



KoroKausi

Safeguarding seasonal work forces during the Covid-19 pandemic and for the future.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Helsinki, Finland

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P2 - Competitiveness

P6 - Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Farm performance, restructuring & modernisation

Measures: M07 - Basic services & village renewal

M16 - Cooperation

Funding: Total budget 299 618.40 (EUR)

EAFRD 125 839.72 (EUR)

National/Regional 173 778.68 (EUR)

Private/Own funds 0 (EUR)

Timeframe: 2020 to 2021

Project promoter: Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK)

Email: marko.maki-hakola@mtk.fi

Tel: +358 20 413 3701



© Korokausi project

In addition, the project highlighted the importance of rural livelihoods for the functioning of society and increased understanding of the importance of the vitality of rural areas and their development.

Summary

The KoroKausi project was able to help agricultural enterprises recruit seasonal workers when the Covid-19-related public health restrictions prevented them from hiring the workers that they normally use on their farms. A real threat was posed by a wave of farm bankruptcies without sufficient seasonal labour, which would have jeopardised seed production into the future. The project used charter flights to arrange safe access to Finland for the required seasonal workers. Information resources were published online at www.toitasuomesta.fi, a portal set up by the project which helped the agricultural enterprises to recruit workers and the jobseekers to find employment in rural areas, including after the project period. Thanks to the project, no farms went bankrupt due to labour shortages during the pandemic.

Project results

- Workers were found for some 1 000 farms via the Töitä Suomesta portal.
- The project contributed to filling all seasonal vacancies (around 16 000 in 2020) in rural areas across the whole country.
- At its peak, the project portal www.toitasuomesta.fi had 2 100 seasonal vacancies with around 7 000 registered users.
- No farms went bankrupt or had to stop production due to a lack of seasonal workers.
- The project organised an airlift for seasonal workers from Ukraine and some 3 000 seasonal workers were brought to Finland.
- The Poikkeustekijä campaign reached 960 000 people via Facebook and Instagram. The campaign video was viewed more than 500 000 times.



- The project activities provided farms and agricultural enterprises with reliable information on how to recruit seasonal workers.
- The project played a key role in creating a better understanding of seasonal labour needs.

Context

The World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. Public health restrictions on travel and entry into Finland came into force in April 2020, which meant that Finnish farms were unable to obtain the foreign seasonal workers needed. This could have led to a sudden shortage of up to 16 000 agricultural seasonal workers in Finland. At worst, the situation could have caused a wave of bankruptcies of agricultural enterprises and could have posed a serious threat to the country's food security.



© Korokausi project

Together with Töitä Suomesta Oy (the company established to support the project), the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK) (the project promoter), reacted quickly to the threat posed by the pandemic-related restrictions to the farming sector. MTK was able to put together an interregional project exceptionally quickly and the matter was processed quickly by the various Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centres) due to the exceptional nature and seriousness of the situation. The project also enjoyed exceptional public visibility and a wide network of partners was established. During the summer and autumn of 2020, the seasonal labour shortage and its potential effects were in the national news almost every day.

Objectives

The project aimed to secure the competitiveness and operating conditions of Finnish farms and food processors during the seasonal labour shortage caused by the pandemic-related travel restrictions and to find domestic or foreign substitutes for an estimated 16 000 seasonal workers.

The aim was to assist agricultural enterprises to ensure their survival and the retention of jobs. The project also sought to identify and respond to the different needs of different regions for seasonal workers.

The project aimed to build a model to diversify the sourcing of seasonal workers through different channels in Finland and abroad to increase the resilience of rural areas now and in the future.

Activities

Preparations for the project started as soon as the Covid-19-related travel restrictions were put in place. The project was launched on 30 March 2020. A project manager and four employment counsellors were hired for the project in April 2020. The company Töitä Suomesta Oy was established to support the project.

To resolve the seasonal labour shortage, employment counsellors set up regional partner networks covering the whole of Finland. The website www.toitaisuomesta.fi was launched in 2020 as a portal for seasonal work and related information. The portal offers vacancies and information on seasonal work as well as an opportunity to advertise vacancies.

In April and May 2020, the project launched the Poikkeustekijät (exceptional workers) campaign to support seasonal work recruitment and increase awareness of seasonal work in rural areas. The campaign included videos and social media content featuring farmers seeking workers and well known individuals such as skier Perttu Hyvärinen, YouTuber Roni Back and actor Janne Kataja.

MTK and Töitä Suomesta organised several charter flights for seasonal workers from Ukraine to Finland. The first charter flight arranged by Töitä Suomesta arrived on 23 April 2020. The website www.toitaisuomesta.fi offered instructions on how to travel safely during the pandemic and a registration form for seasonal workers. MTK and Töitä Suomesta Oy worked with the authorities to prepare a procedure for arriving in the country safely during the pandemic.

The time between April and August 2020 was the busiest period for the project: with the extensive partner network, the project



employees found workers for all farms in need of seasonal labour. The project targeted new potential seasonal worker groups. For example, asylum seekers were contacted through Startup Refugees and the popular Frank mobile app was used for students.

In the autumn of 2020, the project launched measures to prepare for the arrival of seasonal workers the following summer. Farms were given instructions on how to best ensure the return of the same workers. The www.toitasuomesta.fi website became a key database and source of seasonal work information during and after the project. There were links on the homepage through which users could post vacancies and other links through which users could browse job opportunities. Some vacancies were also searchable within the service.



© Korokausi project

Main results

Workers were found for some 1 000 farms that sought help through the Töitä Suomesta portal. It is estimated that, together with employment offices, the project was responsible for filling all seasonal vacancies in rural areas, of which there were some 16 000 in 2020. The website www.toitasuomesta.fi was launched as an information hub. At its peak, the portal had 2 100 seasonal vacancies with around 7 000 registered users.

No farms went bankrupt or had to stop production due to a lack of seasonal workers. During the period of the project, an airlift for seasonal workers between Ukraine and Finland was organised, with some 3 000 seasonal workers brought to Finland.

The need for seasonal workers was highlighted through campaigns. The Poikkeustekijä campaign reached 960 000 people via Facebook and Instagram. The campaign video was viewed more than 500 000 times.

The partner network and operating model created by the project provided farms and agricultural enterprises with reliable informa-

tion on how to recruit seasonal workers. The cooperation started by the project and the development of farmers' skills will ensure Finland's food security and security of labour supply into the future.

The project played a key role in creating a better understanding of seasonal labour needs. The portal for seasonal workers and farms developed on the basis of the project's experience will support sustainable recruitment of seasonal workers in the future. It has also improved the recruitment marketing and public image of farms.

Key lessons and recommendations

Finland is highly dependent on seasonal workers with particular skills and competences. Before Töitä Suomesta Oy, there was no organisation dedicated to supporting agricultural employers.

The importance of rural areas and the relationship between rural and urban areas are usually underestimated.

Recruiting local labour in rural areas is challenging and access to foreign workers is a necessity.

The situation was very intense as well as highly interesting. The unprecedented challenges united all of those involved and enabled exceptionally varied cooperation.

Crises foster innovation. The services that were rapidly developed by the project would most likely not have been carried out otherwise.

The project generated a lot of media coverage. It was featured on a daily basis in national media. The news coverage brought rural seasonal work and Finland's food security to a wider public in an unprecedented way.

In times of crisis, existing tools provide an opportunity to resolve related challenges. Multisectoral cooperation can tackle challenges through action.

Additional information:

Project website: <https://www.toitasuomesta.fi/>

Euronews article: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/07/pick-your-own-fruit-thousands-of-finns-replace-foreign-workers-save-summer-strawberry-harv>

Platform for rural developers in Finland webpage: <https://maaseutuverkosto.fi/en/>

