

FOCUS ON LABOUR EXPLOITATION

Monday 6 November 2023

FLEX's statement on the House of Lords' Horticultural Sector Committee report.

FLEX welcomes the report by the Lords Horticultural Sector Committee, '[Sowing the seeds: A blooming English horticultural sector](#)', published 6 November 2023. We were pleased to [give evidence](#) to the Committee based on the evidence FLEX has collected over these past four years of independent research into the experiences of workers on the UK agricultural seasonal worker visa, including [ongoing work done in partnership](#) with our partners from CASL, Rosmini and SEEAC.

The report recommends that the Government separates labour inspectorates from immigration enforcement, an issue that deters migrant workers from [reporting abuse](#) and offers impunity to exploiters.

The report also calls Government to make clearer the roles and responsibilities of enforcement bodies, given the important governance gaps in the scheme, an issue further explained [here](#), as well as to increase resourcing for labour market enforcement to proactively enforce compliance with labour laws. It also states the importance of ensuring that workers on the seasonal worker visa can access redress.

These are vital recommendations that respond to some of the issues workers have been experiencing on the scheme (see [FLEX's 2021 report](#)) and [Govt's review](#) of the 2019 version of the scheme and important steps towards making sure that the workers who we invite to the UK to support our industry and put food on our shelves can access the rights and treatment we all would expect. The Committee also makes helpful recommendations towards addressing the risks in recruitment, ensuring work is available during workers' time in the UK and addressing the risks created for workers on the scheme by the discrepancies between visa costs and the short period of employment in the UK.

FLEX acknowledges the space given by the Lords Committee to listen to workers with direct experience of the UK's seasonal worker visa and the role this had in the development of positive recommendations to address the risks of exploitation created by the way in which the agricultural seasonal worker visa scheme is currently structured.