

**HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION AND EXECUTIVE
AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Migrant Workers: Injury and ill health statistics in Agriculture

Summary

1 At the AIAC's meeting on 21 March 2006, members asked HSE for an analysis of the injury and ill health statistics in the industry to identify the migrant worker contribution.

2 Lack of information about the size of the migrant working population in the industry, the limitations of existing statutory and other reporting systems and associated, gross under-reporting of work-related injury and ill health in the industry means it is impossible to estimate the potential contribution of these workers to the reported injury and ill health statistics.

Population baselines

3 Determination of the casual and temporary (including migrant) workforce in the industry has been extraordinarily difficult. In June 2002, Government estimates based on the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) annual census of agriculture and horticulture (Census Statistics 2004) estimated that approximately 62,000 temporary workers were employed in the sector. Subsequent research commissioned by Defra and reported in early 2005*, suggested that between 420,00 and 611,000 temporary workers were employed to harvest and process fresh produce in Great Britain (GB) throughout the year of whom between 300,000 and 450,000 were supplied by independent labour providers (gangmasters), the remainder being employed directly by the farm businesses. The numbers do not equate to full or part-time posts but to workers employed; reflecting the number of workers that the agricultural sector draws upon each year. No allowance has been made for seasonality.

* DEFRA: Temporary workers in UK agriculture and horticulture: A study of employment practices in the agricultural and horticulture industry and co-located packhouse and primary food processing sectors. Suffolk, Precision Prospecting Ltd 2005

4 It was further estimated that of these, approximately 44% were UK nationals and 23.5% were European Union (EU) nationals; the remaining 32.5% being recruited from outside the EU.

5 Based on these figures, a best guesstimate would suggest that in late 2004/early 2005, between approximately 235,000 and 345,000 migrants were employed in the sector.

6 Any estimates are complicated by the number of undocumented workers within the industry.

Statistical sources

7 HSE published statistics are based on a number of sources including principally:

- Reports made under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR). Deaths of all employed people and members of the public arising from work activity are reportable to either HSE or the local authority. Three categories of reportable injury to workers are defined under the regulations: fatal, major and over-3-day injury;
- The Labour Force Survey (LFS): a quarterly, statistically representative survey of households carried out by the Office of National Statistics. HSE commissions questions in the LFS to obtain a view of workplace injury and work-related illness based on individuals' perceptions. Questions on workplace injury are included annually. Questions on work-related illness - reported separately in surveys of self-reported work-related illness (SWI) - appear on an ad hoc basis;
- The Industrial Injuries Scheme (IIS), administered by the Department for Work and Pensions, which compensates workers disabled by prescribed occupational diseases; and
- A number of clinically based, voluntary, confidential reporting schemes for occupational disease developed and operated by consultant physicians working in the National Health Service (NHS).

8 None of these sources are designed or structured to capture data as to country of origin nor, given that the indigenous UK workforce now includes first, second, third and possibly fourth generation migrants can conclusions be drawn from any information or assumptions as to ethnic origin. Additionally, the various voluntary reporting schemes for occupational diseases are neither statistically representative nor significant and are constrained by patient confidentiality.

Under-reporting in Agriculture

9 The industry has the worst fatal injury rate of any major employment sector. During the last decade the fatal injury rate has fluctuated between 7.7 and 11.4 per 100,000 workers, approaching nearly ten times the all-industry rate.

10 As with fatal accidents generally, data on fatal accidents involving migrant workers is well documented and thought to be accurate. For example in 2002, a Hungarian student died in a forklift truck accident on farm premises in Cambridgeshire. In 2003, two Polish workers were killed in a rope-winding machine on a farm in Berkshire and three migrant workers were killed at a railway crossing in Worcestershire. In February 2004, twenty-one illegal Chinese workers drowned in Morecambe Bay. More recently, earlier this year, five foreign nationals died in a multiple vehicle crash in Lincolnshire whilst being driven to work.

11 The picture as regards non-fatal injuries and cases of ill health in the industry is obscured by gross under-reporting. Only a small percentage of injuries to those working in agriculture are reported under RIDDOR 1995: about 26% in respect of employees and 5% for the self-employed. Reporting levels for ill health are even lower. Thus, accurate estimation of incidence rates and comparisons over time, both within the industry and between industries, is difficult.

Conclusion

12 For the reasons set out above, it is currently impossible to estimate the contribution of injury and ill health to migrant workers to the reported statistics.

Action

13 Members are asked to note the content of this paper.