



Interactive session on Central Asian culture, religion, social norms and communication styles

For UK farms employing seasonal workers from Central
Asia under the Seasonal Worker Scheme (SWS)

Purpose and Objectives

Enable effective communication and integration of Central Asian seasonal workers (from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) under the Seasonal Worker Scheme (SWS) to improve the experience of both UK growers and seasonal workers themselves

1. Clarify why greater cultural awareness of Central Asian seasonal workers' traditions and practices is critical for UK growers
2. Identify key cultural practices of Central Asian seasonal workers and how these impact their work and wellbeing on UK farms
3. Explore the key challenges faced by UK growers employing seasonal workers from Central Asia
4. Describe how UK growers, employers and supervisors can take action to address possible challenges and support seasonal workers' wellbeing
5. Locate existing supporting resources



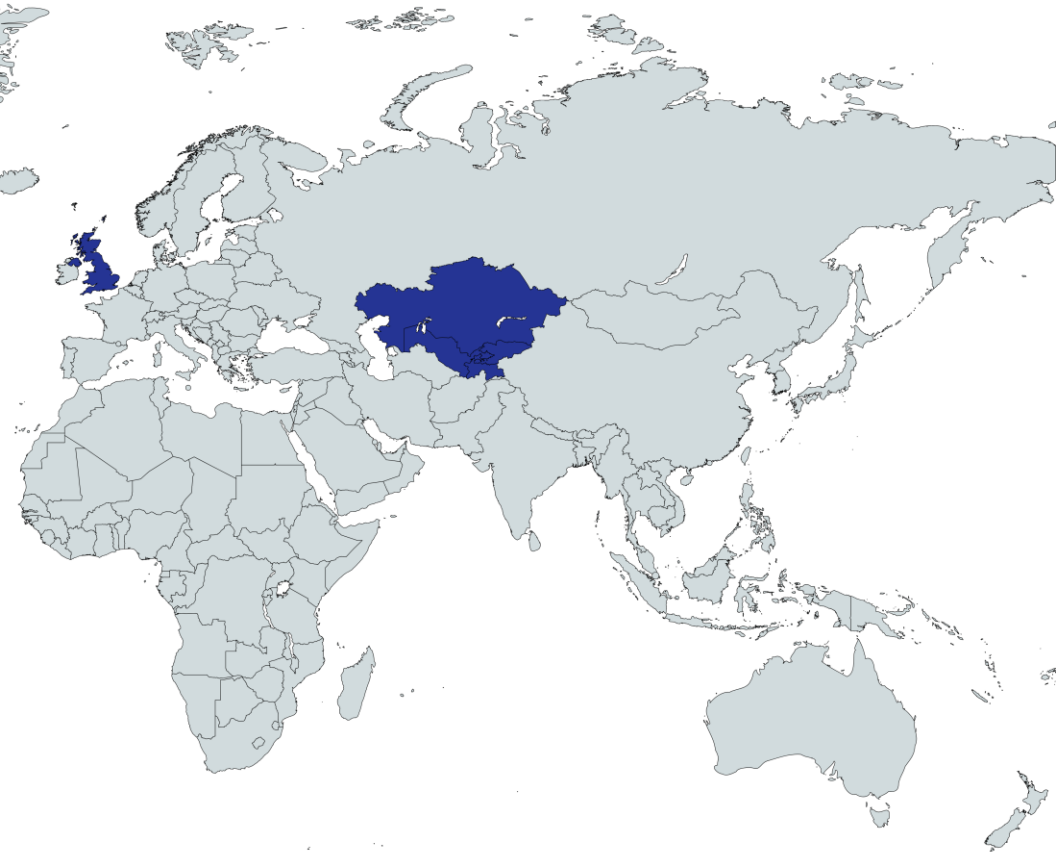
Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Interactive activities
3. Introduction to Central Asia
4. Theme 1: History and Language
5. Theme 2: Religion and Diet
6. 1st Q and A
7. **Coffee Break (15 mins)**
8. Theme 3: Social Norms
9. Theme 4: Communication styles and Conflict resolution
10. 2nd Q and A
11. Resources
12. Close and feedback

Why this session? As a UK grower, what is in it for me?

- 78% of all seasonal workers under SWS come from Central Asia (Home Office visa data for 2024)
- UK growers want an efficient workforce.
- UK employers/ supervisors need to be able to effectively communicate with, and manage, seasonal workers.
- Better awareness and understanding of Central Asian workers' cultural practices and traditions can help improve worker wellbeing and performance on farms.
- Real practical tips and actions for UK growers, employers and supervisors.
- Positively impact the experience of seasonal workers from Central Asia.

Introduction to Central Asia



Seasonal Workers come from 4 countries in Central Asia

- Cultural importance of pasturelands (steppe)
- ~20 million
- Languages: Kazakh (Russian)
- Economy: Dominated by oil and mining sectors; agriculture plays significant role



Kazakhstan

- ~7 million
- Languages: Kyrgyz (Russian)
- Economy: Agriculture, mining, and a growing tourism sector



Kyrgyzstan



Uzbekistan

- 94.1% covered by mountains
- ~10 million
- Languages: Tajik (Russian)
- Economy: Aluminium and cotton production, agriculture, remittances

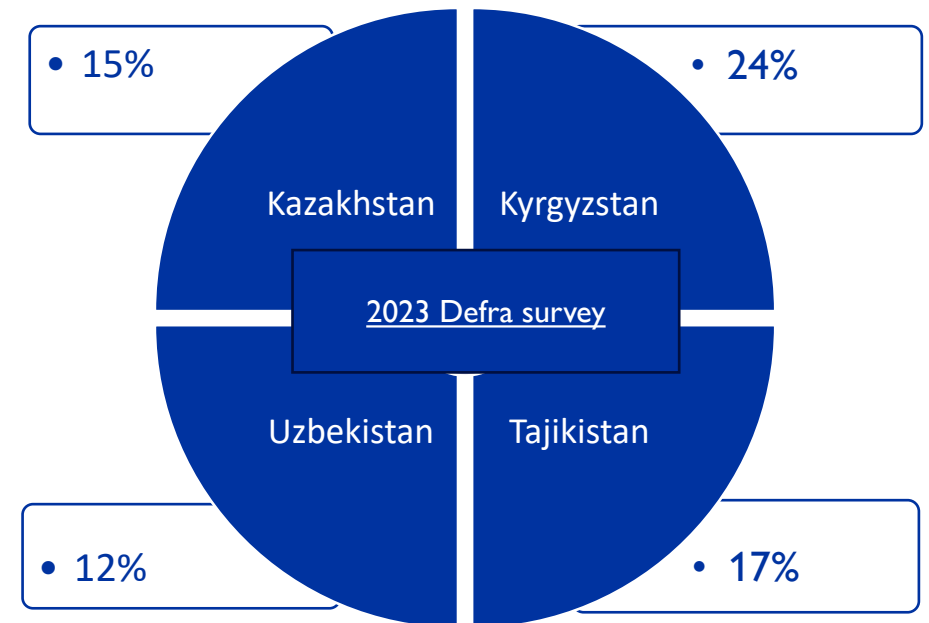


Tajikistan

- Double landlocked country
- ~36 million
- Language: Uzbek (Russian)
- Economy: Cotton production, natural gas, and a growing service sector

Profile of Seasonal Worker from Central Asia

- Between 18-45 years old.
- Mostly male (20% female).
- Mostly Muslim (practice Islam).
- Often from rural areas.
- Secondary education (some tertiary).
- Often the sole/primary provider for their households.
- Many speak Russian.
- Very few speak/understand English.
- Many have prior migration experience (e.g. mainly to Russia, some to UK).

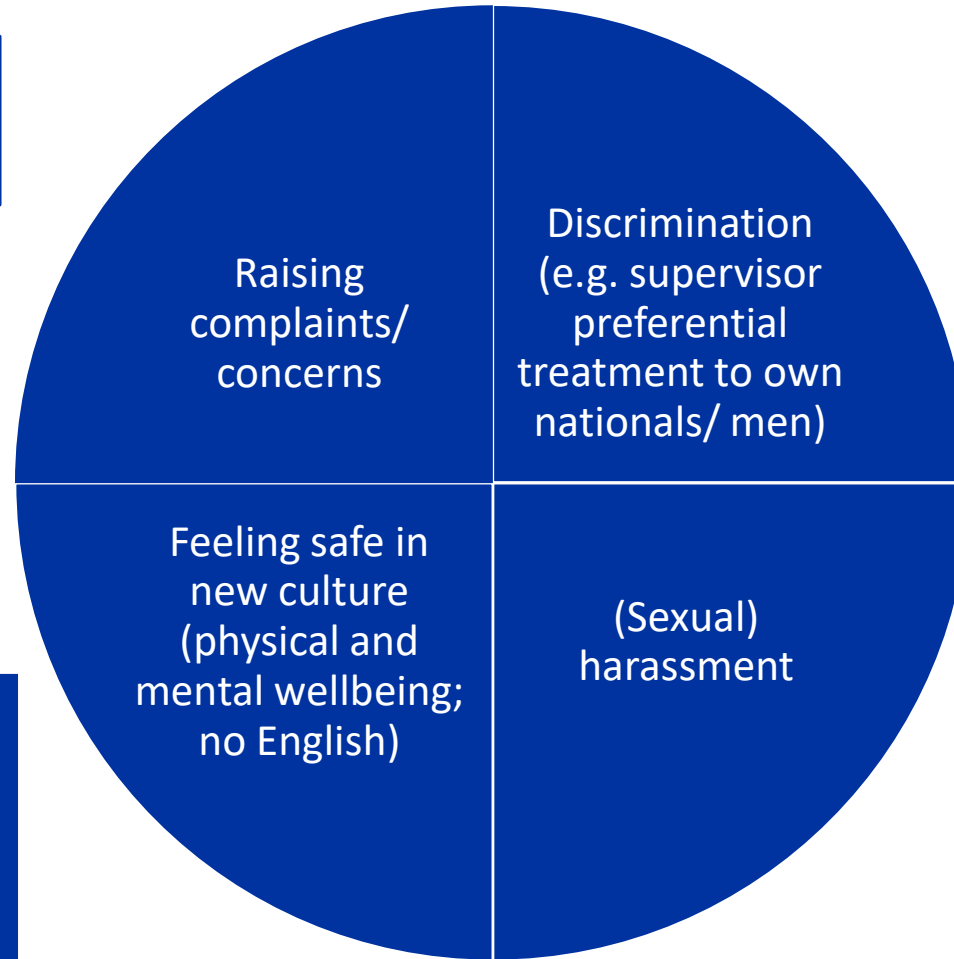


Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO) received by seasonal workers

- 1. Introduction to the UK:** Insights into cultural norms, social expectations, practical aspects of UK life.
- 2. Seasonal Worker Scheme (SWS):** Overview of programme, its objectives, recruitment process.
- 3. Work & Living Conditions:** Details on accommodation, employment standards, and UK farms working environment.
- 4. Healthcare Access & Safety:** Information on accessing medical services and staying safe in the UK.
- 5. Rights and Responsibilities:** Guidance on workers' legal rights under UK law and their obligations to employers.
- 6. Economic Opportunities:** Details on wages, saving, and remittance best practices.
- 7. Support Resources:** Contact info for organisations offering legal, social, and logistical assistance in UK.

Possible concerns and realities of seasonal workers

Mixed accommodation and washrooms are not appropriate.



“I had no problems but faced stereotyping when living in a shared house with guys. They expected me to cook or clean the kitchen.”

– female seasonal worker

“Having shared showers for several caravans was uncomfortable and when concern was raised, it was not addressed.”

– female seasonal worker

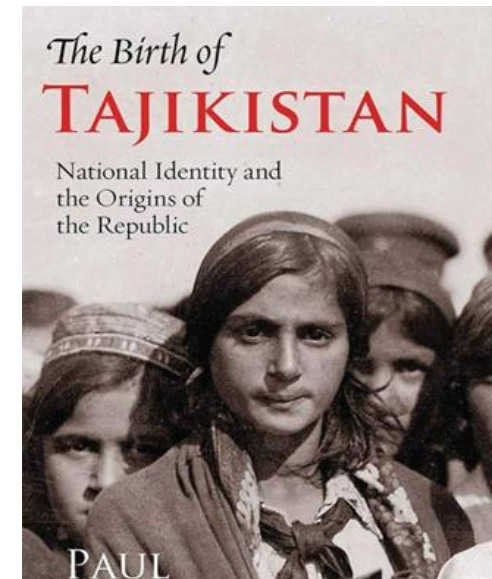
While poor treatment has been noted by seasonal workers, many also noted that this is not a big issue for them and “it is just a work process.” – seasonal worker

1. History and Language



Cultural legacy of Soviet influence

- The four countries have distinct and diverse histories in the pre-Soviet era, shaped by their geographies, climate, economies and trade.
- All four countries share a joint history of being socialist republics as part of the USSR and then gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.
- Emphasis on collectivism, discipline, work ethic and centralized state control - strong sense of communal responsibility and group cohesion. Workers used to following strict orders with minimal autonomy.
- Relationship with authority: respect for hierarchy and deference to leaders is often still prevalent.
- Today: growing sense of personal autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit exists.



Migration

- Very young population (over 50% are under 30 years), a large rural demographic and high unemployment rates, especially among rural youth.....
- Fuel labour migration.
- Remittances have become a lifeline for families and are crucial for national economies, accounting for between 20-40% of GDP across the region.
- Since the war in Ukraine, the region's workers are actively seeking work away from Russia, in other parts of the world, including the UK.



Language

- Each of the four countries has their own main language. **Uzbek in Uzbekistan; Kazakh in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan are Turkic languages. Tajik is similar to Farsi (Persian).**
- The Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet is largely used in all four countries.
- The Latin alphabet is used in Uzbekistan, and more recently in Kazakhstan.
- Russian is the second language of communication in all four countries; widely spoken and used. People may mix their own language and Russian in their daily communication.
- English is NOT widely spoken or understood



What YOU can do

1. Recognise that workers carry their cultural heritage, such as Islamic traditions and rural work ethic, to their workplaces abroad.
2. Be patient with language barriers and avoid complex terminology.
3. Be aware of the workers' different languages. Ideally contracts and other important information should be in their own languages. Older workers are more likely to also speak Russian.
4. Do not expect workers to speak/ read English.

2. Religion and Diet



Religion

- Islam is main religion in Central Asia
- Influences cultural norms, social behaviors, and dietary practices.
- The majority of seasonal workers coming to the UK are likely to be Muslims.
- Prayer - Central Asians use the term “namaz”.
- Muslims are required to pray 5 times a day, at specific times, each prayer approx. 20 minutes. In total, 1 hour per day for praying. **It is a personal choice**
- Muslim men are also required to perform the Friday congregational prayer (approx. 40 minutes)
- [Prayer times | East London Mosque](#)
- Muslims observe **Ramadan**, a holy month of fasting and spiritual reflection; Muslims fast from dawn to sunset, refraining from eating, drinking, and smoking.

2025 Ramadan dates for the UK: starts 28 February and ends March 30

- depends on moon sightings

Diet:

- Food is a key part in the practice of Central Asian hospitality.
- Diet is influenced by Islam.
- **Halal Food** - Muslims follow dietary laws prescribed by Islam, known as Halal. Halal food is prepared following specific guidelines: all meat needs to be slaughtered according to Halal principles. Avoid cross-contamination with non-Halal foods.
- **Prohibited Foods** - Muslims do not consume pork or pork products, nor alcohol, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Allowed foods:** halal meat, fish, vegetables, bread, fruit, some dairy products, eggs, nuts.
- Bread and tea hold special cultural importance and are often served with every meal



What YOU can do

1. Provide designated prayer spaces and allow flexible break times to accommodate prayer routines.
2. Provide Halal food options in canteens, farm shops and during company events, and ensure access to appropriate food shops. All meat needs to be slaughtered according to Halal principles. Avoid cross-contamination with non-Halal foods.
3. Ensure that meals provided do not contain prohibited items and that alternatives are available. Respect the prohibition of alcohol during social events and gatherings.
4. During Ramadan, employers should consider providing extra support, such as:
 - offering shared meal spaces for Suhoor (the meal before dawn) and Iftar (the meal after sunset)
 - possibly adjusting work schedules

3. Social Norms



Hierarchy and Gender roles

- **Age:** Elders regarded as the heads of families or communities and hold significant authority. Younger people expected to show deference to elders through language and behaviour.
- **Gender:** Men traditionally seen as breadwinners and protectors, assuming leadership roles in family, public and political spheres. Women seen as primary caregivers and responsible for managing the home.
- Patriarchal structure extends to professional environments; women face gender discrimination and workplace inequalities.
- Social conditioning fosters widespread acceptance of gender-based violence among both women and men.
- Women face barriers in seeking justice and legal accountability for sexual harassment due to lack of clear legal provisions and social stigma.
- Positive norms around labour force participation and education of women.



What may happen on farms

- Many seasonal workers to the UK come from the more conservative rural areas.
- Workers, especially from more traditional backgrounds, may struggle to accept the authority of younger supervisors and female supervisors.
- Male supervisors may assign additional hours (overtime) of work to male workers rather than female workers (preferential treatment).
- Male workers will expect female workers to 'behave' in traditional ways / roles - which are not acceptable in UK culture.

*“Supervisors would prefer men workers to do overtime work, which allowed them to generate extra income.”
– seasonal worker from Kazakhstan*



Adapting to UK culture

- Digital literacy. Digital services growing faster than awareness around data protection and safety → Workers may share personal information (ID, card numbers, etc.) online and disclose information publicly.
- Lack of awareness of UK visa/work regulations and tendency to trust peers → potentially fall victim to scams offering jobs or visa extensions.
- For many workers, this is a first time abroad. Life in the UK is very different from their real worlds and where they come from → adaptation to local UK culture and norms.



Some workers do not know what asylum status means and can be scammed by lawyers who offer to help with getting a two-year visa but instead they are given asylum-seeker status.

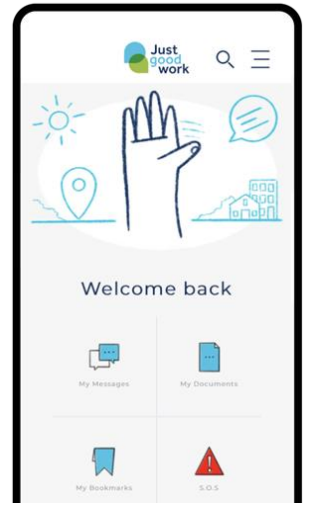
Farm workers might become victims of scams offering employment in London for a fee, but there are no actual jobs available. One of the respondents said that after receiving no response on farm transfer due to an allergy in strawberry fields of the assigned farm, the person decided to leave the farm and work in the car service sector in a nearby city.

What YOU can do

1. Provide separate, lockable accommodation and washrooms for male and female workers.
2. Communicate the roles of supervisors and workers clearly.
3. Emphasise equal opportunities.
4. Address gender-based violence, harassment and discrimination risks during farm introductory trainings and regularly throughout the season. Clearly communicate potential consequences to workers and remind them of UK norms/legislation.
5. Ensure you have a clear and effective process for handling cases of sexual harassment.
6. Provide mechanisms for women to safely raise complaints on farms.
7. Regularly have conversations/ awareness raising about relevant SWS resources/ mechanisms.
8. Address topics of data protection/privacy, and how to be 'street-smart' during farm training or pre-employment information sessions.
9. Regularly have conversations/ awareness raising about relevant SWS resources/ mechanisms.

For example, refer workers to [Just Good Work app](#)

Download resources at justgood.work/uksws



4. Communication styles and Conflict resolution



Interpersonal communication

- Respectful, reserved and moderate communication. People speak in a calm and measured tone, avoiding loud or overly expressive speech - considered rude.
- Handshakes are common (esp. among men). Don't use many gestures. Pointing considered impolite.
- Direct eye contact, especially with persons in authority is perceived as aggressive or confrontational.
- Collectivism: people tend to avoid conflicts and prefer dispute resolutions that preserve relationships.



Social interactions

- Workers may speak indirectly, use euphemisms or non-verbal cues to avoid causing offense.
- Workers will avoid direct criticism, especially when communicating with people older than them/ in positions of authority.
- Norms around masculinity and physical power can lead to confrontation.
- Workers may avoid addressing problems arising on farms/work.
- This may limit their access to grievance mechanisms as workers are fearful of causing (or being seen to cause) disturbance.
- If grievances are unaddressed, workers may try finding alternative work opportunities outside the scheme.
- Workers support and help each other with adapting to the UK and working on farms. Helping each other abroad – community values. Spend time together.

“After work, we spent time eating together and talking. We had a good time.” – seasonal worker



What may happen on farms: communicating with employers

- Workers may fear that making a grievance will affect their work opportunities in the UK.
- Workers might not speak up about issues directly and may instead hint at problems indirectly, avoiding direct confrontation.
- Look out for non-verbal cues that signal discomfort: body language such as facial expressions, avoiding eye contact, body tension, tone of voice, hesitation, silence.



Conflict resolution: if disagreements, misunderstandings or conflicts arise with employers/ supervisors:

- Workers may prefer to address the issue in a private setting, away from the public eye, to avoid embarrassment or loss of face.
- Workers may seek an intermediary to facilitate communication and help find a mutually acceptable solution.
- Employers/supervisors should be patient and listen actively, showing empathy and understanding.

What YOU can do

1. **Really encourage people to speak up.**
2. Establish trust by showing genuine interest in workers' well-being and family.
3. Clearly communicate that appointments are based on skills/experience and emphasise equal opportunities.
4. Provide clear expectations and guidelines regarding work and behaviour. This can help avoid misunderstandings further down the line.
5. Clearly (and regularly) communicate the roles and responsibilities of each employee can be helpful.
6. Regularly have conversations/ awareness raising about relevant SWS resources/ mechanisms.
7. Show appreciation: strengthens trust and goodwill.
8. Trust and relationship-building are key in professional settings.

In the case of conflict/ disagreements:

- Avoid direct confrontation or criticism.
- Address conflict privately, not publicly.
- Active listening.
- Mediation (with elders).
- Cultural awareness.

Seasonal workers report that the opportunity to work on UK farms is **life changing**.

Resources

[Effective Communication Toolkit for Multi-Language Workforces.pdf - Google Drive](#)

IOM UK Website

Resources

- **2025 SWS UK Growers Seasonal Workers Toolkit**

- [Resources - Stronger Together \(2024\)](#)

SWS Growers Toolkit

Section 19 p 35-37 *Handling worker issues and complaints fairly, effectively and consistently*

Section 20 p 38- *Workforce communication - the oxygen of your business*

- Resource 18 (2024) - Potential on farm activities and events to foster a sense of **inclusion, cultural awareness**, and a harmonious and productive work environment
- Resource 17 (2024) - **Religion awareness** and respect
- Resource 16 (2024) - 1-hour workshop on **cultural awareness** to be run on farms



THANK YOU

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