

Migrant Labour in Northern Ireland Agriculture

Background

In autumn 2017, DAERA completed a survey to obtain information on the number and origin of migrant workers employed in the agricultural sector in Northern Ireland. This report presents the results of the survey. Appendix A provides a brief overview of the sampling methodology and response rates. The questionnaire used can be found on the DAERA website along with this report. A similar survey was completed for the food and drinks processing sector in 2017 with results published at the following link:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/migrant-labour-and-trade-enquiry

The results presented in this paper include estimates for farm businesses which did not respond to the survey. Estimates were calculated by weighting responses by farm business type and are based on the number of businesses who responded to the survey from each type. The employment figures estimated in this report are total number of employees. The survey does not distinguish between part time or full time employees.

Agricultural sector results

On 1st November 2017, there were an estimated 1,404 seasonal and non-seasonal workers from outside the UK and Ireland employed in agriculture in Northern Ireland. Of these, 1,397 were from other EU countries, while only 7 were from the rest of the world (RoW). The 2017 June Agricultural Census estimated a total labour force of 48,704 which includes self-employed owners, business partners and spouses. Within this total, there were 11,909 paid and unpaid workers, not classed as self-employed. Migrant labour therefore accounts for approximately 12 per cent of the paid and unpaid agricultural workforce. Assuming there are no unpaid migrant workers, it is more meaningful to consider the contribution of migrant labour as part of the paid labour force (full-time, part-time, casual). The 2017 June Census found that there were 6,850 paid employees working on NI farm businesses. Using this figure, migrant labour accounts for 20 per cent of the NI paid agricultural workforce (table 1).

There were a further 676 seasonal migrant workers who were present **in the year preceding 1st November 2017**, but no longer present on the farm at the time of the survey. These comprised 675 workers from EU countries and one from the rest of the world, equating to 10 per cent of paid employees recorded in the June Agricultural Census.

Note, however, these proportions are approximate. This report uses total agricultural labour from the [June Agricultural Census](#), collected on 1st June 2017, as a proxy for total labour on the 1st of November 2017. Due to the seasonality of some agricultural sectors, some variability in the number of workers is expected. Given the negligible number of employees from the rest of the world, the results presented in this report include both RoW and European employees.

Table 1. All migrant workers present on 01 November 2017

	Migrant Labour	Agricultural Census employee estimates	% migrant employees
All employees	1,404	11,909	12
Paid employees	1,404	6,850	20

Migrant workers were employed on 163 farms, accounting for 0.6 per cent of the 24,956 farms in 2017 June Agricultural Census.

Farm businesses were selected for surveying using a targeted sampling methodology (see Appendix A for details). Of the 609 businesses surveyed, 65 per cent had no migrant labour. Of those remaining, 13 per cent had only non-seasonal migrant labour, 15 per cent had only seasonal migrant labour, and 7 per cent had both non-seasonal and seasonal migrant labour. Non-seasonal workers are defined herein as paid employees working for 20 or more weeks per year; seasonal workers are defined as paid employees working for less than 20 weeks per year (Table 2).

Table 2. Business responses to migrant labour survey

	Percentage of responses
No migrant labour	65
Non-seasonal migrant labour	13
Seasonal migrant labour	15
Both non-seasonal and seasonal migrant labour	7

Of the 35 per cent of respondents who had migrant workers, only 3 per cent indicated that migrant labour was not important to their business, while 97 per cent indicated that migrant labour was in some way important (4 per cent slightly important, 27 per cent important and 66 per cent very important).

When asked how their business would adapt if a future UK government placed significant restrictions on the recruitment of workers from EU countries, the most common response was reduce production (34 per cent), followed by recruit more workers from the UK and Ireland (23 per cent) and invest in labour saving technology (18 per cent). Sixteen per cent of responses indicated the farmer did not know how they would respond with a further 8 per cent of responses included in the other category. Of these latter responses, around two fifths said it could lead to closure of the business.

Subsector results

On 1st November 2017, horticultural farms were the most likely farm type to use migrant labour, with 65 businesses indicating that they employed migrant labour. Altogether they employed 974 migrant workers which was the largest number employed of any sector. These businesses accounted for almost a quarter of all horticultural businesses in Northern Ireland, with migrant labour contributing approximately four-fifths of the total paid labour force. These businesses comprise mushroom, fruit and indoor flower growers.

The second largest number of migrant workers, with 256 employed, was found on the miscellaneous 'other' type farms where they accounted for over a third of the total paid labour force. These businesses comprise various field crop, field vegetable, root vegetable and mixed crop-livestock farms.

Businesses that kept pigs and poultry or grazing livestock had the lowest numbers of migrant workers with 95 and 79 employed respectively (Table 3).

Table 2. Number of businesses with migrant workers, and number of migrant workers by sector on 1st November 2017

Sector	Farms with migrant labour	% of businesses	Migrant Labour	% Paid labour force
Horticulture	65	24	974	78
Pigs and poultry	30	4	95	12
Grazing livestock	40	0	79	2
Other	28	2	256	34
Total	163	1	1,404	20

1. Farm types are based on the 10 category standard output classifications for Northern Ireland, where:

Grazing livestock includes dairy and cattle & sheep (lowland and LFA) farms.

Other includes cereal, general cropping, mixed and other type farms.

2. Proportions for each subsector based on figures for paid workers taken from the June agricultural census, so are approximations only.

Non-seasonal migrant workers

A majority of the non-seasonal migrant workers (paid employees working for 20 or more weeks per year) present on farm businesses on 1st November 2017 worked on large horticultural farms (mainly mushroom growers). Table 4 shows that these businesses accounted for 29 per cent of businesses with migrant labour, and almost two-thirds of non-seasonal migrant workers. The second largest farm type with non-seasonal migrant workers employed was large 'other' category farms (mainly field crops and vegetables) with approximately one fifth of the total non-seasonal migrant workers. This is followed by large grazing livestock farms with 47 migrant workers, and large pig and poultry farms with 45 migrant workers. Results from table 4 show that large businesses in all sectors employ the most non-seasonal migrant labour, with over 90 per cent of migrant labour found in these businesses.

Table 3. Non-seasonal* migrant labour present on 01 November 2017 by farm type and size

Sector	Size	Farms	Labour
Horticulture	Very small, small, medium	6	46
	Large	35	686
Pigs and poultry	Very small, small, medium	7	20
	Large	20	45
Grazing livestock	Very small, small, medium	8	6
	Large	22	47
Other	Very small, small, medium	6	15
	Large	16	201
Total		120	1066

1. Due to weighting the predicted values for labour in tables 4 and 5 do not add to the totals in table 3.
2. *Non-seasonal migrant workers are defined as paid workers who are present on the farm for 20 weeks or more per year.
3. Farm types are based on the 10 category standard output classifications for Northern Ireland, where:
Grazing livestock includes dairy and cattle & sheep (lowland and LFA) farms.
Other includes cereal, general cropping, mixed and other type farms.

Seasonal migrant workers employed on 1st November

Of those present on farms on the 1st November 2017, the majority of seasonal migrant workers (paid employees working for less than 20 weeks per year) were employed on large horticultural farms (mainly specialist fruit). These businesses accounted for 63 per cent of all seasonal workers present on this date (Table 5). Horticulture as a whole accounted for almost three-quarters of seasonal migrant labour on farms at the 1st of November. The next largest farm type with seasonal labour was the 'other' category farms (mainly field crops and vegetables) with 11 per cent of seasonal migrant labour employed. Only the horticulture farm type could be disaggregated by farm size as numbers in the remaining farm types were not large enough to publish as per DAERA disclosure guidelines.

Table 4. Seasonal migrant labour present on 01 November 2017 by farm type and size**

Sector	Size	Farms	Labour
Horticulture	Very small, small, medium	8	34
	Large	23	218
Pigs and poultry ⁴	All farm sizes	6	32
Grazing livestock ⁴	All farm sizes	14	25
Other ⁴	All farm sizes	6	38
Total		57	347

1. Due to weighting the predicted values for labour in tables 4 and 5 do not add to the totals in table 3.
2. **Seasonal migrant workers are defined as paid workers who are present on the farm for less than 20 weeks per year.
3. Farm types are based on the 10 category standard output classifications for Northern Ireland, where:
Grazing livestock includes dairy and cattle & sheep (lowland and LFA) farms.
Other includes cereal, general cropping, mixed and other type farms.
4. Farm size combined due to disclosure constraints.

Seasonal migrant workers employed in previous 12 months

Data on seasonal workers employed in the preceding 12 months but not present on 1st November was collected in the survey to establish as full a picture as possible of migrant labour use. In the 12 months preceding 1st November 2017, large horticultural farms (mainly specialist fruit) were again the largest employer of seasonal migrant workers, accounting for almost half of all these workers. Large 'other' category farms (mainly root crops and field vegetables) accounted for a further 15 per cent of seasonal migrant workers present in the 12 months preceding 1st November 2017 (Table 6).

Table 5. Seasonal migrant labour employed in the 12 months preceding 01 November 2017 by farm type and size**

Sector	Size	Farms	Labour
Horticulture	Very small, small, medium	17	115
	Large	28	329
Pigs and poultry³	All farm sizes	8	36
Grazing livestock	Very small, small, medium	14	23
	Large	9	24
Other	Very small, small, medium	8	48
	Large	12	101
Total		96	676

1. **Seasonal migrant workers are defined as paid workers who are present on the farm for less than 20 weeks per year.
2. Farm types are based on the 10 category standard output classifications for Northern Ireland, where:
 Grazing livestock includes dairy and cattle & sheep (lowland and LFA) farms.
 Other includes cereal, general cropping, mixed and other type farms.
- 3 Farm size combined due to disclosure constraints.

Country of origin of migrant workers

Almost a third of non-seasonal migrant workers present on 1st November 2017 were from Bulgaria, with 28 per cent from Lithuania, 16 per cent from Poland and 10 per cent from Latvia.

Over half of the seasonal workers present on 1st November were from Romania, with 17 per cent from Bulgaria, 12 per cent from Lithuania and 11 per cent from Poland. No migrant labour was reported from the remaining EU and EEA countries.

Table 6. Country of origin of non-seasonal * and seasonal migrant workers present on 01 November 2017**

Country	non-seasonal *	% non-seasonal	Seasonal**	% Seasonal
Belgium	18	3	0	0
Bulgaria	206	32	54	17
Czech Republic	0	0	2	1
Estonia	2	0	0	0
Hungary	13	2	13	4
Latvia	66	10	14	4
Lithuania	183	28	38	12
Poland	105	16	34	11
Portugal	2	0	1	0
Romania	24	4	163	51
Slovakia	18	3	1	0
Slovenia	1	0	0	0
Spain	1	0	0	0
Rest of World	5	1	0	0
Total	644	100	320	100

1. Not all respondents answered this section of the survey, so numbers of migrant workers will be different to other sections of this report.

2. * non-seasonal migrant workers are defined as paid workers who are present on the farm for 20 weeks or more per year.

3. **Seasonal migrant workers are defined as paid workers who are present on the farm for less than 20 weeks per year.

4. No migrant labour was reported from Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Sweden, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland.

Appendix A

Businesses were selected to participate in the agricultural migrant labour survey using targeted sampling based on the following criteria:

1. All farms with four or more paid employees based on the results of the 2017 June agricultural census.
2. All farms who indicated that they employed migrant labour in the 2010, 2013 or 2016 EU Farm Structure Surveys. These surveys indicated that horticultural businesses were more likely to employ migrant labour, so, in addition;
3. All horticultural businesses with two or more workers in the June 2017 agricultural census.

The 609 farms selected using these criteria were assumed to constitute the population of businesses in Northern Ireland who employ migrant labour.

Paper questionnaires were issued in early November 2017 to the farm businesses identified above. Respondents were contacted by telephone to clarify any anomalies on returned form. The response rate obtained for the agricultural migrant labour survey was 69% (421 businesses).