



Vatican COVID-19 Commission

Executive summary: Economics Taskforce



Photos above and below right by Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World

SEE: A workforce without hope

How to ensure that food, work and dignity are not lost

All over the world, migrant workers – who make up much of the seasonal workforce for agricultural harvesting and food production – face a **desperate situation**. The pandemic has resulted in restricted movement in many countries: they cannot go elsewhere to work, or often even leave their homes. As well as causing great hardship, this will also have a big impact on agricultural supply chains globally.

Many of these workers are not recognised under national labour laws and work informally – **they simply do not exist**. They have no income and many live in poverty, in precarious conditions with poor hygiene. They have no health, social protection or even information about COVID-19 – which places them at **higher risk** of infection themselves and becoming carriers of the virus.

272 million

The estimated number of international migrants. Most are agricultural workers and domestic service providers (source: IOM).

1 million

The estimated number of seasonal workers that Europe will be deprived of, if the pandemic continues for much longer (source: FAO).

50%

The percentage of seasonal workers on Australian vegetable farms and **30%** on its fruit and nut farms; **10%** on US farms.



Pope Francis has asked the Vatican COVID-19 Commission to consider the key issues arising from the pandemic, and to reflect on new socio-economic-cultural approaches that are needed to enable us to build a better future for everyone.



Migrants are displaced twice

They are not welcome in their host countries, where they remain invisible in the informal sector and at risk of infection. However, they are not allowed back into their home countries out of fear they are potential carriers of the virus.

JUDGE: The capacity of a bridge is measured by its weakest pillar

The value of a society is determined by how it treats its most vulnerable people

The absence of seasonal migrant workers **threatens harvests** and **food security**. As well as a terrible waste of food, this situation may lead to food scarcity and increased prices, causing even greater difficulties for the poor.

Migrant workers confined to their homes will lose their incomes and will not be able to send money back to their families. This will have **grave health consequences** for the former and **serious economic impacts** for the latter.

An efficient society values and does not waste resources, but allocates them in the most intelligent and efficient way.



Our failure to regulate migrants, seasonal workers, care givers and domestic workers exposes them to great health and economic risks. It is also **very short-sighted** – crops will go to waste if there is no one to harvest or process them. This will result in **food scarcity** and the lack of basic necessities in many countries.

The absence of caregivers puts the elderly once again at **higher risk** of contracting and dying from COVID-19. On the other hand, giving these groups legal status and providing them with health and social protection would ensure **widespread social security** and **prevent the spread of the virus**.

ACT: Proposals for action

The Church and other religious and social actors could encourage states to:

- **Address the plight of migrants** through emergency measures, especially those working in the agricultural sector, given their key role in food security.
- **Extend and renew work visas** on the verge of expiring to give seasonal workers adequate social and medical protections, enabling them to work under safe conditions and **reduce human exploitation** in agricultural production.
- **Simplify the procedures** for hiring and paying seasonal agricultural workers to reduce discrepancies between workers looking for jobs – who legally cannot be hired – and agricultural producers in desperate need of labour for the harvest season. Catholic organizations, Caritas, labour unions and employer associations can **mediate and act** as guarantors of the process to reduce corruption.
- **Consider migrants' situation** and their pleas in measures taken to mitigate the economic consequences of COVID-19.
- **Ratify and implement** the ILO Domestic Workers Convention no. 189 and the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
- The Church and other religious communities could send **a strong, clear message** about labour and its dignity, particularly in light of the upcoming **International Worker's Day on Friday May 1**.
- Labour is essential for our revival. The planet and its resources cannot wait for us to resolve our uncertainties. We need **urgent measures** so that those in need of workers can hire them quickly and without complications, and those who are in need of work can find employment.