

**E2 Research's new report states:**

## **Money and war motivate Ukrainian seasonal workers in Finland**

**Ukrainian seasonal workers in Finland want to earn money both to secure their livelihoods and to aid their home country. The ongoing war has increased communication between seasonal workers, their families, and Finnish farm owners. Farms have provided employment and security.**

These findings stem from a recent study that examined the situation of Ukrainian seasonal workers and their families in Finland, as well as the crisis resilience of the farm owners employing them. The study involved interviews with Ukrainian workers and entrepreneurs employing them on agricultural and horticultural farms. The research material consisted of 31 qualitative interviews conducted in Ukrainian, Russian, and Finnish between December 2022 and February 2023. The study was conducted by E2 Research.

### **Money earned in seasonal work is sent to war-torn Ukraine**

The main reason for engaging in seasonal work in Finland is money. One interviewed Ukrainian worker described it as follows:

*Money was the driving force behind my decision. Before that, I was in Poland, where wages were much lower. I accidentally heard from another seasonal worker how they work in Poland during the winter but spend the summer in Finland. They explained to me that the pay and attitude in Finland are much better than in Poland.*

The wages earned from seasonal work in Finland significantly exceed the Ukrainian wage levels. According to the interview data, among the seasonal workers, there are doctors and lawyers, although the majority appear to be less educated.

The interviewees state that in the context of the war, their motivation for seasonal work goes beyond improving their situation and includes financing the Ukrainian army and the country's reconstruction. One interviewee describes the outbreak of the war and their thinking:

*It started when I was at home collecting documents for the upcoming season when the war began. I was so shocked by the cruelty of the Russians, and I decided to go for seasonal work—not only to earn money, survive, and stay in a safe place but also to donate money to the Ukrainian armed forces.*

Coincidence and the experiences of others have also played a role in their decision to come to Finland. Some made the decision to come after receiving information from relatives, friends, or advertisements from job intermediaries.



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### **The war has brought farm owners and seasonal workers closer together**

The interviewees mention that farm owners contacted their seasonal workers and offered accommodation in Finland before the start of the harvest season. One interviewee describes the situation:

*I was at home in Mykolaiv, on the border of the Russian invasion. When my farmer called me and offered accommodation even before the season, I decided to go, just to be in a safe place.*

Communication also took place in the opposite direction. Many former seasonal workers, especially men, asked if their relatives or families could travel to Finland and seek refuge on the farms, even though the inquirers themselves couldn't leave Ukraine due to the war.

Ukrainians have also had negative experiences in Finland. Some of the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the treatment they received on the farms. The reason for this was attributed to the stress experienced by the entrepreneurs, such as concerns about the harvest or the spread of disease during the pandemic.

### **The use of brokers poses problems**

Many interviewed seasonal workers mention having used brokers' assistance in finding employment, especially during their first year of seasonal work. Once direct connections with the farms are established and communication functions in both directions, brokers are no longer needed.

Several seasonal workers criticize the high cost of broker services, especially during the first time. The activities of brokers have also been associated with uncertainties and even fraud. The use of brokers is also explained by the lack of language skills. Brokers often arrange transportation to Finland as well.

One interviewee describes their experiences:

*The first time, I paid them 500 euros, and later, when I knew the price better, I paid 250 euros. I used services because I didn't speak English, and it was impossible to find a farm in any other way than by using intermediary assistance.*

### **One can manage with limited language skills**

Ukrainians consider learning both Finnish and English to be important. Without a common language, it is difficult to make friends. One interviewee said:

*I didn't speak any Finnish or English when I arrived, and it was really difficult, but when I started learning the language, life improved.*

Language skills are important for employment and integration. On the other hand, the interviewed seasonal workers say that there are tasks that do not require extensive language skills. Translation apps installed on smartphones have also been helpful.

One interviewee says:



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*I hope that my future Finnish employer would understand that even though I don't speak Finnish well, I am still a really good worker, like all Ukrainians.*

### **Work, children's education, and hobbies facilitate adaptation to Finland**

Many children have arrived on farms with seasonal workers and refugees. Ukrainians feel that their children's education, as well as their participation in activities and play with Finnish children, have been essential for their adaptation. One interviewee stated:

*Our farm owner arranged a place for my daughter at school, and she already speaks basic Finnish. She has new friends.*

The interviewed seasonal workers report having made friends with other Ukrainians. However, making friends with Finns has been more challenging. On the other hand, those with a longer work history in Finland have established more connections with Finns.

### **Community, camaraderie, and prioritizing work offer relief to farm owners during crises**

The agricultural and horticultural entrepreneurs interviewed for the study state that preparation and change management help farms cope with crises. Farm owners find taking care of their own well-being, fostering a sense of community among the workers on the farm, and having friendships beneficial in managing stress. Additionally, improved delegation and prioritization of tasks enhance their resilience.

- *Crises have tested the resilience of seasonal workers and farm entrepreneurs. From their experiences, we can learn and improve our resilience and ability to adapt to changes also during "normal" conditions, not only in exceptional times. Crises cause suffering, but may move societies forward, says **Atte Penttilä**, researcher from E2 Research.*

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The research publication event will be held on June 1, 2023, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the E2 Research offices in Helsinki (Kalevankatu 4, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor) and online. Register for the event from [this link](#).

The research was conducted by PhD, Atte Penttilä from E2 Research. E2 Tutkimus is a multidisciplinary research institute serving third-sector organisations, businesses, foundations, municipalities, ministries, political decision-makers, and the media. The research has been financed by MTK's Foundation.

For more information on the research:

Atte Penttilä  
PhD, Researcher  
[atte.penttila@e2.fi](mailto:atte.penttila@e2.fi)  
+358 40 1675 969

For more information on the project:

**Marjatta Selänniemi**  
Senior Expert  
[marjatta.selanniemi@e2.fi](mailto:marjatta.selanniemi@e2.fi)  
+ 358 50 3651 481