



ACCOMMODATION FOR SEASONAL WORKERS

Public thematic report

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Summary

Half of the estimated one and a half million seasonal workers are employed in the tourism sector, the other half in agriculture. The 312,000 intermittent workers in the cultural sector who have been excluded from this estimate also have a variable activity, but, as the Court's investigations show, their accommodation does not pose any problems, apart from special cases such as the Avignon OFF Festival or the Cannes festival.

Although there are no consolidated statistics on their numbers, the financial jurisdictions estimate that 400,000 seasonal workers need accommodation close to their place of work. Without local accommodation, recruitment becomes more difficult.

In 2023, the tourism sector accounted for 8 % of GDP¹ and revenues from international tourism for €63.5 billion; winegrowing accounted for 16 % of French agricultural production, or €15 billion. These strategic economic sectors cannot develop without seasonal workers.

The lack of accommodation is a major handicap to the development of tourism and farming activities. In the hotel industry², 84 % of companies believe that it is difficult to recruit seasonal workers; as a result, in 2022, 59 % of them had to restrict their high-season supply due to a lack of staff.

This survey set out to define this need and how it is being met, and to identify areas for improvement.

Approximate knowledge of the accommodation needs of seasonal workers, which themselves are changing

The absence of a universal definition of the status of seasonal worker has led to a variety of situations, making it impossible to count them reliably. In particular, the different laws that apply to them do not set the same standards when it comes to housing or accommodation, which constitutes a temporary housing solution.

Given this imprecise knowledge, the various levers used to promote accommodation solutions for seasonal workers are often ineffective because they do not meet their specific needs.

At the same time, the need for accommodation for seasonal workers is changing: the seasonal nature of activities is changing, with shorter winter seasons, longer summer seasons and more time between seasons. The qualifications required to recruit seasonal workers are increasing in line with the growing demands of tourism³ and may require more space, to the detriment of the areas devoted to housing these workers.

¹ 2023 GDP: €2,370.5 bn.

² Study by the *Union des métiers et des industries de l'hôtellerie* (UMIH) in 2022 on seasonal employment in tourism-related industries.

³ Creation of "suites" instead of single rooms, creation of spas or jacuzzis.

Lack of steering and monitoring of actions

The May 2023 national plan for seasonal workers, which followed on from earlier initiatives to make these jobs more attractive, pays little attention to accommodation and is not well known or well taken into account in the regions. Some regions, as part of their remit for tourism or mobility, are trying to promote a number of initiatives, but this is not a specific policy. It is at the inter-municipal level, rather than the municipal level, that practices or attempts to manage the issue of housing for seasonal workers are implemented.

There has been no assessment of the commitments made prior to 2018 regarding the use of employers' contributions to the construction effort (PEEC) for the benefit of seasonal workers, nor of the implementation of the mandatory⁴ agreements between tourist municipalities and the State. In addition, diagnoses of local situations are not sufficiently reliable to serve as a reference. The lack of steering at both the national and local level is therefore an aggravating factor in the shortage of accommodation for seasonal workers.

In this context, the solutions found are often the result of local initiatives, sometimes of a small-scale nature, whereas the State, employers and local authorities would be more effective if they coordinated their action on the basis of shared objectives.

Difficulty in reconciling housing supply and demand

While many stakeholders (local authorities, *France Travail*, *Action Logement*, *Maison des Saisonniers*, etc.) act as intermediaries between seasonal accommodation-seekers and potential landlords, their effectiveness is limited by the significant mismatch between high demand and very low supply.

Employers of seasonal workers and local authorities responsible for the activities concerned tend to pass the responsibility for finding solutions onto each other. Employers, like the trade unions, do not want accommodation to be a compulsory part of the employment contract, and local authorities believe that it is up to employers to meet the need. The recent confusion over the conditions for claiming housing benefits as a seasonal worker has added a further constraint.

On the other hand, the Labour Inspectorate is quite active in carrying out checks on accommodation conditions for seasonal workers. This report describes a number of cases of mistreatment which have been heavily punished, particularly in agriculture, but also in the tourism sector.

Despite this general observation, the investigation revealed some interesting local initiatives to be developed

Local authority initiatives to preempt, acquire or refurbish buildings for seasonal workers do exist, even if they are few and far between, due to the scarcity and high cost of land.

Certain segments of the social housing stock (social residences, young workers' hostels) can be used for them, but in the end these places are never allocated as a priority to seasonal workers; similarly, with a few exceptions, boarding schools or university residence halls are not very suitable for accommodating seasonal workers.

⁴ Imposed by the "Mountain II" law.

The only measure strictly reserved for accommodating seasonal workers is a tax relief for private landlords, but this measure was created on an experimental basis by the Finance Act for 2024 and is infrequently used and not well known. However, some local authorities do not hesitate to support private individuals who take in seasonal workers over several seasons, believing that this is more effective and less expensive than building accommodation specifically for seasonal workers.

In this context, some employers are increasingly investing in accommodation for their own seasonal workers, when local authorities alone are unable to provide the necessary solutions. In mountain communities, joint action by local authorities and employers has long helped to develop sustainable solutions.

Experimentation with new solutions in coastal communities is growing, such as temporary light housing in transitional areas or campsites. This solution is close to the workplace and is preferable to seasonal workers camping or sleeping in their car.

A need for pragmatism and the promotion of best practices

This report puts forward a number of proposals based on a pragmatic approach: the existence of too many different standards can contribute, through their circumvention, to increasing insecurity and hindering the implementation of common-sense solutions. In fact, waivers negotiated and accepted by the authorities, employers and trade unions have enabled seasonal workers to be housed in more dignified conditions than when they are left to their own devices or to slum landlords.

Among the action levers specifically designed for seasonal workers is the recent *Visale* scheme for seasonal workers, which covers landlords in the event of unpaid rent or damage, and avoids the need for tenants to take out a deposit.

On the other hand, another effective lever, which consists of organising home-to-work mobility, is still in its infancy. However, when transport is provided for seasonal workers between their place of work and accommodation, however remote, it is easier for them to widen the scope of their search for accommodation. Whether in the mountains, on the coast or in rural areas, there are few consolidated and replicable solutions. The disappearance of the federation of seasonal workers' centres⁵ means that there is no longer any opportunity to exchange and pool best practices in this sector.

The financial jurisdictions propose improvements to facilitate accommodation for seasonal workers

The first option, which might seem obvious - mobilising vacant homes - is not proving very effective. Few vacant homes are actually available in tourist municipalities, and the vacancies revealed by the available statistics are often fictional and do not represent a very significant resource.

Viable solutions, on the other hand, are often the result of local initiatives, some of them small-scale. This adaptation to the realities of each region is a guarantee of effectiveness, but the State, employers and local authorities would gain even more by coordinating their actions on the basis of common objectives.

⁵ Association governed by the law of 1901.

The inter-municipal dimension of steering associated with planning tools such as territorial coherence schemes (SCOT), local town planning schemes (PLU) or local housing programmes

(PLH) is a solution for effectively and sustainably mobilising stakeholders able to promote housing for seasonal workers. The financial jurisdictions suggest that the legal powers of the local authorities should be clarified so that housing for seasonal workers is explicitly recognised as part of local authorities' "housing" remit.

This inter-municipal approach, which needs to be better recognised, will only be meaningful if robust governance is put in place at the State level to ensure the coherence of schemes and funding.

In order to adapt to local realities, we need to encourage the dissemination of existing best practices rather than major regulatory change. In this respect, the Court proposes to strengthen and simplify the implementation of Stecal⁶, which has already been tried out by some prefectures and which constitutes an exception to the principle of non-buildability in agricultural and natural areas, just as it recommends reactivating the network of seasonal workers' centres.

Finally, the investigation revealed that it was impossible to separate the issue of access to housing for seasonal workers from their employment contract. The shorter and more precarious the contracts, the more difficult it is to access housing. Multi-employer, multi-territory or multi-season contracts: anything is on the table to be invented or reinvented to secure the career paths of seasonal workers.

The purpose of this investigation is to alert all the stakeholders involved in the accommodation of seasonal workers, so that this issue is taken into consideration in a more coherent way, in a context where climate change is impacting the length and nature of tourist seasons and where the evolution of the skills expected of seasonal workers is profoundly transforming these professions, which are particularly useful to our economy.

⁶ Sectors of limited size and capacity.

Recommendations

Concerning management

1. By 2026, introduce a sub-function for accommodation for seasonal workers into the budgetary and functional accounting nomenclatures of local authorities (*ministry of the interior*).
2. By the end of 2025, finalise the evaluation of the implementation of agreements relating to the housing of seasonal workers and, in light of the results, formulate the guidelines to be followed by the departmental prefects (*ministry of the interior, ministry of territorial development and decentralisation*).

Concerning public policy

3. By 2026, identify housing for seasonal workers as a component of the "housing" remit, giving public establishments for inter-municipal cooperation (EPCIs) the role of lead partner, and supplement part IV of Article L.302-1 of the French Construction and Housing Code to include housing for seasonal workers in local housing programmes (*ministry of the interior, ministry of territorial development and decentralisation*).
4. By 2025, reactivate a federated network of seasonal workers' centres (*ministry of the economy, finance and industrial and digital sovereignty, ministry of territorial development and decentralisation*).
5. By 2026, extend to seasonal worker accommodations the temporary exemptions from the rules applicable to land rights for certain temporary removable structures, as set out in Article L.421-5 of the French Town Planning Code (*ministry for territorial development and decentralisation*).
6. From 2025 onwards, encourage departmental prefectures and local councils to use the waiver scheme for sectors of limited size and capacity (Stecal) as one of the possible tools for providing accommodation for seasonal workers (*ministry for territorial development and decentralisation, ministry for agriculture and food sovereignty*).
7. Examine, from 2025, the conditions for re-establishing the issuance of "small shed" licences in order to develop appropriate local mobility solutions (*ministry for territorial development and decentralisation*).