



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Màiri McAllan MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Housing
Scottish Government
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice
Committee
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Inquiry into Conditions for Agricultural Workers on Tied and Temporary Visas

Members from both the Social Justice and Social Security Committee and the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee recently attended a briefing session organised by the Worker Support Centre. Both Committees have agreed to write to you to convey our concerns regarding the conditions reported by seasonal agricultural workers employed in Scotland.

During the meeting, the workers described living in severely overcrowded, unhygienic caravans, being denied basic protective equipment, facing significant barriers to healthcare and fearing that any complaint would jeopardise their future employment in Scotland.

The workers described living in caravans so overcrowded and dilapidated that they would fall far below any recognised housing standard, however it appears that they are either not covered by existing legislation or that the legislative requirements are not being applied. Currently, it appears that no public body is taking ownership for inspecting the accommodation before or during the period of time when the seasonal

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workers are living in the caravans, leaving repair obligations and safety measures unenforced.

Based on the testimonies received during this session, the following sections outline key areas where current arrangements appear to fall short of expected standards and where greater oversight or reform is required.

Overcrowded and Unfit Accommodation

Workers reported being housed in caravans designed for three to four occupants but routinely accommodating five or six, resulting in cramped, stressful conditions with limited personal space or privacy. Shared kitchen and bathroom facilities were insufficient, leading to long queues after extended shifts. Accommodation was frequently damp and inadequately heated, with mould present and clothes dried on heaters, posing fire risks. Despite paying around £75 per week plus utilities, many felt the quality was below what they expected and the cost disproportionate. Sites were often remote, lacked communal space and reliable internet, and do not appear to meet health and safety standards. The workers reported that a persistent fear of retaliation prevented them from raising many of their concerns about their living conditions.

Treatment and Discrimination

Workers reported disparities in the provision of essential protective clothing, with local employees receiving weather-appropriate clothing free of charge, while visa-holders were expected to purchase their own or use the inferior alternatives issued to them. Accounts of verbal abuse and dismissive treatment by colleagues and supervisors were also shared. These experiences contribute to a broader sense of vulnerability and exclusion.

Employment Conditions

Workers described uncertainty surrounding future placements, with no guarantee of being invited back the following season. This lack of continuity undermines financial stability and planning, particularly given the high costs of return travel and visa renewal. Transfers between farms were inconsistently managed, with some workers bearing the cost of relocation themselves. Concerns were raised about unpaid travel time between fields, discrepancies between the working hours logged by the workers

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and their employer, and failure to meet the legal minimum of 32 paid hours per week.¹

The concerns raised in this letter speak directly to the regulatory gaps highlighted during Stage 3 consideration of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Amendments 348 to 350, lodged by Richard Leonard MSP, sought to strengthen oversight and improve accommodation standards for seasonal migrant workers, proposals that align closely with the issues reported to our Committees.

While the amendments were not supported at this stage, we welcome your recognition of the need to address these issues and your commitment to further engagement.

We understand that you intend to meet with Mr Leonard and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, Mairi Gougeon MSP, to explore appropriate next steps.

As part of your consideration of these issues we would appreciate it if you would, as a matter of urgency, look at where responsibilities lie for ensuring that seasonal agricultural workers living in caravans are protected by relevant health, safety and employment laws, as well as how to ensure that these protections are enforced when standards fall below statutory requirements.

It would be helpful if in your reply you provide further detail on the legislative or policy barriers to improving the conditions for these workers.

We look forward to your response to our request.

This letter has been copied to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, the Rural Affairs and Planning Committee and Richard Leonard MSP.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Adam MSP
Convener
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil
Justice Committee



Bob Doris MSP
Deputy Convener
Social Justice and Social Security
Committee



¹ Since 12 April 2023, the Immigration Rules have stated that Seasonal Workers must receive a minimum of 32 hours' pay for each week of their stay in the UK, regardless of whether work is available. This change was made with the intention of ensuring that workers are not bearing significant risks from bad weather impacting availability of work.

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