

How to tackle the shortage of seasonal workers in a period of crises?



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Overview

- 1. Farm labour in Austrian horticulture**
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1 Situation of farm labour

Migratory seasonal farm labour in Austria

- **12.000 from EU member states: free access to national labour market:**

Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia etc.

- **3.000 from “Third countries”: work permit from the Ministry of Labour, quotas according to demand**

Ukraine, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Vietnam, Philippines etc.

6 months (can be extended to 9 months within one year)

Core working force (since 2022, minimum of 3 years between 2017-2022, working permit outside quotas)

Special agreement with workers from **Ukraine** (since 2022)

Collective labour agreement: 1.500 – 1.650 € monthly gross wage (2022)

Source: STATISTIK Austria (2021)

2 Farm Labour Crises

news ORF.at

en TVthek Radio Debatte Österreich Wetter Sport News ORF.at im Überblick

das problem

Wie Erntehelfer betrogen werden

„Freiwillig mache ich das nicht“

„Keine Ausnahme, sondern die Regel“

„Dann werde ich den Betrieb schließen“

Reiche Ernte, arme Ernter?

Warum wollen immer weniger ausländische Erntearbeiter nach Österreich kommen? Die Gewerkschaft erhebt schwere Vorwürfe, von Lohndumping bis Betrug - und ein Saisonarbeiter erzählt über schreckliche Praktiken. Bauern sehen das Problem hingegen

Covid-19 shutdown 2020 and 2021

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SPARGELDÜNNE ERNTE

Ukrainische Saisonarbeiter bleiben aus: Bauern befürchten Ernteausschlag

Die Spargelsaison beginnt, doch Erntehelfer fehlen. Der Ukraine-Krieg macht die Abhängigkeit Österreichs von Saisonarbeitskräften aus dem Ausland deutlich

LANDWIRTSCHAFT

Coronavirus-Krise: Hochbetrieb für Bauern

Die Landwirtinnen und Landwirte müssen täglich ihre Tiere versorgen, ihre Betriebe zählen zur kritischen Infrastruktur. Direktvermarkter, Bauernläden und der Ab-Hof-Verkauf sind geöffnet, Aussaat und Ernte in Gewächshäusern sind bereits im Gang. Für die Vermarktung gehen die Bauern in der Coronavirus-Krise neue Wege.

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3 Survey

Best practice examples

numerous stories of exploitation: poor field access, no valid results

best practice farms are interested in social and environmental sustainability out of various reasons: social, human, political, religious etc.

Five vegetable farms: cucumbers, asparagus, strawberries, radishes, lettuce etc.
between 50 and 280 ha
between 26 and 125 seasonal workers

Interview setting: group discussion (13 to 16 persons)
expert group discussion with farm management
reflection amongst interviewers

3 Survey

Participating foreign migratory seasonal workers in group discussion

Origin	male	female	seasonal	short time	refuges	total
Romania	5		5			5
Bulgaria		4	4			4
Croatia	2		2			2
Kosovo	5		5			5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1		1			1
Afghanistan	7				7	7
Ukraine	3	6	3	6		9
Poland	1	1	2			2
Vietnam	1		1			1
Total	25	11	23	6	7	36

4 Theory of Resonance and Recognition

Axel Honneth (2018) in referring to **G.W.F. Hegel** and **George H. Mead** points out the importance of **equal human rights, recognition** and **self-esteem** in **motivating human action**. The character of public rights enables the formation of self-esteem and that a person is universally recognized as a morally eligible person. Recognition likewise permits a person to share the qualities of a community with all other members and to participate in a discursive will-building. Self-respect means the possibility of referring positively to oneself.

Love, justice and **self-respect** create the social conditions under which human subjects can arrive at a positive attitude towards themselves. The acquisition of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-recognition make person learn to understand himself/herself as an autonomous being.

4 Theory of Resonance and Recognition

Hartmut Rosa (2020) states that for the quality of the **human world relationship**, it is crucial that subjects dare to master challenges, influence the environment in a controlled manner and thus be able to make a planned impact. People depend on the desire for resonance relationships. The spheres of work or family, but also of art, religion and nature can serve as modern resonance spaces. Many people establish their **resonance axes** in fields like reading or visiting museums, cinema or worship, going to the forest, the mountains or the sea, professional work, family, sports club, voluntary service or a circle of friends. Sociocultural dynamics and growing economic constraints tend to create increasing resonance blockages. The disturbance of resonance axes may cause existential individual or cultural alienation.

5 Results

Indications for resonance axes (Rosa 2020)

Work

“2,000 persons from Ukraine were planned in 2021, half of them men. All drafted into military service. With one exception of about - I estimate (...) for the whole of Austria probably 25-30 men who are in Austria despite everything, but not because they were in the Ukraine before, but because they previously worked in Poland or anywhere else.”

*“Plan B for **short-term crops** that are grown and harvested in batches, such as lettuce, yes, now that the first two batches are out, a certain amount of lettuce would be planted regularly every week, every calendar week until the beginning of August. And then from May 1st, when the first planned set is ready to harvest, you start with that and then go into the harvest again in stage 2, 3, 4. And if Plan B becomes necessary now, then either the quantity is reduced, that is, the company normally has 10 people available, now it only has 5, then the whole quantity is reduced to what 5 can handle instead of 10. And they other area, you can then quickly and easily cultivate it with grain, with corn, with something that technically the farmer can do 100 percent himself. So (...) there is simply a complete changeover (...) across Austria or Europe.” (...) Strawberries, which are **permanent crops**. It can also be the case that out of 20 hectares that are outdoors, only 10 hectares are harvested”.*

(Expert interview)

*“K. has a lot of **trust**. K. has her own ATM card from the company, which she uses to shop for the kitchen. This is not a problem as debits could be controlled without this.”*

(Expert group discussion 5)

5 Results

Indications for resonance axes (Rosa 2020)

Housing and sanitary facilities

"We provide single and double rooms so that our employees can also withdraw during the long time they spend here."

"The farm I mentioned employs a lot of people, but they don't have a proper toilet in the field and people actually have to go into the corn every time to defecate there. Is that humane or is it not humane. (...) Appreciation is, for example, not just how I present someone on the homepage, but whether I properly feed them, accommodate them or even appreciate them in the toilet when the field is 10 km away from the farm. (...) It is unacceptable that people are given breakfast but then have to hide when they have to go to the toilet. Not today."

(Expert group discussion 3)

5 Results

Indications for resonance axes (Rosa 2020)

Leisure

“We spend our leisure in watching football together on TV because Croatia was at the European Football Championship. During the European Football Championship we watched the matches together.” (...) Whenever it's Friday, this is normal. That's also with family and BBQ sometimes and that's it.”

(Seasonal workers from Croatia group discussion 1)

6 Conclusion

Farm workers are belonging to a vulnerable group

risk of exploitation due lack of information (laws, wages), language problems
feeble support by trade unions
poor paid jobs are not considered as such, wage dumping

Resonance and recognition are supporting farm organisation

availability of workers
human relationship: lack of resonance axes implies costly control
BUT no change power distribution between workers and management.

Social Conditionality

CAP 2023-27 payments are linked to the respect of certain EU labour standards and beneficiaries are incentivised to improve working conditions on farms.
Abandonment of certain labour-intensive production systems?

Augmentation of resonance

Follow-up interview with farm manager after the outbreak of the Ukrainian war in April 2022
those who are already resonant are becoming even more resonant.

6 Conclusion

Farm Strategies for labour intensive crops

less labour intensive crops

raising prices (luxury goods, less demand)

abandoning crops (asparagus, strawberries etc.)

shifting labor costs onto consumers: strawberry picking

attracting farm workers by means of fair working conditions and enhanced social networks (resonance, recognitions)

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> Abhängig Beschäftigte in der Landwirtschaft

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