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The bulletin is an initiative of the UKRI funded project Feeding the nation: seasonal migrant workers and food security during COVID-19 pandemic led by Dr Roxana Barbulescu (University of Leeds) and Prof Carlos Vargas-Silva (University of Oxford) and Dr Bethany Robertson (University of Leeds)

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OUTBREAK TRACKER AND FOOD SECURITY: MONITORING ONE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC

Workers in food industries including seasonal migrants were qualified as essential workers so they could continue to go to work to ensure the agri-food supply chain could feed the nation through the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on analysis of local and national newspapers, our team has produced an Outbreak Tracker that maps out outbreaks at the regional level and across three industries: fruit and vegetable farms, meat factories and fish and seafood factories.

Overall, **24 outbreaks** were identified in these industries, with **four in five of these taking place in meat factories, one in six on fruit and vegetable farms and two in seafood factories**. Not only were outbreaks more likely to take place in meat factories, they also affected more people as they tend to employ more workers. **4 deaths** are directly associated with outbreaks in the Tracker.

In terms of numbers of outbreaks, July 2020 was the month that saw the highest number of outbreaks reported in the media, namely 5. The outbreaks reported in the media depended on the testing capacity available which explains why we see none reported until June 2020. ... **Continues on page 5**

PIECE RATES: WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY MATTER

WHAT IS A PIECE RATE?

Seasonal workers in British horticulture are often paid per piece rather than per hour. A piece rate means workers are paid per output, for example based on the weight of fruit or vegetables picked (DEFRA, 2020).

WHO SETS THE RATES OF PAY FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS?

i) England

As The Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) was abolished in England in 2013, employers in England can set a 'fair rate' for output work, for example based on the average productivity of workers on their farm (DEFRA, 2020). This means piece rates can vary between farms and fluctuate within seasons due to factors such as crop yield or weather. As workers must receive at least National Minimum Wage (NMW), pay is topped up by employers if workers do not reach the equivalent amount through the outputs of their work (DEFRA, 2020). Farms outline the benefit of piece rates is that those who are productive workers can earn over the National Minimum Wage. As a result, seasonal workers are faced with flexibility, yet uncertainty, about their earnings.

ii) Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

There is an additional layer of regulation in Scotland and Northern Ireland where the minimum rates of pay are set by their respective Agricultural Wages Boards and the Agricultural Advisory Panel in Wales. The piece rates must not be below the pay set in the Agricultural Wage Orders, unlike in England where the baseline is NMW/NLW. The board for each nation is made up of an independent chair, independent members, representatives from the nation's farmer's union and Unite the Union. These governing structures provide representation for agricultural workers to ensure legislation surrounding their rights is upheld and their entitlement to rest breaks, holiday pay, bereavement leave and sick leave is protected. They set an agricultural minimum wage that must be adhered to by employers in each nation which vary according to worker types (in the case of Wales and NI) or workers' qualifications (in Scotland). Without such structures, representation can prove difficult for seasonal workers to access due to the temporary nature of employment and migrant workers may be unfamiliar with support systems in Britain and/or face language barriers.

Unite (2021) has a branch for rural workers which campaigns against intentions to abolish AWB in Northern Ireland announced by the Irish Minister Poots in January 2021. Following the announcement, a public consultation has been launched on the 13th of May (references below).

HOW DO AGRICULTURAL WORKER RIGHTS COMPARE ACROSS THE NATIONS OF THE UK?

i) Accommodation

Seasonal farm workers often live on site in temporary accommodation such as mobile homes or caravans. Therefore, in Wales and Scotland the AWBs enforce a maximum deduction for accommodation from pay. For example, in Scotland from 1st April 2021, any deductions from wages for accommodation must not exceed £8.36 per day and currently in Wales (2020) not more than £4.82 per day. For those employed in England after 1 October 2013 when the AWB ceased, there is no such protection.

ii) Sick pay

In Scotland and Wales (and in England for those employed prior to 2013), Agricultural Sick Pay only applies 'to workers who have been continuously employed by the same employer for at least 52 weeks'. Therefore, these rates which are more generous than Statutory Sick Pay, are unlikely to be available to seasonal workers. Yet,

agriculture has a high rate of accidents and injuries with the worst rate of worker fatalities of the main industrial sectors (HSE, 2020).

iii) Bereavement pay

In Scotland if a close member of an agricultural worker's family dies, they are entitled to at least 3 days paid leave and in Wales if a family member dies, agricultural workers have a paid entitlement of one to four days leave. In Northern Ireland, farm workers are the only workers currently to have the right to paid bereavement leave. However, in England, if a dependent dies, any worker has the right to time off but the amount of leave, and whether it is paid, is at the discretion of the employer.

iv) Holiday

In Scotland, holiday entitlement depends on the number of days expected to work in a regular working week. Where the number of days worked varies weekly, the average number of days worked per week over a 12-week period is calculated. Similarly in Wales, holiday entitlement for agricultural workers depends on the days worked per week. For example, those who work five days per week are entitled to 35 days holiday. In Northern Ireland, an agricultural worker employed for less than 52 weeks, which is likely to apply to seasonal workers, is entitled to 28 days leave if 5 days are worked per week. In England, all workers are legally entitled to 28 days paid holiday a year and for people working irregular hours the entitlement for paid time off is based on every hour they work.

SOURCES

DAERA NI (2021). Agricultural Wages Board for Northern Ireland (AWB).

<http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/agricultural-wages-board-northern-ireland-awb>

DAERA NI (2021). Public consultation on the abolition of Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) in Northern Ireland.

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/public-consultation-launched-proposals-abolish-agricultural-wages-board-awb-northern-ireland>

DAERA NI (2021). Poots announces plans to abolish the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) 20th January.

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/poots-announces-plans-abolish-agricultural-wages-board-awb>

DEFRA (2020). Piece Rates: Guidance for Employers and Workers in the Agriculture Sector. <https://pickforbritain.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PieceRatesGuidance2020.pdf>

HSE (2020). Fatal injuries in agriculture, forestry and fishing in Great Britain 2019/20. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/resources/fatal.htm>

Scottish Government (2021). Agricultural wages: guide for workers and employers - 25th edition. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/agricultural-wages-scotland-twenty-fifth-edition-guide-workers-employers/>

Unite (2021). Hands off our farm work: Defend & expand the AWB. https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/3782/9410_handsoffawb_ni_3-1.pdf

Welsh Government (2020). Agricultural wages in Wales 2020: guide for workers and employers. <https://gov.wales/agricultural-wages-guidance>

OPERATORS OF THE SEASONAL WORKERS VISA

The government has recently announced the names of the remaining two labour providers that will recruit seasonal migrant workers for the British horticulture sector. Two operators have been licenced in 2019 and 2020 but in those years the volume of the visas was much smaller, 2500 and 10000 respectively. For the year 2021, 30,000 people are to be employed on the seasonal worker visa.

The operator licences are:

- Concordia
- Pro-Force
- Fruitful
- AG Recruitment

Fruitful and AG Recruitment are the last to join the scheme while Concordia and Pro-Force have been operating in the last two years.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT: HELPLINE AND SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY FOR SEASONAL MIGRANT WORKERS

In May 2021, the Scottish Government published guidance and a specialist helpline has been established to support Seasonal migrant workers. The Seasonal Workers Helpline - 0300 111 4160 – is administrated by the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution and offers multilingual advice and support to newly arrived migrants.

Read more:

Information for agricultural workers on the Seasonal Worker Visa on your rights and support whilst in Scotland

<https://www.sasa.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20-%20Seasonal%20migrant%20workers%20-%20EnglishSWP%20-%20March%202021.pdf>

OUTBREAK TRACKER AND FOOD SECURITY: MONITORING ONE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC

Methodology:

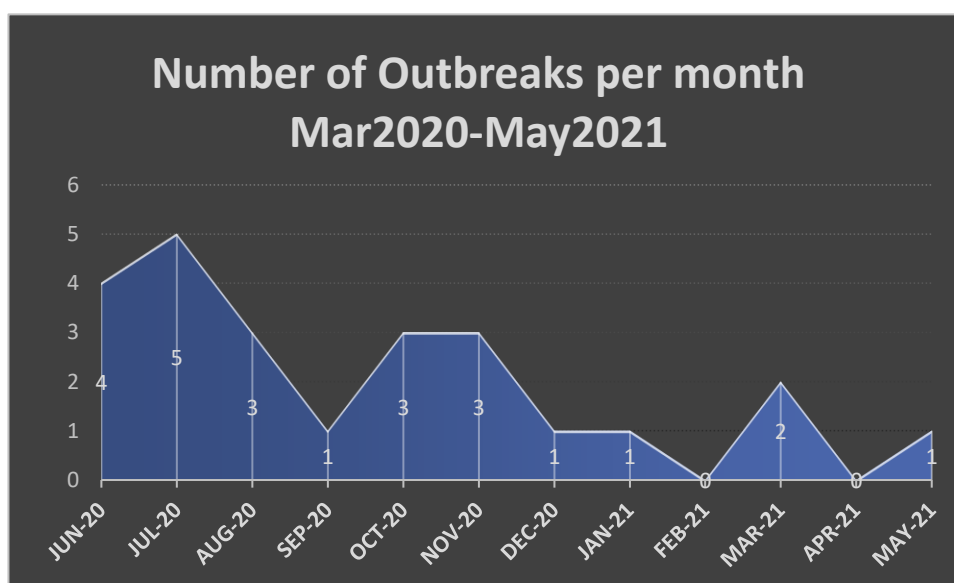
The methodology used to identify the outbreaks is media analysis of national and local newspaper articles reporting outbreaks. The search words used were 'outbreak', 'farm', 'meat factory', 'seafood and fish' for the period March 2020 - May 2021. One limitation is that not all outbreaks were reported in the media and represented here are only those which the reporter identified as an 'outbreak'. This means that not all outbreaks that fall under the epidemiological profile of an outbreak, which is based on two connected cases, have been recorded (see below). This tracker does not claim to represent an epidemiological study.

Instead, the mission of this tracker is to capture what and where did the media report these cases as important to the collective memory of the pandemic, particularly in local communities such as towns and villages.

Findings:

Overall, **24 outbreaks** were identified in these industries, with **four in five of these taking place in meat factories, one in six on fruit and vegetable farms** and **two in seafood factories**. Not only were outbreaks more likely to take place in meat factories, they also affected more people as they tend to employ more workers. **4 deaths** are directly associated with outbreaks in the Tracker. In addition, the national testing capacity was scaled up in June 2020 with the majority of outbreaks reported taking place after this date. Outbreaks on these sites routinely triggered factory closure and had an impact on the local communities.

Region	No outbreaks	Size of outbreak (no. people tested positive)	outbreaks by food industry type
East Midland	1	50	1meat factory; fruit&veg 0; fish and seafood 0
Eastern	4	26-75	3 meat factory; 1 Fruit&Veg, 0 fish and seafood
Northern Ireland	2	35-140	2 meat factory; 0 fruit and veg; 0 fish and seafood
Scotland	4	4--78	4 meat factory; 0 fruit and veg, 0 fish and seafood
South West	3	5-173	2 fruit and veg, 1 meat factory; 0 fish and seafood
Wales	3	32-200	3 meat factory, 0 fruit and veg, 0 fish and seafood
West midlands	3	14-134	3 fruit and veg; 0 meat factory; 0 seafood
Yorkshire and h	4	7-150	2 meat factory; 0 fruit and veg, 2 seafood
TOTAL	24		



IN THE NEWS

Significant news curated by the research team. Follow us on Twitter @feedingnation

United Kingdom

Ministers in immigration row over raising cap on seasonal farm labour <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministers-in-immigration-row-over-raising-cap-on-seasonal-farm-labour-x7fq5xpp>

Covid-19: Hereford fruit packers self-isolating after outbreak <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-57014361>

Pick for Britain campaign fails to bear fruit” <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/pick-for-britain-campaign-fails-to-bear-fruit/>

Scotland Horticultural businesses have been informed of new Covid-19 testing arrangements which have been put in place for seasonal workers. <https://www.scotsman.com/country-and-farming/covid-testing-in-place-for-seasonal-workers-3209433>

Horticulture ‘ignored’ in Defra’s Sustainable farming Incentive Pilot, says NFU <https://www.fginsight.com/news/horticulture-ignored-in-defras-sfi-pilot-says-nfu-118007>

New Seasonal Jobs app teams up with Hops. Businesses are working together to help growers recruit UK residents to seasonal positions after government cancels Pick for Britain campaign <http://www.fruitnet.com/fpj/article/185103/new-seasonal-jobs-app-teams-up-with-hops>

UK seasonal agricultural workers being recruited from dictatorial regimes. At least 30,000 foreign workers are being sought from countries including Belarus and Russia to come quarantine-free to the UK <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/04/30/uk-seasonal-agricultural-workers-recruited-dictatorial-regimes/>

UK ‘faces labour shortage’ as Covid and Brexit fuel exodus of overseas workers. Experts say recovery at risk amid sharp fall in EU workers and dwindling interest in UK jobs from abroad <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/17/uk-faces-labour-shortage-as-covid-and-brexite-fuel-exodus-of-overseas-workers>

Scottish fruit farmers’ fears over shortage of migrant workers <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-57086016>

UK growers warn of seasonal staff shortage <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/fruit-and-veg/uk-growers-warn-of-seasonal-staff-shortage/656513.article>

International

FINLAND “Seasonal workers set to enter Finland this summer amid pandemic” https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/seasonal-workers-set-to-enter-finland-this-summer-amid-pandemic/

IRELAND “Irish fruit farms worry over seasonal workers and Covid quarantine rules. Producers fear forcing foreign pickers into quarantine hotels will hike prices” <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/irish-fruit-farms-seasonal-workers-covid-quarantine-rules-33jrqszc>

FIJI Seasonal workers leave for Australia <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/business/seasonal-workers-leave-for-australia/>

AUSTRALIA Australian Agricultural Bosses Can’t Find Workers. Maybe They Should Try Paying More <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/04/australian-farmworkers-agriculture-fruit-pickers-shortage>

CANADA Ontario: 'It's a win, win, win'; Southwestern Ontario Farm community hails worker vaccine pilot program
<https://london.ctvnews.ca/it-s-a-win-win-win-southwestern-ontario-farm-community-hails-worker-vaccine-pilot-program-1.5383134>

CANADA Ontario to offer COVID vaccine to migrant farm workers arriving at Toronto airport this weekend
<https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/migrant-farm-worker-vaccine-pilot-to-run-at-toronto-airport-this-weekend>

INDIA As the pandemic's second wave rages, migrants trudge home again
<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/as-the-pandemics-second-wave-rages-migrants-trudge-home-again-7297303/>

SPAIN Fruit pickers on Spain's coronavirus outbreak: 'What terrifies me is not being able to feed my children'
EL PAÍS talks to some of the hundreds of migrant workers in Huesca who remain in the province despite a new spike in Covid-19 cases
<https://english.elpais.com/society/2020-06-25/fruit-pickers-on-spains-coronavirus-outbreak-what-terrifies-me-is-not-being-able-to-feed-my-children.html>

FINLAND Double testing, vaccines for seasonal migrant workers
https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/double_testing_vaccines_for_seasonal_migrant_workers/11938583

CANADA Ontario Hundreds of migrant farm workers in Ontario denied fresh air during quarantine
<https://globalnews.ca/news/7862350/ontario-county-migrant-farm-workers-fresh-air-quarantine/>

SPAIN 'Time is running out': Spain races to vaccinate its seasonal farm workers
<https://www.thelocal.com/20210527/time-is-running-out-spain-races-to-vaccinate-its-seasonal-farm-workers/>