Worker Support Centre

Seasonal Farm Workers' Roadmap to Fair Work in Scotland



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Despite Scotland's bold ambitions and pledge to become a Fair Work Nation, its five Fair Work Dimensions still feel very distant for people working in seasonal agriculture with whom the Worker Support Centre (WSC)[1] partners. In their workplaces the legal minimum is often not yet met, and workers face barriers and repercussions for reporting breaches of the law.

The Fair Work Convention, an independent advisory body to the Scottish Government, first published its Fair Work Framework in 2016. It set out five core dimensions: effective voice, opportunity, fulfilment, security and respect. In 2021 the Scottish Government published its first Action Plan towards meeting these five dimensions by setting an aim to become a Fair Work Nation by 2025.

For WSC and the people we work alongside, Fair Work means going beyond the legal minimum to become a Scotland where every worker is treated with dignity and respect - no matter their visa type, job or nationality. Over 2025-26 we have partnered with people working in seasonal agriculture to develop a clear roadmap towards Fair Work for them.

We held a series of discussion forums and workshops with people working on farms across Scotland. These started by explaining the Fair Work framework, its significance and scope. Then we listened to workers who shared their thoughts on the dimensions of Fair Work, what they meant in their workplaces, or what was absent. We jointly pieced together these experiences looking at commonalities and differences and what needs to change for Fair Work to become a reality. Through this combined exercise, over many months, this Roadmap was produced - setting the direction of travel towards fairer workplaces, together. Our sessions focused on reviewing current experiences against the five Fair Work dimensions and considering what Fair Work would mean in people's workplaces. We also ran a session imagining a "perfect world scenario": a vision of a Scotland that truly welcomes every worker.

The resulting Roadmap spans the five Fair Work dimensions and considers the routes to achieving these on farms. It includes relevant actions for employers, retailers, Scheme Operators (workers' visa sponsors), the Scottish and UK Governments and enforcement agencies.

Workers' recommendations and experiences relating to each Fair Work dimension have also informed the development of further proposals for actions by the WSC team

1. WSC is an independent charity working towards a world where we are all safe, valued and respected at work and for an end to labour exploitation.

1. Effective voice

"The supervisors treat us like family, and when we have problems, they explain what needs to be done and how it should be done. Some supervisors on the farms are from Central Asia; therefore their attitude towards us is better, and this gives us more motivation to work even harder. There is even a place on the farm where we can ask for advice about salary or working hours."

Quote from farm workers' vision of a truly welcoming Scotland.

For workers, having an effective voice means being heard, trusted and able to participate in decisions that affect their work and wellbeing without fear of retribution. However, their reality remains far removed from this. **WSC's 2025 data shows workers regularly being threatened with dismissals or punished for raising issues in workplaces, including by being denied work for days which effectively removes income.**

People report being warned not to contact trade unions, or independent worker organisation like WSC. Trade unions are currently not present in seasonal agricultural workplaces, and workers report having had no opportunities to engage with them.



This is farm workers' roadmap for achieving effective voice:

Employers: Improve workplace behaviour, practices and culture

- Employers should provide opportunities for workers to raise concerns, ask questions, and express their views without risking punishment, blacklisting[2] or dismissal.
- Disciplinary hearings should allow all workers to present their evidence, with clear actions documented and actioned.
- Visa sponsors and employers should never blacklist workers for raising concerns.

Retailers:

- Establish a mechanism for workers to directly escalate blacklisting concerns, and operate a policy of disengagement with employers or other supply chain actors found to blacklist workers.

Scheme Operators: Create solid structures for worker dialogue:

- Scheme Operators should treat workers with dignity and respect throughout the process, including providing workers with timeframes for responses and appeal systems for unfair decisions. Asking for a transfer to a new employer should never lead to punishment.
- Scheme Operators should respond to transfer requests in a timely manner, to avoid an unsuccessful placement leaving a worker stuck in an abusive employment relationship or disadvantaged.
- Scheme Operators should provide clear, accessible communication channels, giving every worker a dedicated contact for questions or concerns.
- Scheme Operators and employers should provide a system for anonymously sharing issues about living or working conditions, so workers can speak up without fear of reprisal.

Further recommendations to strengthen effective voice:

The Scottish Government should also:

- Use its public procurement and public funding to enforce zero tolerance for workplace repercussions if a worker raises issues.
- Enforce effective voice through its public procurement and public funding, requiring employers to evidence promotion of trade unions and union associated worker organisations, like Worker Support Centre.

The UK Government should:

- Ensure protection against blacklisting extends to trade union related activities.
- Make blacklisting a criminal offence.

2. Blacklisting is the practice of systematically denying individuals employment on the basis of information, accurate or not, held in a database

2. Opportunity

"When we work with strawberries, we have good greenhouses for picking with good volumes of berries. We all have good equipment. Before, there were not enough working trolleys and if you got a bad trolley you had to drag it around with you all day."

Quote from farm workers' vision of a truly welcoming Scotland.

For workers, opportunity means having genuine choice and fair access to work, and a reliable and fair income. It also means being treated equally to other employees and not disadvantaged through allocation of products or equipment.



This is farm workers' roadmap towards fairness and equal opportunity:

Employers: Provide fair opportunities at work

- Employers should provide equal opportunities at work regardless of nationality, age, religion, sex, gender or other protected characteristics.
- Employers should ensure fair and equal distribution of workplaces and hours, allocating work transparently so no one is sent to empty fields or disadvantaged in use of Piece Work rates.
- Employers should provide seasonal agricultural workers who speak limited English with access to professional, independent interpretation during work meetings, trainings and supervision instructions.

Further recommendations to strengthen opportunity:

The UK Government Fair Work Agency should:

- Pro-actively inspect workplaces and engage with workers in languages they understand on issues relating to employment related rights, including allocation of work, equipment, roles and housing.

The Scottish Government and Scottish Agricultural Wages Board should:

- Review Piece Rates and their compatibility with the Agricultural Minimum Wage.

The UK Equalities and Human Rights Commission and Scottish Human Rights Commission should:

- Conduct a joint investigation into employee discrimination on Scottish farms.



3. Security

"We wanted to be paid equally and to be valued and respected. So now we are paid for the time we spend travelling to the fields."

Quote from farm workers' vision of a truly welcoming Scotland.

For workers, security means above all being paid for the time they work, receiving clear information about how they will be paid and being involved in decisions about pay structure.

This is farm workers' roadmap towards real security:

Scheme Operators: Understanding employment rights

- Scheme Operators should fully inform workers about their working and living conditions before they accept a role, including pay, working hours, accommodation, health and safety, and how to raise concerns.

Employers: Pay transparency and defensibility

- Employers should document workers' hours and pay calculations and provide an accurate digital record of hours worked and pay earned.
- Employers should give workers appropriate written notice on piece work and calculation of piece rate pay where it is used.
- Employers should also provide a transparent time-tracking system, accurate recording of hours and transparent pay calculation to prevent breaches of wage payments.
- Employers should pay workers for all their work time, including travel time, induction and training, overtime, in line with the Agricultural Wages Order.
- Employers should pay all workers at least the Real Living Wage.

Further recommendations to improve security:

The UK Fair Work Agency and Scottish Agricultural Wages Enforcement teams should:

- Ensure they respond in a timely manner to worker complaints about pay.
- Work with organisations like Worker Support Centre to gather detailed worker evidence to support cases.

4. Fulfilment

"After we finish working, we have transport to go to the beach. We always have Fridays off, and we go to prayer. We can play football on site and socialise in a common outdoor place. There is a separate place for our prayer times. We also attend English classes now. On my way to the fields, we are thinking about our days off, when we will be taken by transport to a city to see more of Scotland."

Quote from workers' vision of a truly welcoming Scotland.

For workers, fulfilment concerns their daily lives beyond work: engaging with their local communities, shopping, accessing services, and feeling physically and mentally healthy. Having facilities at work for rest and recuperation is important. As most workers live on geographically isolated farms without a car, transport is key for wellbeing, accessing health and education services, buying food and socialising.



This is farm workers' roadmap for fulfilment at work:

Employers: Design jobs for fulfilment at work

- Employers should provide tables and benches for breaks and meals, to avoid workers being forced to rest and eat sitting in the mud.
- Employers should provide seasonal workers who live on farms with access to sports areas and equipment to maintain their physical health.
- Employers should provide reliable, regular and free transport between work and home at the end of each shift, so workers can get home, for weekly grocery shopping, accessing healthcare and other services.
- Employers should provide Wi-Fi so workers can connect with family, socialise online and find support.

5. Respect

"Now everyone who works on the farm is treated with respect and understanding. They understand that we are far away from home and family, and that we are under stress. They don't make us feel nervous anymore, and they are no longer immediately rude to us when we make mistakes. The attitudes are good and warm, everything is explained properly and people do not shout at us at work."

Quote from workers' vision of a truly welcoming Scotland.

For workers, respect means - above all - being treated with dignity by their managers and colleagues.

It means farms providing housing that meets national minimum standards, and which doesn't cost workers far more than current market rates.

It means having workplaces where workers' concerns are discussed and where employers adhere to health and safety legislation.



This is farm workers' roadmap to respect at work:

The Scottish Government: Dignified and safe housing

The Scottish Government should establish and enforce national standards for all seasonal agricultural worker housing that cover:

State of repair: housing should be habitable with fixtures, fittings and furnishings properly maintained.

Structures: Housing structures should be safe, well insulated and ventilated, with sufficient space to prevent overcrowding.

Privacy and safety: Workers should have privacy in their accommodation, with a window and one person occupancy in lockable rooms so belongings can be safely stored. All electrics should be fire safety compliant.

Food and nutrition: Housing should be equipped with sufficient cold and dry storage space ensuring all occupants can store food safely and get adequate nourishment after hard physical work.

Fees and charges: Given very high housing costs and low pay, all gas and electricity needed by workers should be included in accommodation costs, along with reliable Wi-Fi access.

"The kitchen is fully equipped with fridges large enough for all of us, so we can cook and keep the leftovers. We live in bigger caravans with fewer people. The caravans are clean, warm, insulated and cheaper, with utility bills included in the rent. Everything necessary is inside: a toilet and a shower, so we don't need to go outside. The shower is big, with powerful ventilation and good lighting. Before it was so difficult to breathe and move in the showers because they were so small."

Quote from workers' vision of a truly welcoming Scotland.



Further recommendations to improve respect:

The UK Government Health and Safety Executive should:

- Pro-actively inspect all farm workplaces to ensure all issues related to facilities, machinery, personal protective equipment and training are addressed (see details below).

Employers: Implement respect as an organisational value

- Employers should not punish workers for raising complaints or not performing in line with expectations, e.g. with forced 'days off', being sent to their caravans (cutting their working day short), facing dismissals, or removal of the opportunity to return to the UK. Instead, see advice for clear disciplinary process above (under 1. Effective voice).

- Employers should ensure polite and respectful workplace communication without shouting, insults, swearing, or abusive language, so that everyone feels valued and heard.

Employers: Expertise and networks on health and safety

- Employers should provide free personal protective equipment and clothing, including boots, waterproof jackets or overalls, gloves, rubber gloves, and protective masks or glasses where necessary.

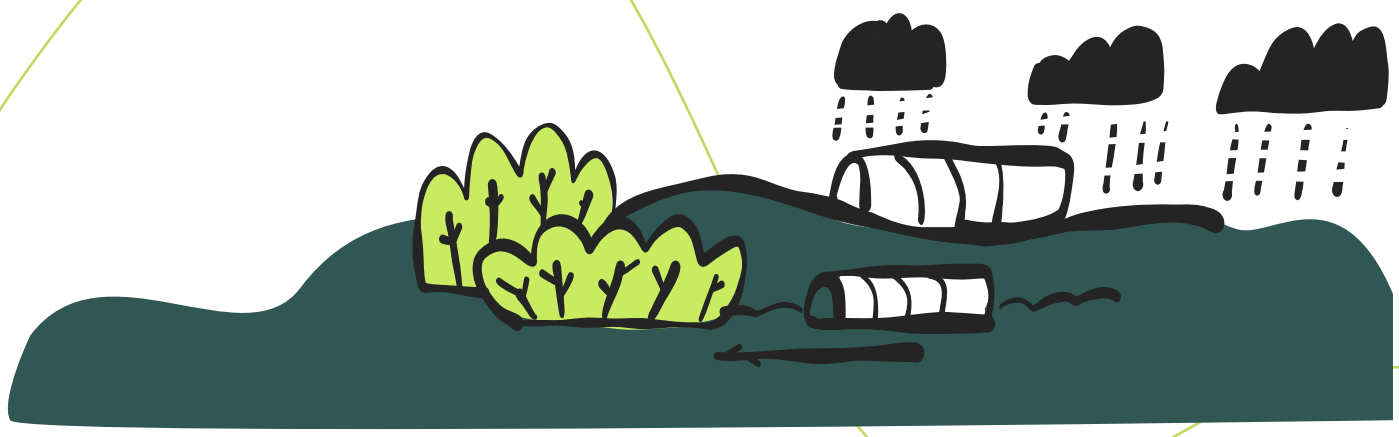
- Employers should properly maintain all tools and equipment to prevent injuries.

- Employers should provide clear instructions and proper health and safety training, with additional training for working with machinery and chemicals.

- Employers should provide drinking water, sufficient toilets and handwashing facilities close to all workers in fields. Employers should provide well stocked first aid kits and named health and safety representatives and first aiders.

- Employers should respond to workers' individual health needs, and respect workers requiring alternative tasks e.g. due to allergies, injuries, pregnancy or repetitive strain.

- Employers must inform workers about how to access medical assistance and provide transport to appointments when needed.



Conclusion

This Fair Work Roadmap has been developed by people working in seasonal agriculture across Scotland.

In this Roadmap, workers have set out a detailed vision for a sustainable, fair and productive agricultural sector that respects their rights, promotes fair work and complies with the law. WSC has also added our reflections on wider policy changes leading to farms where all workers feel safe, valued and respected.

Please send your reflections or responses to: **romeena@workersupportcentre.org.uk**

Together for a Scotland that welcomes every worker.



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