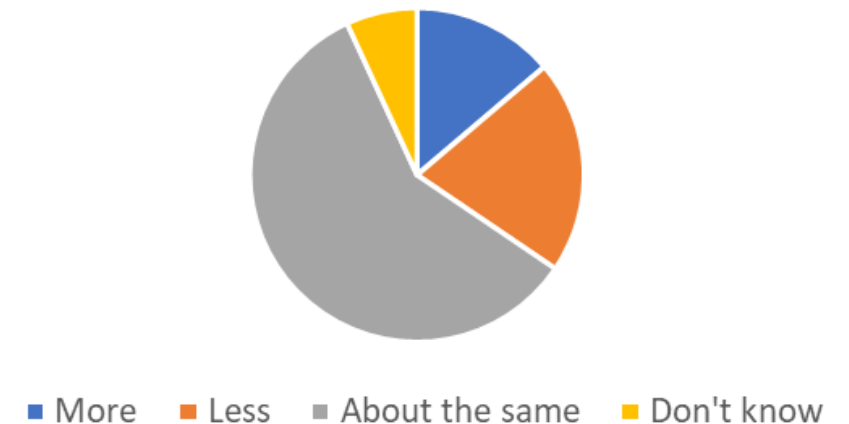
Labour shortages of seasonal farm labour in 2021



How was recruitment of seasonal farm labour in 2021 compared to 2020?



Recruitment of British seasonal workers in 2021 compared to 2019



I would not say that this is an easy job every day when you come after work (we work 7 hours), your back hurts, your neck hurts, out of 10 fingers on 6 you have calluses, well, that is quite a difficult job. And you don't expect that when you come here. But in fact, when you arrive, you already have no choice.

Marian, 44 years Romanian old open field top tree picker EUSS

I like to work, I like this work and I put some savings aside

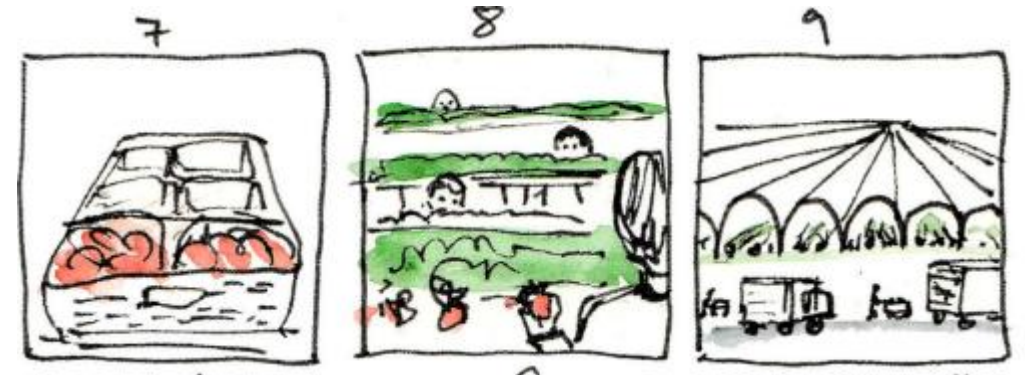
Costel 62 years old, Romanian, packhouse worker

We arrived at about 7 pm at the farm, we signed a contract, then at about 8 o'clock we were instructed. At 4:40 am we got up, at 5 am we already left for work. I've wanted to visit Britain.

Masha, 21 years old Belarusian strawberry picker T5visa holder

“...you left everyone there, in Ukraine, you came here to earn some penny, and then they come to you, they start shouting at you, your moral background is not very good anyway

Nadim, 23 Ukrainian, strawberry picker T5 visa holder



Emerging trends and challenges looking ahead:

- Pre-departure information in countries of origin remains poor
- To increase financial gains for migrant worker and to make the seasonal worker scheme more effective, a significant proportion of workers are moved between farms (from example from soft fruit in early summer to top fruit in late summer)
- ILO Employer Pays Principle- evidence by statutory agencies of loan bondage
- Safeguarding minimum working hours guidance for 32 weeks but in practice many workers accumulate less weeks in paid
- Lack of clarity how payment is calculated as most productive workers meet targets, others qualify for NMW. There are also age- linked rates for hourly wages
- Labour intensive fruit like soft fruit and asparagus are more exposed to fluctuations in the availability of labour. Best practices were found to take place in the mushroom sector
- Automation being taken up at a slower speed and scale than projected



Thank you & get in touch
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THE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES INDUSTRY SERIES

Thank you



FRUIT AND VEGETABLES SCHEME



The OECD-COLEAD Fruits and Vegetables Industry Series focuses on market access conditions and opportunities for the fruit and vegetable sector, especially for fruit and vegetables producers and exporters from ACP-countries. This activity is supported by the Fit For Market Plus programme, implemented by COLEAD within the Framework of Development Cooperation between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union.