



International  
Labour  
Organization

A photograph of a cotton field at sunset, with the sun low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the cotton plants. The cotton bolls are visible on the stems.

Recruitment practices  
and seasonal employment  
in agriculture in Uzbekistan

2014-15



**Recruitment practices and seasonal  
employment in agriculture  
in Uzbekistan  
2014-15**

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## Preface

This ILO survey of ***Recruitment Practices and Seasonal Employment in Agriculture in Uzbekistan, 2014-15*** paints a qualitative and quantitative picture of the recruitment experience of adults picking cotton in Uzbekistan.

There are three main reasons why this survey is important:

- *First*, almost one quarter of the adult population or around three million citizens are engaged at some time during the harvest each year picking cotton by hand. Two-thirds of pickers are women. Managing this workforce is an enormous task.
- *Second*, cotton remains a significant part of the Uzbekistan economy, despite government policy to diversify agricultural production. Cotton will provide jobs and incomes and contribute to foreign exchange earnings for many years to come.
- *Third*, international criticism of Uzbekistan focuses on the alleged use of child labour and forced labour during the cotton harvest, in contravention of ratified ILO Conventions. For the first time, this survey enables allegations of forced labour to be addressed using statistically significant, nationwide numbers.

Just as important as the numbers are the survey's recommendations. Reform of the labour market is on the Government's agenda. So this survey is a timely contribution to achieving fair recruitment and decent work for seasonal workers in Uzbekistan.

The idea for this survey arose from discussions over many years between the ILO and its Uzbekistan constituents (Government, Federation of Trade Unions and Chamber of Commerce and Industry). Responding to conclusions of the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Uzbekistan and the ILO agreed a Decent Work Country Programme 2014-2016 – since extended to 2020 - to deepen and broaden co-operation on a range of labour and social protection issues, including on child labour and forced labour.

In addition to this survey of 2014 and 2015, the ILO has monitored the 2013 cotton harvest for child labour and, under an agreement with the World Bank, the 2015 and 2016 cotton harvests for child labour and forced labour. These were accompanied by efforts by the Uzbek constituents to raise public awareness of the prohibition of child and forced labour, to build the capacity of officials and institutions to tackle child and forced labour, and to establish a feedback mechanism for citizens to have their complaints remedied. In addition, Uzbekistan started its own monitoring of the harvest for child and forced labour.

With ratification in December 2016 of ILO Convention no. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, Uzbekistan has now ratified all eight fundamental Conventions of the ILO.

This survey does not cover recruitment of people younger than 18 years old. The use of children in the cotton harvest has been prohibited and progressively eliminated. Nonetheless, there is a need to remain vigilant on the use of child labour to ensure its full elimination, especially amongst those most vulnerable within the 16 – 17 year-old age range.

The survey instead focuses on the recruitment experience of women and men. Two consecutive harvests were surveyed to enable comparisons to be drawn.

Although the term “reluctant” is not found in 2014 ILO forced labour Convention 29 (and its Protocol, which has not yet been ratified by Uzbekistan) or Convention 105, it does provide a necessary category for those survey respondents who replied that they were unwilling to pick cotton yet who also replied that they did not experience or fear an actual or perceived penalty if they were to refuse to pick cotton. This means that the “involuntary” category of cotton pickers accords with the precise definition of forced labour contained in the ILO Convention. It also enables a comparison of the productivity of each category of picker, with reluctant pickers less productive than volunteers but more productive than involuntary pickers.

The recommendations of the survey report echo those contained in the ILO assessments of the 2015 and 2016 harvest monitoring, a formal framework of rules and assignment of responsibilities for the recruitment and employment of seasonal agricultural workers; better wage setting and working conditions to attract enough willing, high-productivity pickers; and safeguards and remedies to protect vulnerable or dependent workers from duress, in particular women and youth.

The overall message of the survey is positive. It points to an alternative model of recruitment and employment that removes the need for low-productivity forced labour. If wages and working conditions were improved such that reluctant workers became volunteers, the whole harvest could be picked by the larger number of volunteers simply due of their higher productivity. Thus, the elimination of forced labour is an entirely manageable problem.

Beate Andrees  
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The survey was conducted under the auspices of the ILO's Decent Work Country Programme Support Project, and funded by the United States Department of Labor. This material does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the US Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government.

The survey would not have been possible without the kind permission and cooperation of the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, the Federation of Trade Unions, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Chairperson of the Coordination Council on Child and Forced Labour in Uzbekistan.





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# Executive summary

## *Purpose and background*

- This report presents the results of primary research carried out by the International Labour Organization (ILO) regarding the recruitment and seasonal work of adults aged 18-50 years old in Uzbek cotton cultivation in 2014 and 2015. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of practices regarding the recruitment of seasonal labour in Uzbek cotton cultivation, including a framework for measuring the risk of forced labour in this specific context.
- Since it became a member of the ILO in 1992, Uzbekistan has ratified 14 ILO conventions, including all eight fundamental conventions - an important milestone achieved in 2016 with ratification of the Convention on Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise.<sup>1</sup> In response to comments from the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Uzbekistan has recently been taking concrete steps to implement these ILO Conventions – including the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No 29), ratified in 1992; the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No 105) ratified in 1997; the Minimum Age Convention (No 138), ratified in 2009; the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No 182), ratified in 2008 – with the technical assistance of the ILO.
- In 2014, the Government and social partners of Uzbekistan and the ILO signed the first Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) for Uzbekistan, extended in 2017. One of the DWCP's priorities is to ensure that conditions of work and employment in agriculture, including in the cotton sector, conform with international labour standards. An important starting point for the ILO's work programme with its Uzbek partners was to establish an in-depth research programme on recruitment and seasonal employment in cotton cultivation.
- The ILO has also been conducting third party monitoring of the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan in cooperation with the World Bank, targeting World Bank project areas. The World Bank and the ILO signed a Memorandum of Understanding on issues of child and forced labour in 2014, following a complaint to the World Bank's inspection panel in 2013. The World Bank asked the ILO to assess the use of child and forced labour by the beneficiaries of World Bank projects in specific project areas, in 2015 and 2016.
- The methodology for this study involved both qualitative and quantitative elements, including probabilistic sampling surveys that permitted the extrapolation of results at a national level. The target population for the study was adults aged 18 to 50 years old.
- Children were not covered by the survey. ILO monitoring confirms that Uzbekistan has made significant progress in eliminating the use of child labour in the cotton harvest, though continued vigilance is required to maintain this progress, especially amongst vulnerable 16 – 17 year-olds.

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<sup>1</sup> Information on Uzbekistan's ratifications was current as of January 2017. At this time, the most recent ratification was the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1949 (No 87) in December 2016.

## **Planning, production and seasonal labour requirements in Uzbek cotton**

- The major requirement for seasonal labour in cotton cultivation arises during the harvest. Altogether, there are around 3.2 million cotton pickers, or nearly 25% of the total population aged 18 to 50 years, who are engaged as seasonal labourers over three “passes” from September to November. Each pass takes place over about ten days, and with each pass, the quality and volume of cotton available for picking decreases.
- Cotton farmers are contractually obliged to meet annual production quotas, which are set by the national Ministry for Agriculture and Water Resources (MAWR) and its local departments, and provide the basis for projected seasonal labour requirements. Once fixed, quotas are distributed to province and district *hokimiyats* (local government) in August for implementation and management, and *hokimiyat* officials are personally responsible for ensuring that the assigned quotas are met. Each *hokimiyat* establishes a cotton harvest committee (*pakhta shtab*) that organizes, coordinates and monitors the harvest, including mobilisation of the necessary amount of seasonal labour required by farmers.
- Historically, seasonal labour activities in cotton cultivation have involved the participation of non-agricultural workers, including students, and public sector and private sector employees. Although mechanisation has been introduced in some districts, most farmers continue to rely heavily on manual labour, as the topography of their land does not permit the use of machines or they do not have sufficient access to machinery to meet their needs at the peak of the cotton weeding or harvesting season.

## **Profile of pickers**

- There is an important gender dimension revealed by the survey. Rural women seeking cash incomes, who are otherwise economically inactive, form the bulk of cotton pickers. Pickers normally employed in the health and education sectors are also overwhelmingly women. Mechanisation plans for the sector need to take into account the fact that there are limited alternatives for income generation for women in rural areas.
- Over the period in question, the surveys suggest that there was a drop in the overall participation rate in seasonal cotton picking: in 2014, 24% of all 18 to 50 year olds (3.2 million) participated, compared to 21% (2.9 million) in 2015. Women represented nearly three quarters of the seasonal workforce over both harvests (71% in 2015, 72% in 2014). Most pickers were from rural areas; however, there was a slight rise in the proportion of pickers from urban areas in 2015 (34% of pickers in 2014, rising to 37% in 2015).
- Cotton picking is a temporary economic activity for all the individuals interviewed for this survey, who were otherwise not economically active or engaged in other forms of economic activity. The largest category of seasonal workers, rising from 42.9% in 2014 to 46.1% in 2015, were the economically inactive (excluding students): this category comprises individuals – mainly women - who are otherwise responsible for unpaid work in the home or on family plots, or retired. This group was followed by those who were employed outside the health and education sectors (20% in 2014; 22.6% in 2015). From 2014 to 2015, there was a drop in participation in the harvest by those employed in the health and education sectors (16.6% in 2014; 14.8% in 2015), students (11.2% in 2014; 8.6% in 2015) and the unemployed (8.8% in 2014; 7.1% in 2015). The

occupational composition of weeders in 2014 was broadly similar, except there were higher levels of participation of the unemployed (35%) and lower levels of students (4%).

- The number of individuals who declined to participate in the harvest (“rejectors”) increased from 644,000 (14.8% of those who were called) in 2014 to 1.1 million (23.34% of those who were called) in 2015. The groups most likely to turn down the call to participate were the unemployed and otherwise not economically active (broadly in line with their proportionate representation as the largest category of pickers). The majority of rejectors experienced no negative consequences (74% in 2014; 80% in 2015) and for those who did, the most common negative consequence was that they assumed the cost of a replacement worker. Some 25% of rejectors paid to be replaced in 2014, dropping to 18.2% in 2015.

### **Key recruitment channels**

- Securing labour for the cotton harvest is a major organized activity. Almost all seasonal pickers were “called” or asked by someone with some level of authority to participate (96.8% in 2014 and 95.5% in 2015). Of these, more than 95% of all pickers in 2014 and 2015 were called through three main recruitment channels. These were:
  1. Heads of enterprises or organizations (including medical and educational facilities);
  2. Representatives of *mahallas* (neighbourhood or community councils); and
  3. Farmers or their representatives.
- Heads of enterprises or organizations were the largest recruiters of workers over both harvests. However, the role of *mahallas* grew over the period (from recruiting 25% of all pickers in 2014 to 39.5% in 2015) and the role of farmers dropped (from 28.4% in 2014 to 14.6% in 2015).
- In 2014, farmers who were located furthest from rural settlements were reported to be the least likely to have machinery to help with harvesting, and they found it most difficult to attract workers. Consequently they were particularly reliant on the assistance of the *pakhta shtab* and others in order to recruit non-local workers.

### **Volunteers and workers at risk of coercion**

- Based on the findings of the qualitative research, seasonal workers were classified into three categories:
  1. **Voluntary:** those who participated willingly without being subject to pressure or coercion;
  2. **Reluctant:** those who participated because they did not want to damage positive relationships with others (“social pressure”); and
  3. **Involuntary:** those who participated primarily in response to a perceived risk of dismissal, wage reduction, expulsion from educational institution, loss of scholarship, or harassment by authorities; or inability to pay for a worker to replace them.
- Although the term “reluctant” is not found in the ILO forced labour Convention No. 29 of 1947 (and its Protocol, which has not yet been ratified by Uzbekistan) or Convention 105, it does provide a necessary category for those survey respondents who replied that they were unwilling

to pick cotton yet who also replied that they did not experience or fear an actual or perceived penalty if they were to refuse to pick cotton. This means that the “involuntary” category of cotton pickers accords with the precise definition of forced labour contained in the ILO Convention. It also enables a comparison of the productivity of each category of picker, with reluctant pickers less productive than volunteers but more productive than involuntary pickers.

- The majority of workers participated in the harvest on a voluntary basis, increasing from 60% of all pickers in 2014 to 66% in 2015. The proportion of reluctant pickers decreased over the period (29% in 2014, 20% in 2015), but the number of involuntary pickers increased (11% in 2014; 14% in 2015). This breakdown was broadly similar for weeding.
- The main reason that people volunteered was to increase their incomes (72% in 2014, 77% in 2015). Cotton picking is a particularly important opportunity for rural women to earn extra income, as reflected in the gender composition of cotton pickers. Voluntary workers were more likely to come from the ranks of the unemployed or otherwise not economically active (including many women who are otherwise occupied with domestic duties or family plots): in 2014, this group represented 51.9% of all pickers and 69% of volunteers; rising to 68.7% of all pickers in 2015 and 71% of all volunteers. Volunteers were more likely to be recruited by *mahallas*, who provided 25% of all pickers and 35% of all volunteers in 2014, and 39.5% of all pickers and 52% of volunteers, in 2015.
- Involuntary pickers were most likely to be those employed outside the health and education sectors (30.4% of all involuntary pickers in 2015), those employed in the health and education sectors (27.2%), and students (26.7%). The main reasons given by involuntary pickers for working related to perceived risks of loss of income, jobs or student places. Although there was a decrease in the overall number of students who participated from 2014 to 2015, there was a substantial increase in the proportion who did so on an involuntary basis: 6.3% of all students in 2014, rising to 43% in 2015 (representing an increase in absolute terms from 22,000 to 106,000). There was a similar increase for those employed in the health and education sectors (13% in 2014, rising to 25% in 2015). Heads of colleges and enterprises were the most significant recruitment mechanism for involuntary workers, responsible for recruiting 82% of all involuntary pickers in 2014 and 75% in 2015. One possible explanation to the increased number of involuntary students and medical staff may be found in the significant increase of rejectors, and the simultaneous decrease of reluctant people. This led to a situation where the total number of pure volunteers was not enough to ensure the full harvest, hence the call to students and medical staff.
- The proportion of reluctant workers – i.e. those who felt social pressure to participate, but did not report any actual or perceived threat of penalty – decreased over the period (29% of all cotton pickers in 2014, 20% in 2015).
- Involuntary pickers were more likely to come from urban areas and were more likely to be recruited later in the season. Urban residents were also over-represented amongst reluctant pickers, representing 44% of reluctant pickers in 2014 and 51% in 2015.
- Levels of living standards do not seem to have a strong bearing on reluctance or involuntariness. The representation of very poor, poor, middle-income, well-off and rich households remains relatively proportionate to their overall participation rate across all categories of voluntariness (voluntary, reluctant and involuntary). However, the number of very poor who were classified as reluctant workers trebled from 2% in 2014 to 6% in 2015.

- In advance of the 2015 harvest, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MOL) and the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (FTUU) launched an awareness raising campaign regarding the rights of seasonal workers. Only a minority of survey respondents had been exposed to these messages: 18% of pickers and 15% of rejectors.

### ***Duration of work, productivity and earnings***

- The average number of days spent picking cotton decreased from 2014 to 2015. Over the period, the average number of days worked by students was higher than other workers (37 in 2014 and 35 in 2015). The average number of days for those employed in the health and education sectors (29 in 2014, 26 in 2015) and reluctant and involuntary workers (30 in 2014, 28 in 2015) was broadly in line with the average across all seasonal cotton pickers (31 in 2014, 29 in 2015).
- There was a decrease in the proportion of seasonal workers who worked more than eight hours per day on average (36% to 26%); however, there was an increase in the proportion of reluctant and involuntary workers who worked more than eight hours a day on the third pass (15% in 2014; 18% in 2015). The main reason that pickers worked more than eight hours a day was to increase their income (66% in 2014; 68% in 2015), but there was a clear increase in the proportion of some categories who said that they also did so in response to instructions (for instance, 16% of involuntary workers in 2014, rising to 83% in 2015).
- The productivity of cotton pickers was significantly higher during the first pass, and voluntary workers were more productive than involuntary and reluctant workers across all passes. All farmers considered that workers recruited directly by farmers (or their proxies) were more productive than workers brought in by the *pakhta shtab*, as they picked cotton at a faster rate and of a higher quality.
- Workers struggled to maintain productivity levels in October and November, when average picking amounts fell under this level, and average earnings – based on piece rates – dropped by half between the first and third passes.

### ***Findings and conclusions***

- Overall, the results suggest that recent interventions by the government and social partners of Uzbekistan and the ILO are having a positive impact: important advances have been made in reducing the risk of coercion in the use of seasonal labour in the cotton harvest. Significantly, over the period in question, there was a clear increase in the proportion of workers who participated in the harvest on a voluntary basis. There was a decrease in the number of students and staff from medical and educational facilities who participated in the harvest. This was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of individuals who felt empowered to refuse to participate (“rejectors”), together with an increase in the proportion of rejectors who experienced no negative consequences as a result of their decision.
- Nevertheless, despite these promising signs, there is clearly scope for further progress, and the survey results indicate that the risk of forced labour in Uzbekistan remains a concern. Alongside the increase in voluntary participation, there was an upswing in involuntary work in the 2015 harvest, particularly among students and staff of educational and medical facilities. In addition, the

average number of working days for students and staff of educational and medical facilities increased from 2014 to 2015.

- Encouragingly, the figures of the survey findings indicate that involuntary participation could be eliminated altogether without resorting to full-scale mechanisation. This research suggests that the voluntary workforce could be increased significantly with improvements in wages and working conditions. Responses to the household survey suggest that 1.7 million people would willingly participate in future harvests under any conditions, 1.15 million would participate voluntarily if remuneration was higher, and another 476,000 would participate voluntarily if working and living conditions were improved.
- Improving labour relations and working conditions in the sector should be considered an important pathway to both the modernization of the agricultural sector and sustainable development in rural areas in Uzbekistan. Better wages and working conditions would lead to higher levels of voluntary participation, which would, in turn, have important knock-on effects for farm level productivity, as well as household incomes in rural areas. However, there may be a role for increased mechanisation for more remote farms, given that these farmers find it more difficult to attract voluntary workers, and are more likely to rely on workers who need to be brought in from other areas.

## **Recommendations**

1. Streamline, clarify and formalise frameworks and rules for recruitment and employment of seasonal labour in agriculture, particularly in cotton cultivation.
2. Foster greater ownership of recruitment and employment functions by the farmers and their representatives.
3. Support Small and Medium Enterprises as key actors in rural labour provision, with particular attention to the role of rural women.
4. Strengthen market and institutional mechanisms to link labour demand with supply.
5. Boost incentives to work in the cotton sector, including review of worker compensation strategies.
6. Introduce safeguards and remedies for categories of vulnerable workers so that participation in the harvest is truly voluntary.
7. Focus on the labour productivity gains associated with higher levels of voluntariness, which could be stimulated by better wages and working conditions set through forms of tripartite consultation or collective bargaining.
8. Support rural communities to sustain dynamism of rural labour markets.
9. Build capacity and understanding of actors at all levels, including policy-makers, recruiters and vulnerable categories, with respect to *inter alia* the implementation of international labour standards, decent recruitment practices, workers' rights during the harvest and workers' right to refuse to participate in the harvest.
10. Continue to monitor developments and trends over time.



## Acronyms

<b>CCI</b>	Chamber of Commerce and Industry
<b>DWCP</b>	Decent Work Country Programme
<b>FBM</b>	Feedback Mechanism
<b>FTUU</b>	Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GOU</b>	Government of Uzbekistan
<b>ICAC</b>	International Cotton Advisory Committee
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MAWR</b>	Ministry for Agriculture and Water Resources
<b>MMT</b>	Million Metric Ton
<b>MOL</b>	Ministry for Labour and Social Protection
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprise
<b>PSU</b>	Primary Sampling Unit

## Glossary

<b>First pass</b>	Early harvesting period when open cotton bolls are most plentiful and easiest to pick
<b>Hokimiyat</b>	Local government administration (province / district / city / town)
<b>Mahalla</b>	Organized neighbourhood committees or councils
<b>Mardikor</b>	Temporary / day labourer
<b>Pakhta shtab</b>	Cotton picking committee at <i>hokimiyat</i> level
<b>Second and third passes</b>	Later harvesting period when fewer cotton bolls are left on the plant
<b>Secondary crops</b>	Crops that farmers grow on land that is free from main crops, or the land where they grow wheat; not subject to quotas
<b>Soum</b>	Currency of Uzbekistan



# I. Introduction

## I.1 Purpose

- This report presents the results of qualitative and quantitative research carried out by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on recruitment and seasonal work in Uzbek cotton cultivation in 2014 and 2015. In particular, it aims to provide a deeper understanding of practices regarding the recruitment of seasonal labour in Uzbek cotton cultivation, including a framework for measuring the risk of coercion in this specific context.

## I.2 Background to this study

- Since it became a member of the ILO in 1992, Uzbekistan has ratified 15 ILO conventions, including all of the eight fundamental conventions.<sup>2</sup> Uzbekistan ratified the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No 29) in 1992, the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No 105) in 1997, the Minimum Age Convention (No 138), in 2009, and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No 182) in 2008.<sup>3</sup>
- Over time, the ILO supervisory bodies have addressed regular comments to the Uzbek government on the implementation of these conventions, and have encouraged the government to avail itself of ILO technical assistance. In particular, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) has made a number of comments over time regarding reports of the involuntary participation of citizens in cotton cultivation.<sup>4</sup> In response to these comments, the Uzbek government has made a number of high level policy commitments to abolish the use of forced and child labour in the cotton harvest. Following a discussion in the Committee of the Application of Standards at the 2013 International Labour Conference, the ILO was invited to monitor the scope of child labour in the 2013 harvest, and it reported its results to the Committee of Experts. At the same time, the Government requested assistance on the application of the Forced Labour Convention No 105.
- Uzbekistan is taking concrete steps to implement ILO Conventions. In 2014, the Government and social partners of Uzbekistan and the ILO signed the first Decent Work Country Programme

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<sup>2</sup> Information on Uzbekistan's ratifications was current as of January 2017. At this time, the most recent ratification was the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1949 (No 98) in December 2016.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the core conventions on forced and child labour, Uzbekistan has also ratified the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No 98) in 1992, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No 97), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No 111) in 1992, and the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No 100) in 1992. The full list is available at:

[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:PI1200\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:103538](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:PI1200_COUNTRY_ID:103538)

<sup>4</sup> For the most recent CEACR comments, see: Direct Request (CEACR) – adopted 2015, published 105<sup>th</sup> ILC session (2016), Abolition of Forced Labour (No. 105) – Uzbekistan (Ratification: 1997):

[http://ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::PI13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID:3256207](http://ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::PI13100_COMMENT_ID:3256207); and Direct Observation (CEACR) – adopted 2015, published 105<sup>th</sup> ILC session (2016), Abolition of Forced Labour (No. 105) – Uzbekistan (Ratification: 1997):

[http://ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:PI13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID:3256210](http://ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:PI13100_COMMENT_ID:3256210).

(DWCP) for Uzbekistan for 2014-2016. This broad technical cooperation programme is scheduled to be extended in early 2017 up to 2020. The DWCP identifies clearly defined priorities, objectives, outcomes and performance indicators to guide cooperation between the ILO and its tripartite constituents in Uzbekistan: the Government of Uzbekistan (GOU), the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (FTUU) and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI). These are members of the national-level Coordination Council established in 2013 to bring together key stakeholders including relevant ministries, to streamline efforts to implement core labour standards. Financial support for the implementation of the DWCP, including this research, has been provided by the United States Department of Labor.

- One of the priorities of the DWCP is to ensure that conditions of work and employment in agriculture, including in the cotton sector, conform with international labour standards. However, to date, one of the difficulties has been the scarcity of reliable statistical data on recruitment practices and working conditions in the cotton industry. As such, an important starting point for the ILO's work programme with its Uzbek partners was to establish an in-depth research programme on recruitment and seasonal employment in cotton cultivation.
- As part of its programme of action to strengthen implementation of the ILO Conventions, the Uzbek government has introduced a series of measures to guard against risks of forced labour in the cotton harvest.<sup>5</sup> These include:
  - **A National Action Plan to Modernize Agriculture and Improve Working Conditions for the period 2016-2018.**<sup>6</sup> This was introduced in January 2016. The action plan outlines a detailed list of measures for a range of Uzbek actors to work together, with the support of the ILO and World Bank, in order to:
    1. **Strengthen national regulatory and legal frameworks in order to enhance safeguards for seasonal workers**, including clearer legal status for different categories of seasonal workers, potential establishment of recruitment agencies for the agricultural sector and new methods for monitoring minimum working conditions and wages (especially on farms);
    2. **Improve efficiency and introduce further mechanisation in the agricultural sector**;
    3. **Strengthen labour market information systems and conditions in seasonal agriculture**, including modernization of public employment and welfare agencies, new regulations on seasonal work in agriculture and support for women's economic empowerment in rural areas;
    4. **Build institutional capacity and strengthen the feedback and monitoring mechanisms for child and forced labour prevention**, including building the

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<sup>5</sup> Many of these measures are also relevant to the prevention of child labour in the cotton harvest. It is important to note that the research described in this report was not designed to measure child labour: the target group was limited to the adult population aged 18 to 50 years. In February 2017, the ILO found that the risk of child labour in the cotton harvest had reduced to the point that it had become "socially unacceptable" (ILO, 2017), although this assessment was based on Third Party Monitoring rather than a nationally representative survey.

<sup>6</sup> The National Action Plan is available at: [http://fbm.uz/ru/pages/news/351/?sphrase\\_id=410](http://fbm.uz/ru/pages/news/351/?sphrase_id=410) (Russian language).

capacity of the labour inspectorate and continuing annual monitoring of child and forced labour; and

5. **Expand activities to raise public awareness of labour rights and protections**, including work with farmers, education and healthcare establishments, students, and colleges.
- **Public awareness raising activities in the 2015 and 2016 harvests:** During the 2015 and 2016 harvests, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MOL) and the FTUU conducted a nationwide public awareness raising programme, disseminating messages regarding child and forced labour across the country, via banners, posters, leaflets, radio, SMS texts and television notices. The main messages of the programme were “Everybody’s free choice to work is guaranteed” and “Everybody has the right to pick cotton voluntarily in decent working conditions or to refuse to pick cotton” (ILO, 2015 & 2017).
  - **Feedback mechanism:** There are two formal Feedback Mechanisms (FBMs), administered by the Ministry of Labour and the FTUU respectively, which provide workers with an avenue for reporting problems and requesting assistance, with a particular focus on child and forced labour during the cotton harvest. From September to October 2016, there were 1902 requests to the FTUU FBM, of which 85 complaints/requests related directly to cotton picking (ILO, 2017). Six cases of child labour were confirmed, two cases were recognized as presenting risks of forced labour, and some more refer to sub-standard working conditions. The MOL FBM received 3,919 inquiries during the cotton harvest: 30 were registered as grievances, of which two related to child labour and three to forced labour. An additional five infringements related to child labour and nine related to forced labour were identified by labour inspectors (ILO, 2017).
  - **Capacity building activities:** As reported by the chairperson, in 2016, the Coordination Council carried out a series of capacity building activities. This included the dissemination of guidelines on the implementation of international labour standards to ministries, government departments, employees of higher and secondary education institutions, public health institutions, local authorities and youth and women’s groups. Overall, 312 workshops were conducted, covering 73,040 individuals from government authorities, educational and medical institutions, and students.
  - The ILO arranged training seminars for more than 40 professionals from ministries, law enforcement agencies and NGOs, and the International Trade Union Confederation arranged seminars for staff involved in the Feedback Mechanism<sup>7</sup>. The ILO project of support for the implementation of the DWCP provided training to employers on the need to eradicate child and forced labour and provided technical advice during development of the assessment questionnaires used during Third Party and National monitoring in August-November 2016. The members of national monitoring groups were provided with an additional refresher session on recognition of child and forced labour during the cotton harvest. The project was part of a working group on development of the national awareness-raising campaign for 2016 cotton harvest and

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<sup>7</sup> Information provided by the Council of Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan.

produced a video on formalization of working relations and decent working conditions for agricultural workers<sup>8</sup>.

- The ILO is working actively with its Uzbek partners within the framework of the DWCP. In addition to the research presented in this report, the ILO is working with the tripartite constituents to develop recommendations to reduce the risk of forced labour in the cotton harvest, and is developing a pilot intervention for 2017-18 to be implemented in a small number of districts, with a view to rolling out successful approaches to the rest of the country. The ILO has also held a number of roundtable meetings with Uzbek partners to discuss the results of third party monitoring on child and forced labour in the cotton harvest, and has provided training for Uzbek officials on international labour standards and occupational health and safety.
- Uzbekistan is also continuing to work with the World Bank on a number of activities, including projects to promote rural development and modernization of the agricultural sector, and modernization of the education system. These include: the Rural Enterprise Support projects (Phases I & II); the Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change Mitigation Project (GEF); the South Karakalpakstan Water Resources Management Improvement Project; the Horticulture Development Project; the Modernising Higher Education Project; and the Improving Pre-Primary and General Secondary Education Project.<sup>9</sup>
- The World Bank and the ILO signed a Memorandum of Understanding on issues of child and forced labour in 2014, following a complaint to the World Bank's inspection panel in 2013. The World Bank asked the ILO to assess any potential use of child and forced labour by the beneficiaries of World Bank projects in specific project areas, in 2015 and 2016 (see ILO, 2015 & 2017). The ILO has noted that, in the context of very large-scale organized recruitment of adults to pick cotton, while there were many willing participants in the harvest, there are ongoing risks of forced labour involved in the organization of large numbers of seasonal workers by Uzbek authorities in a short period of time (ILO, 2015 & 2017). Certain groups are particularly vulnerable, including staff of educational and medical facilities, staff of other public budget and private entities, and pupils / students of lyceums, colleges and higher education institutions (ILO, 2017).

### 1.3 Methodology

- This report aims to establish a framework for understanding and measuring risks of coercion in seasonal work in cotton cultivation in Uzbekistan and to identify emerging trends in the recruitment of seasonal labour in the 2014 and 2015 cotton harvests in Uzbekistan. The research is primarily focused on use of seasonal labour during the cotton harvest, but also presents data on seasonal work in weeding in 2014 and provides insights into the perceptions and outlook of farmers who are involved in cotton cultivation, based on data collected in relation to the 2014 harvest. The survey interviews were conducted retrospectively (post-harvest) in mid-2015 and early 2016.
- The study employed qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data, which are described in further detail below. The quantitative research involved a probabilistic sample survey that

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<sup>8</sup> Information provided by ILO, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> The complete list of World Bank projects in Uzbekistan is available at:  
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/projects/all>.

permitted extrapolation of results to the national population. Fieldwork was carried out by a local consultancy, under the close technical guidance and supervision of the ILO.

- The research focuses on the participation of citizens aged 18 to 50 in seasonal weeding and cotton picking activities. It excludes farmers and permanent farm workers from the analysis of recruitment and working conditions data of cotton pickers.
- The key elements of each phase of the research are summarised below. More detailed information is provided in the Annex: Methodology.

## **Qualitative research**

- This first phase of the research aimed to generate detailed information on how agricultural labour markets operate in Uzbekistan, with a focus on cotton cultivation, in order to inform the design of quantitative survey instruments. In particular, the goal was to better understand the dynamics of supply and demand with respect to seasonal labour in Uzbek cotton cultivation, including farmers' labour requirements, recruitment practices, the nature of employment relationships and working conditions. Given the complex network of actors involved in the recruitment of seasonal workers, the qualitative survey sought to clarify the many different channels used for recruitment, the resulting working relationships, and the risks of coercion associated with different recruitment channels and relationships.
- A qualitative survey was carried out from March to July 2015. The qualitative research encompassed a series of interviews and focus group discussions with different actors, including:
  - Farmers;
  - Temporary and permanent agricultural workers;
  - Representatives of public, state and private enterprises;
  - Representatives of *mahallas* (neighbourhood or community bodies) and *hokimiyats* (local government councils);
  - Heads and teachers of colleges and universities;
  - Heads and staff at medical facilities;
  - Trade union representatives;
  - Specialists from the MOL, including employment services; and
  - Other stakeholders involved in recruitment and management of works.
- Questionnaires for the qualitative survey were developed jointly by the ILO and its local consultants. Interviews were carried out by a team of local consultants who asked questions regarding recruitment practices and use of seasonal labour relating to the 2014 cotton harvest.

## **Development of statistical measurement framework**

- Under the ILO's Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No 29) forced or compulsory labour is defined as "*all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily*".
- One of the challenges associated with measuring forced labour is the development of indicators that enable measurement and can be adapted to specific contexts. According to the ILO's established

approach for measuring forced labour,<sup>10</sup> there are two main elements for establishing indicators of forced labour:

- **Involuntariness;** i.e. work for which a person has not offered themselves voluntarily; and
  - **Coercion;** i.e. work which is performed under the menace of any penalty applied by an employer or a third party to the worker.
- On the basis of the qualitative research, a typology of recruitment practices was developed to measure risks of coercion in Uzbekistan. This typology must be understood to apply to the specific circumstances of large-scale recruitment of seasonal workers in Uzbekistan, where workers are commonly recruited or “called” by representatives of local organisations (see ‘Context’ below for further discussion). Three main categories of seasonal worker emerged from the qualitative research (see also **Table I**):
    1. **‘Voluntary workers’:** These seasonal workers reported that they participated in seasonal cotton cultivation activities without being subject to any kind of pressure or coercion. They either directly applied themselves or responded willingly to those who called for their participation.
    2. **‘Reluctant workers’:** These seasonal workers said that they felt obliged to participate in cotton cultivation for social reasons; in particular, “the risk of destroying positive relations (*insonchilik*) with the person who called them”. In the Uzbek context, this can be understood as a reference to an individual’s social capital and their standing in the community, and their ability to draw on collective networks of mutually beneficial relationships across many areas of life, including employment, education and business.<sup>11</sup> While social pressure may provide some indication of involuntariness, it is not sufficient to satisfy the legal or operational definition of forced labour on its own. There was no evidence that the participation of these individuals was influenced by a specific penalty or threat.
    3. **‘Involuntary workers’:** These seasonal workers said that they felt compelled to participate in seasonal work, and said that they did so on the grounds of financial or other penalty (perceived risk of dismissal, wage reduction, expulsion from educational institution, loss of scholarship, or harassment by authorities; or inability to pay for a worker to replace them). This constitutes a category of worker at risk of forced labour.

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<sup>10</sup> The ILO commonly develops an operational definition of international labour standards – based on the legal definition elaborated by the conventions – for the purpose of statistical inquiry. For the measurement of forced labour, the ILO has set out detailed survey guidelines in: ILO, *Hard to see, harder to count: Survey guidelines to estimate forced labour of adults and children*, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> There are many ways in which these relationships and networks introduce greater ease into everyday events and transactions, including in the application of sometimes rigid rules. For instance, mutual goodwill may make it easier for individuals to take days off work or college for family events, to apply for social allowances, to call on support from community leaders for family events, to call on neighbours to assist with minor works or repairs, or to request in-kind payment from farmers. Conversely, the withdrawal of social capital may lead to a lack of cooperation by others or the overly rigid application of rules. Personal networks are usually intertwined and may be based on traditional ethnic relationships, including relatives, colleagues, neighbours, *gaps* (groups usually consisting of 12 former classmates / students and fellow citizens, colleagues or friends), or among friends.



**Table 1: Typology of seasonal workers in cotton cultivation in Uzbekistan - overview**

	Category	Broad definition	Indicators of forced labour	
			Involuntariness	Coercion / penalty
1.	Voluntary	Those who actively sought to participate in the harvest, or willingly agreed to do so after being called by someone.	-	-
2.	Reluctant	Those who were called and did not actively wish to participate, but did so in response to social pressure.	Yes	Social pressure but no perceived or actual penalty
3.	Involuntary	Those who were called and did not want to participate, but did so either because of a perceived risk of dismissal, wage reduction, expulsion from educational institution, loss of scholarship, or harassment by authorities; or inability to pay for a worker to replace them.	Yes	Yes

### Quantitative research

- The quantitative research was comprised of two household panel surveys in 2015 and 2016, relating to the 2014 and 2015 harvests respectively, and a farmer survey in 2015 relating to the 2014 harvest. Surveys were designed in accordance with the guidelines set out in the ILO's publication on measuring forced labour, *Hard to see, harder to count* (ILO, 2012).
- **The household survey was based on a probabilistic sample of 3,500 households from all provinces.** The target population was those aged 18 to 50 years old. All sampling was designed to provide results at the national level, rather than by province. (For more information on household selection and sampling, see the Annex.)
  - The first household survey took place from August to September 2015. This involved a survey of 3,500 households: interviews were conducted with heads of households, and members who either picked cotton in 2014, weeded in 2015 or who were asked but refused to do either. All adults aged 18-50 years old were interviewed (10,350 people).
  - The second household survey took place from March to April 2016. It involved a survey of the same list of 3,500 households, and interviews with individuals who picked cotton or refused to do it in 2015. Weeders were not interviewed in the second household survey.
- **The household questionnaire was presented to respondents as part of a study to inform the government's plans to introduce higher levels of mechanisation in cotton cultivation.** However, there were relatively few questions on mechanisation in the survey. The first part of the household survey included questions on the socio-economic profile of households, and their income sources. The second part included questions for household

members who provided seasonal labour in cotton cultivation, including questions around recruitment, earnings, and duration of work, and for those who were asked to work but refused.

- **The surveys sought to provide a baseline and to identify any emerging trends over the period of the 2014 and 2015 harvests.** In the first instance, the surveys sought to measure:
  - How many people were called to work in the harvest and how many of these people then worked in the harvest;
  - How recruitment takes place, including channels for recruitment, and incentives provided for accepting work, possibilities for refusing or (perceived) consequences for refusing;
  - Different kinds of employers and recruiters and their relationships with recruited workers;
  - Workers' awareness of their employment rights under national law;
  - Working conditions during the harvest;
  - The socio-demographic profile of households and workers (gender, age, rural/urban location, living standards, income sources, occupation outside cotton cultivation); and
  - Alternative livelihood options for cotton pickers, including household views on the possible impact of mechanisation.
- **A farmer survey was carried out alongside the first household survey, based on a probabilistic sample of 420 farmers.** This survey was conducted from August to September 2015. The purpose of the farm survey was to gain a deeper understanding of farmer perspectives on recruitment practices and the use of seasonal labour in the cotton harvest.

## **Limitations**

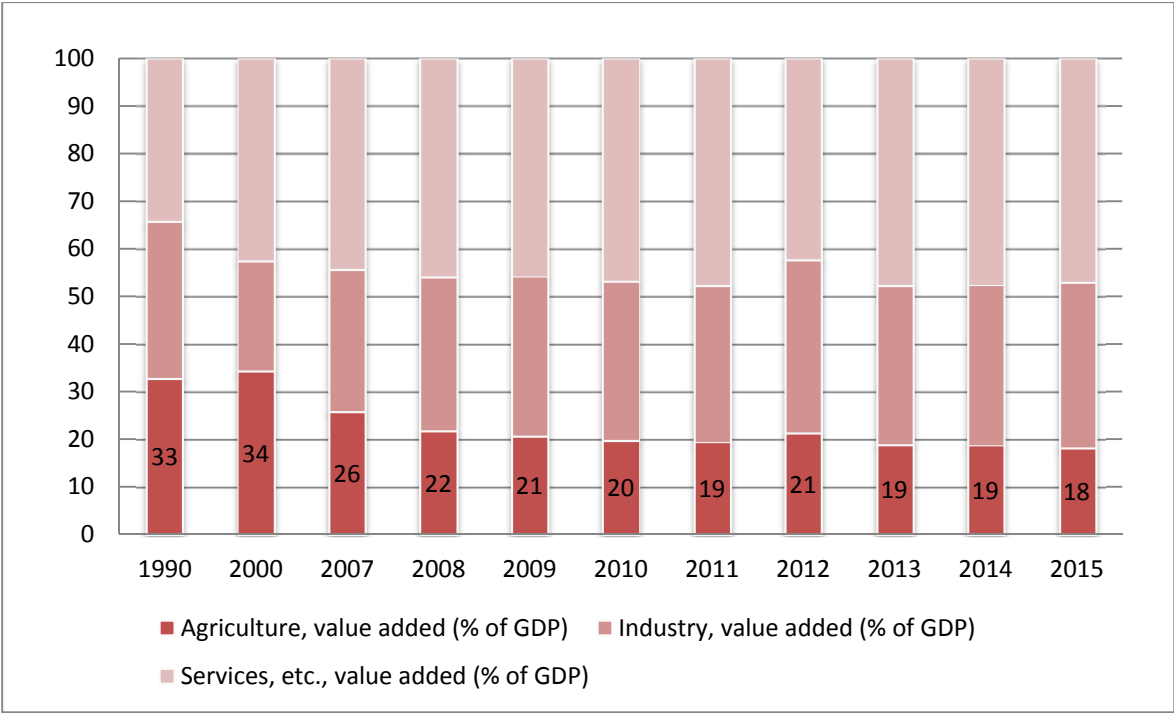
- Surveys were conducted with respect to two consecutive cotton harvests: those of 2014 and 2015. Whilst this enables the preliminary presentation of some trends, these trends should be interpreted with some caution and understood as a starting point for further measurement, given the relatively short period under consideration. Moreover, where the quantitative data suggests certain trends, further qualitative research is needed to determine why these changes have taken place and further quantitative research is needed to determine whether these trends have continued during the 2016 harvest and beyond.
- The main focus of the surveys was to record the perspectives and motivations of those who were called to pick cotton, as well as farmers. The research does not permit an in-depth discussion of the institutional mechanisms surrounding the production planning for the cotton harvest.
- The findings outlined in this study provide an indication of emerging trends regarding recruitment practices and seasonal employment in agriculture; however, further research is required to determine the causes of the trends that are identified in this report.

## 2. Context

### 2.1 Cotton cultivation in Uzbekistan

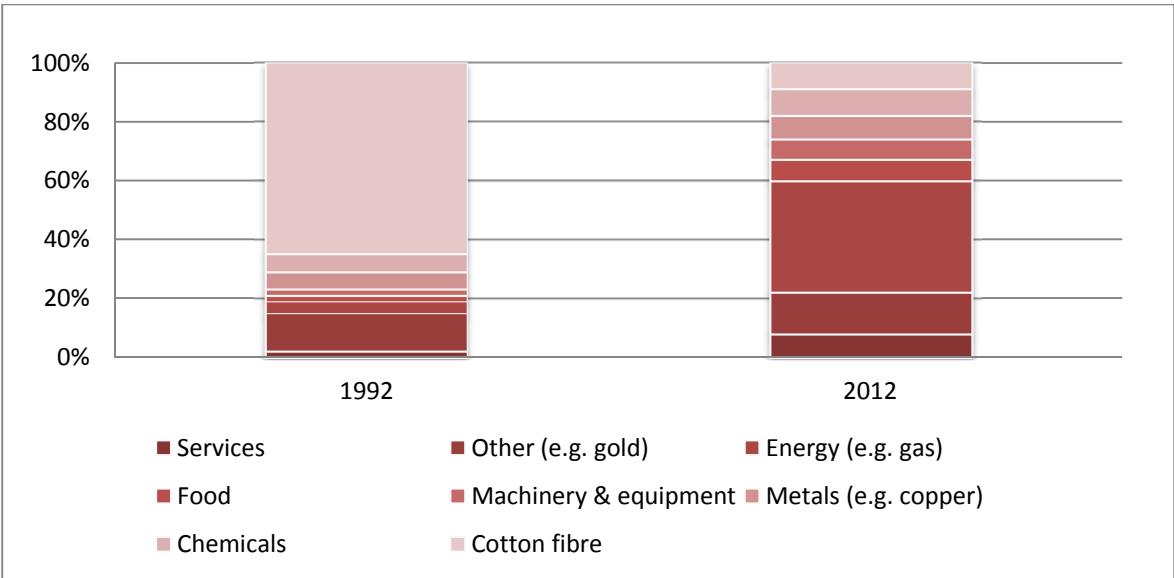
- Cotton is an important industry for Uzbekistan, which is the world’s fifth largest cotton exporter, and the sixth largest cotton producer in the world (ICAC, 2016).** Cotton is Uzbekistan’s second most important crop in terms of area of cultivation and has great political, economic, and cultural significance for the country (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). Together with wheat, cotton accounts for around 80% of cultivated agricultural land in Uzbekistan (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). Official data on the total cotton harvests for 2014 and 2015 is not available, although state targets for 2015/6 were set at 1.28 million hectares and 3.35 million metric tons (MMT) (USDA FAS, 2015).
- The agricultural sector has an important – although diminishing – role to play in Uzbekistan’s ambitious plans for economic development.** In recent times, Uzbekistan has experienced solid GDP growth, averaging an annual rate of 8% over the period 2004-2012 (World Bank, 2013). The country has announced an ambitious goal to reach upper middle-income country status by 2030, which implies a ten-fold increase in per capita incomes (Larson, Khidirov and Ramniceanu, 2015). To this end, the GOU has started to articulate longer term strategic objectives that recognize that future growth will have to rely increasingly on productivity increases, economic diversification and more efficient use of human capital (World Bank, 2013). Uzbekistan’s ability to meet these goals and maintain a positive economic outlook will depend in great part on the Government’s on-going articulation and implementation of reforms across a number of sectors, including agriculture, which represents a significant – if decreasing – proportion of overall GDP (see **Graph I**) (World Bank, 2016).

**Graph I: Composition of Uzbek GDP 1990-2015**



- Agricultural modernization is a priority goal for the Government of Uzbekistan (GOU), including through support for mechanisation in cotton cultivation.** The GOU recently adopted a policy to mechanise 70% or more of the cotton harvest by 2017 (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).<sup>12</sup> Given that almost all cotton in Uzbekistan is currently picked by hand, if the GOU reaches its mechanisation goals, it will have a major impact on the organization of work in the sector: the harvest season will be shortened by several weeks, and the amount of labour required will be significantly reduced (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).
- Modernization also means pursuing a policy of crop diversification, and moving away from reliance on cotton.** In recent years, cotton production in Uzbekistan has stayed relatively constant, while production of other agricultural commodities – including wheat, potatoes, fruit, and vegetables – is increasing, in order to ensure greater food security and secure higher levels of land and water productivity (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). For instance, the horticulture sector has been a source of growth within agriculture in recent years – the value of horticultural exports tripled from 2006 to 2010 – and the area devoted to horticulture has been growing (Larson et al, 2015). (Workers in rural communities are likely to benefit from enhanced work opportunities where farmers switch from cotton and wheat to fruit and vegetables, since horticultural field crops require more hired labour inputs than do cotton and wheat.)
- Whilst cotton remains an important export for Uzbekistan, the economy has moved away from being overly reliant on cotton and diversified its export base** (see **Graph 2**). Nevertheless, agriculture remains an important source of income and livelihoods for the 4.7 million households that operate *dekhan* farms (smallholders in rural and disproportionately poor communities) (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).

**Graph 2: Uzbekistan's export structure: 1992 & 2012**



<sup>12</sup> There was some mechanization during the Soviet period, but post-independence attempts to mechanise resulted in high costs and poor results due to inappropriate equipment (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).

- **As part of the modernization drive, the government has carried out a process of farm consolidation that has increased the average size of farms.** In 2009-2010, the government terminated contracts for land leases for small farmers (with farm sizes of 5 to 10 hectares). This resulted in a 69.5% decrease in the number of farmers (from 217,095 in 2007 down to 66,134 in 2010) and a 244% increase in the average size of farms (from 13.8 hectares in 2007 to 47.5 hectares in 2010) (see **Table 2**). There are reports that consolidation has led to challenges for farmers in managing larger crop areas, and larger farmers have started sub-leasing their lands to former farmers and other citizens (ILO interviews, 2015). At the same time, larger parcels of land are more amenable to mechanised picking. The GOU's intention is to reduce the amount of land under cotton up to 2020 (USDA, 2016).

**Table 2: Number and size of farms in Uzbekistan, 2000-2010**

	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total number of farmers	43,479	125,668	189,235	217,095	105,033	80,268	66,134
Farmers' croplands, 1,000ha	632.2	2,140.70	2,710.60	3,001.60	3,045.20	3,052.90	3,140.20
Share of total crop area in the country, % including HH land plots	16.7	58.7	74.7	84.3	84.4	84.6	84.8
Average farmers' crop area, ha	20.3	30	26.2	13.8	29	37.9	47.5

Source: State Statistical Committee of Uzbekistan, 2013.

## 2.2 Production planning and seasonal labour requirements in Uzbek cotton production

- **The government sets annual quotas for cotton cultivation and prices.** Agricultural land in Uzbekistan is collectively owned, and farmers with land designated for cotton production are required to meet state-imposed quotas as a condition of leasing land. Based on the quota, the farmer can take out a low-interest loan (3%) from the government that covers the costs of cotton cultivation (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). All wheat and cotton is sold to the state at a price fixed by the government, which takes into account the cost of supplies and labour used by the farmer. When a farmer meets the quota, his/her expenses are reimbursed and it may be possible to earn a profit. If the quota is not met, the farmer will need to cover the loan from income earned from other crops or in the following year. If the quota is not met over three consecutive years, the farmers' lands may be confiscated and eventually reallocated to another farmer.
- **Cotton cultivation requires a significant volume of seasonal workers.** Some labour inputs are required throughout the cultivation cycle, for which farmers typically use permanent workers and temporary workers from local villages, with some use of machinery. During springtime, farmers require additional seasonal labour for weeding, but the major requirement for seasonal labour arises during the harvest, when farmers need an influx of workers for three "passes" from September to November (see **Table 3**). Each pass lasts for about ten days, and with each pass, the quality and volume of cotton available for picking decreases. Productivity – and, by extension, workers' earning potential – is highest during the first pass, when around 75%

of cotton bolls are open (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). During the third pass, picking becomes more arduous, as open cotton bolls are scarcer and harder to reach.

**Table 3: Cotton production – timing of seasonal labour requirements**

	Dec-Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Cotton cycle	Off-season	Growing period						Harvest period		
Seasonal labour inputs		Planting	Weeding			[planning & preparation]		1 <sup>st</sup> pass	2 <sup>nd</sup> pass	3 <sup>rd</sup> pass

Source: ILO farmer surveys; Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016.

- Production quotas are fixed by central government, and then harvest planning and mobilisation of seasonal labour is coordinated by different levels of government.** The Ministry for Agriculture and Water Resources (MAWR) and its local departments are responsible for setting annual harvest quotas, which provide the basis for projected seasonal labour requirements. These quotas and labour projections are then distributed to province and district *hokimiyats* (local government) in August each year for implementation and management. Each *hokimiyat* establishes a cotton harvest committee (*pakhta shtab*) to organize, coordinate and monitor the harvest, including mobilisation of the necessary amount of seasonal labour required by farmers, and *hokimiyat* officials may face grave consequences if the assigned quota is not met (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). The *pakhta shtab* usually includes representatives of the *hokimiyat*, *mahalla* offices, and other local organizations (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). Once the *pakhta shtab* is established, farmers submit their requests for seasonal labour to the committee: this is increasingly organized through the Farmers' Council (ILO, 2017). In some cases, the *pakhta shtab* establishes the labour requirements for individual farms (see **Chapter 5**). Each farmer has a cotton cultivation schedule, with a timeline for each activity that is approved and monitored by the *hokimiyat* (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).
- Regional and local authorities help mobilize seasonal workers in order to meet seasonal peaks in agricultural labour demand.** Historically, this has included organizing the participation of non-agricultural workers in the harvest, including students, and public sector and private sector employees. Although mechanisation has been introduced in some districts, most farmers continue to rely heavily on manual labour, as they do not have enough sufficient access to machinery to meet their needs at the peak of the cotton weeding or harvesting season (see **Chapter 5**).
- The mass recruitment of seasonal workers takes place through a number of channels.** Recruiters or intermediaries may be *mahalla* representatives, school and college directors, university rectors, directors of medical facilities, heads of enterprises or state budget organizations, *hokimiyat* officials, and other organizations, such as the Kamolot youth organization (ILO, 2017). Individuals may be asked to participate by announcements or requests at their local community or neighbourhood meetings, workplaces, educational institutions, mass media and even mosques (ILO interviews). Picking is variously represented as a national duty, a community obligation, a temporary transfer of work tasks, or frequently an opportunity to earn additional income (ILO, 2017).

- **Due to significant demand for local labour during the harvest, seasonal workers may also be recruited from outside areas.** According to interviews carried out for the World Bank, local communities provide only 35 to 70% of cotton pickers in a district, and the rest are brought in from elsewhere (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). The process of recruiting non-local workers is coordinated by the *pakhta shtab*, which approaches more distant organizations within or outside the district to ask them to recruit cotton pickers on their behalf. The *pakhta shtab* then organizes these workers into brigades and helps arrange their transport and accommodation. (See **Chapter 3** and **Chapter 5**.)
- **In some cases, individuals hire replacement workers to take their place in the fields.** Where an individual is called to take up seasonal work but cannot or is unwilling to participate, he or she may pay for a replacement worker to take his/her place. This study found that in 2014 and 2015, more than 70% of these payments were made directly to a replacement cotton picker, including friends and neighbours. The rest were payments to mahalla or organizations that recruited the person to be replaced. Replacement workers are usually *mardikor* (local day labourers). The survey panel did not include workers who were hired as *mardikors*; nor does the survey cover the use of monies transferred with the stated purpose of hiring replacement day labour. It should be noted, however, that a worker's inability to find funds to pay for replacement fees is identified as a factor of threat of penalty giving rise to involuntary labour.
- **Workers may participate in seasonal activities as individuals, or as part of a 'brigade'.** Brigades have been a feature of rural labour markets in Uzbekistan for a number of decades. They predominantly consist of rural women, amongst whom there are higher levels of economic inactivity and unemployment. Two to three weeks before harvest begins, individuals can ask *mahalla* representatives that they be included within brigades in the area. The contract with the farmer tends to be signed by the *mahalla* representative, rather than the leader or the members of the brigade.
- **Self-organized brigades are a relatively recent development in rural labour markets.** Since around 2010, women have begun organizing themselves into brigades, around one month before the cotton harvest begins. Self-organized brigades tend to have stable membership from year to year and are more efficient than other workers, picking cotton faster, in higher volumes and better quality. As such, they can often be selective about which farmers they work for and their wages and conditions, and farmers compete to attract the best brigades. This model first emerged in the Fergana Valley, and quickly spread after women saw that by working collectively, they could command higher wages and better conditions. It also makes families more likely to agree to women's participation in the harvest; otherwise, it is often seen as inappropriate for women to work alone alongside men from outside their family or kinship circle. Self-organized brigades are often prepared to work on the second and third passes, provided that they can negotiate beneficial terms and conditions with the farmer (which may exceed official rates).

## 2.3 Rural labour markets in Uzbekistan

- **Agriculture is the main source of employment in rural areas.** According to official statistics, in 2015, agriculture accounted for 27.6% of women's employment and 27.7% of men's employment at a national level (SSC/GSU). However, according to the World Bank/GIZ Uzbekistan Jobs, Skills, and Migration Survey, agriculture may account for an even higher proportion of women's jobs: this survey found that 35% of working age women work in

agriculture, compared with 19% of working age men (cited in Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). Approximately 49% of Uzbekistan's population is located in rural areas (SSC/GSU, 2015).

- **Unemployment rates are low but thought to conceal higher numbers of discouraged job-seekers.** The official unemployment rate in Uzbekistan is 5%<sup>13</sup>; however, a considerable portion of the workforce is thought to be discouraged and consequently not looking for work, including up to 10% of those aged 20-24 years (Ajwad et al, 2014). Household data collected for this study suggested that as many as 95% of the unemployed may not be officially registered, reportedly due to difficulties in registering income or lack of incentives to register (i.e. inadequate unemployment benefits).
- **Seasonal work in cotton cultivation represents an important income-generating opportunity for many rural households.** Focus group discussions conducted for World Bank research suggested that income from cotton picking typically represents between 10 and 15% of annual income for rural middle- and low-income households, and can rise to 30% for some households (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). Wages levels are lower in rural areas, except during peak agricultural season (July to September), when wages in rural areas are almost equal to those in urban areas (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). Household data collected for this research indicated that there was a significant gap between the average monthly income for rural and urban households: 723,000 soums (USD 225) and 918,000 soums (USD 286) respectively in March 2016.<sup>14</sup>
- **Cotton picking represents a particularly important source of income and employment for rural women.** Across the country, women's employment rates are significantly lower than men's (37.8% for women at a national level, compared to 73.8% for men), and are lowest in the centre and east of the country (30.7% and 31.5% respectively, compared to 70.2% and 75.9% for men) (Ajwad et al, 2014). Rural women report particular difficulties in finding suitable work outside agriculture, in particular as a result of a lack of skills. The types of professions that are typically considered suitable for women – for instance, teaching and healthcare – are more limited outside urban areas (ADB, 2014).<sup>15</sup> Thus, income earned during the harvest is particularly important for rural women, who represent the majority of pickers (Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016; ADB, 2014).
- **Cotton picking has several advantages compared to other seasonal agricultural work.** Payment is made in cash, which is advanced by state banks, and is made almost immediately after the work is completed (usually every two to five days during the season) (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). As such, many households seek to maximise working time during times of high labour demand and earn as much income as possible, especially during the first pass of the cotton harvest (ILO interviews, 2015). It is also important to note that this income is an additional income to the normal salary for the majority of employees: more than 85% of employees who leave their job to pick cotton keep their usual salary during their absence. This proportion is even higher for staff from medical and health institutions.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, 2015 figures cited at [gender.stat.uz](http://gender.stat.uz). The modelled ILO estimate for 2014 is 10.6%: World Bank, WDI, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> The average household size was 5.5 in both rural and urban areas (household survey data).

<sup>15</sup> There is also a substantial gender wage gap. On an annual basis, women earn one third less than men, and in rural areas, daily wages can be up to 50% lower for women (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).



- **Lack of economic opportunity contributes to high levels of international migration, particularly amongst young men, which might be distorting rural labour markets.** It is estimated that up to 2 million Uzbeks were living abroad in 2010, equivalent to 7% of the country's population (Ajwad et al, 2014). Migration rates are particularly high amongst men: according to the World Bank / GIZ Uzbekistan Jobs, Skills, and Migration Survey, one in three males between the ages of 20 and 24 is a migrant (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). This means that in some rural areas, there are low levels of young male job-seekers. By contrast, internal migration levels are very low, which is thought to contribute to sub-optimal labour allocation within the country (Ajwad et al, 2014). Nevertheless, the size of the Uzbek population has increased significantly since 2014, which is thought to be due in part to the return of migrant workers from Russia. For many households, this has led to a substantial dip in remittances: 8% of households received an average of USD 389 in monthly remittances in 2016, compared to 14% in 2015 who received a monthly average of USD 1106.
- **The implications of current reform policies in agriculture remain unclear for rural labour markets.** Higher levels of mechanisation are likely to lead to lower demand for seasonal labour. More jobs will be created in the assembly, operation and maintenance of equipment, but on balance, there will be lower demand for seasonal workers in rural areas (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).



### 3. Recruitment for seasonal labour in cotton cultivation, 2014-2015

This chapter sets out the results of the household surveys with respect to recruitment channels for seasonal workers in weeding (2014) and picking (2014 and 2015). Data for weeders is provided where available, but is not available to the same extent as for pickers.

#### 3.1 Demographic profile of seasonal workforce

- **A substantial proportion of the working age population participates in the harvest, but the total number of participants dropped from 2014 to 2015:** There was a decrease in the total number of people who participated in the cotton harvest over the period, declining from 29.6% of the population aged 18 to 50 years in 2014 (3.8 million people) to 28% in 2015 (3.7 million).<sup>16</sup> This figure drops more substantially when farmers, supervisors and permanent farm workers are excluded and only seasonal cotton pickers are counted: from 24% of the target population (3.2 million) in 2014 to 21% (2.9 million) in 2015. (The rest of the data referred to in this chapter relates only to seasonal cotton pickers and excludes farmers, supervisors and permanent farm workers.)
- **Nearly three quarters of cotton pickers were women.** Over both harvests, the majority of seasonal pickers were women (71% in 2015, 72% in 2014). This represents a higher proportion of women than in the agricultural sector as a whole, where men represent closer to 50% of the total workforce (SSC/GSU).
- **There was a roughly even spread of pickers across age groups.** The largest category of workers was from the group aged 35 to 50 years (35% in 2014; 37% in 2015), followed closely by those aged 25 to 34 years (32% in 2014; 31% in 2015), and those aged 18 to 24 years (33% in 2014; 32% in 2015).
- **Around two thirds of pickers were from rural areas.** However, there was a slight increase in the proportion of pickers from urban areas over the period: in 2014, 34% of pickers were from urban areas, rising to 37% in 2015.
- **While there were fewer weeders than pickers, the number of workers engaged in weeding was still significant:** Some 1.0 million individuals were engaged as seasonal workers in cotton weeding in 2014, compared to 3.8 million pickers. This largely reflects the lower labour inputs required for weeding, as compared to harvesting. There was considerable overlap between the weeding and picking workforces: in the 2014 harvest, 82% of weeders were also involved in picking.

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<sup>16</sup> Note that there was a sizeable increase in the overall population over the period 2014 to 2016: 30.5 million in 2014; 31.0 million in 2015; and 31.6 million in 2016 (Source: SSC/GSU). This is thought to be due in part to migrant workers returning to Uzbekistan as a result of the economic crisis in Russia. The substantial change in population size means that in most cases it is more meaningful to compare percentages than absolute numbers.

## 3.2 The occupational profile of seasonal workers

- **For weeders and pickers, those who were economically inactive (excluding students) comprised one of the largest categories of seasonal workers.** The proportion of cotton pickers who were economically inactive (excluding students) (i.e. those who are otherwise responsible for unpaid work in the home or on family plots, or were retired) increased from 42.9% in 2014 to 46.1% in 2015. This group represented just over a quarter (27%) of weeders in 2014.
- **Those employed outside the health and education sectors represented a significant category of pickers during the period, but were less important for weeding.** This group – workers who combined seasonal cotton work with other employment (outside health and education) – represented 20.0% of all cotton pickers in 2014, rising to 22.6% in 2015. They represented 13% of weeders in 2014.

**Those employed in the health and education sectors represented a decreasing proportion of cotton pickers from 2014 to 15.** This group accounted for 16.6% of all pickers in 2014, dropping to 14.8% in 2015: this represented an absolute decrease of 106,000 people (see **Table 4**). However, they represented a relatively higher proportion of weeders (21%) in 2014. Those employed in the health and education sectors who participated in the harvest were overwhelmingly female (consistent with the feminised nature of these sectors): in 2014, women represented 83% of educational and medical staff who participated in the harvest, dropping slightly to 80% in 2015.

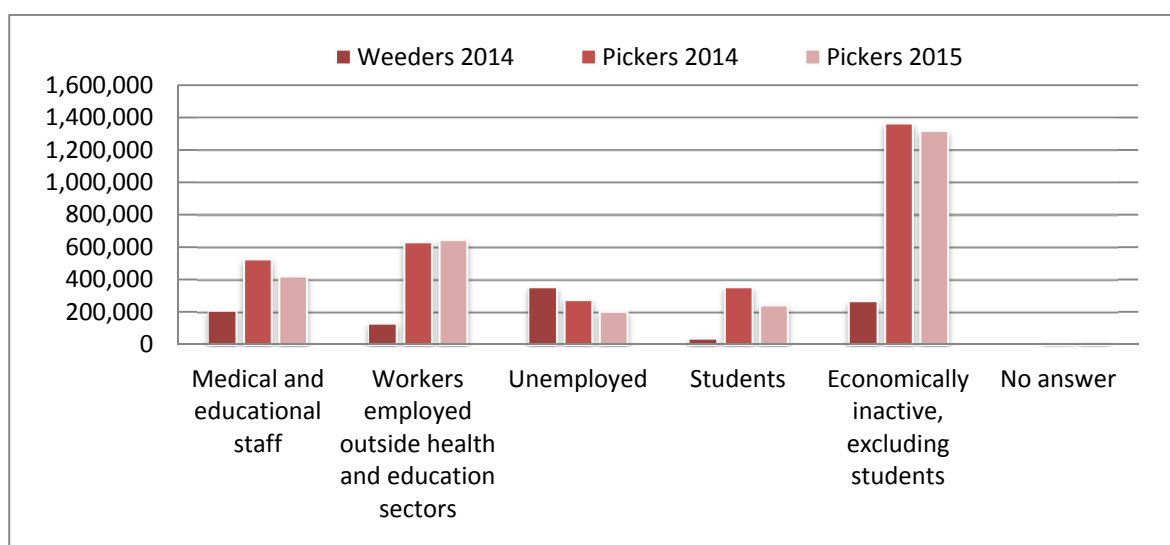
**The participation of students decreased from 2014 to 2015.** The proportion of students amongst cotton pickers dropped from 11.2% in 2014 to 8.6% in 2015: this represented an absolute decrease of 109,000 people (see **Table 4**). Students represented a lower proportion of weeders (4%) in 2014. The gender breakdown of student pickers was roughly even across both years: women represented 47% in 2014 and 50% in 2015. A significant proportion of students (70%) were aged 18 or 19 years at the age of the interview, showing that mainly young students participate and that some may have been below 18 at the time of cotton picking.

- **The unemployed represented one of the smallest categories of seasonal workers during the harvest, but a significant proportion of weeders.** In 2014, the unemployed accounted for 8.8% of the seasonal cotton picking workforce, decreasing to 7.1% in 2015. (This is slightly higher than the official unemployment rate of 5%.) Notably, the participation of the unemployed was greater in weeding activities, both in terms of their proportion of the seasonal workforce (35%) and in absolute numbers (354,000 weeders, compared to 280,000 pickers). The reason for this disparity is not clear from the survey results.

**Table 4: Size and composition of seasonal workforce in cotton cultivation, 2014-15**

	Weeders		Pickers	
	2014	2014	2015	Difference
Medical and educational staff	213,000	529,000	423,000	-106,000
Workers employed outside health and education sectors	132,000	636,000	645,000	9,000
Unemployed	354,000	280,000	204,000	-76,000
Students	40,000	354,000	245,000	-109,000
Economically inactive, excluding students	273,000	1,362,000	1,316,000	-46,000
No answer		17,000	20,000	3,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,012,000</b>	<b>3,200,000</b>	<b>2,850,000</b>	<b>-350,000</b>
	2014	2014	2015	Difference
Those employed in the health and education sectors	21%	16.6%	14.8%	-1.8%
Those employed outside health and education sectors	13%	20.0%	22.6%	+2.6%
Unemployed	35%	8.8%	7.1%	-1.7%
Students	4%	11.2%	8.6%	-2.6%
Economically inactive, excluding students	27%	42.9%	46.1%	+3.2%
No answer	0%	0.5%	0.7%	+0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

**Graph 3: Occupational profile of seasonal workers in cotton production, 2014-15**



### 3.3 Recruitment channels for seasonal workers

- Almost all seasonal pickers were “called” by someone, rather than proactively seeking employment themselves.** This was a consistent pattern over both years: in 2014, 96.8% pickers were ‘called’ by someone and 95.5% in 2015. It is important to note that this inaction does not by itself necessarily denote reluctance, but may be a function of how the recruitment system has developed over time: for instance, many local pickers wait for announcements by local recruiters before they sign up for the harvest, and thus would consider that they were called. However, this system can also lead to risks of coercion, where individuals are called and they feel that they cannot refuse. (This is discussed below.)

**Graph 4: Recruitment channels for weeders and cotton pickers, 2014-2015**



- More than 95% of all cotton pickers in the 2014-15 harvests were primarily recruited or “called” through three main channels.** These were:
  - Heads of enterprises, organizations, (including medical and educational facilities), heads of colleges and universities
  - Representatives of *mahallas* (community organizations); and
  - Farmers or their representatives.
- The most significant recruitment channel for cotton pickers across both harvests was heads of enterprises and organizations.** In 2014, heads of enterprises and organizations (including medical facilities and colleges, state-owned enterprises and private enterprises) accounted for 42.4% of all recruitment, although this figure dropped to 40.9% in 2015. Almost all of those employed in the health and education sectors were called by their

manager (94% in 2015), and the majority of students were called by heads of colleges (80% in 2015).

- **The importance of *mahallas* in the recruitment process increased significantly over the period.** In 2014, *mahalla* representatives were responsible for calling 25.0% of all cotton pickers, rising to 39.5% in 2015.
- **The role of farmers and their representatives in the direct recruitment of cotton pickers decreased significantly from 2014 to 2015.** In 2014, farmers recruited 28.4% of all cotton pickers, compared to 14.6% in 2015.
- **There is a very small (<5%) number of other recruitment channels.** These include family members, friends or neighbours (2.6% in 2014, 2.2% in 2015), and those who wanted to find a replacement (1.1% in 2014, 0.7% in 2015).

### 3.4 Rejectors

- **The number of people who declined to participate in the harvest (the “rejectors”) increased by roughly two thirds from 2014 to 2015.** In 2014, there were 644,000 rejectors, rising to 1,090,000 in 2015, signifying an additional 446,000 rejectors in 2015. The rejectors represented a growing proportion of the total number of individuals who were called to participate: 14.8% in 2014 and 23.34% in 2015. Across both years, the gender profile of rejectors broadly matched the overall gender breakdown of the cotton-picking workforce: women represented 71% of rejectors in 2014, and 70% in 2015, and men represented 29% in 2014 and 30% in 2015.

**Table 5: Rejectors in cotton harvest 2014-2015**

	2014	2015
Total number of rejectors	644,000	1,090,000
% of total population aged 18-50	4.95%	8.23%
% of those who were called	14.8%	23.34%

- **The unemployed and the economically inactive (excluding students) represented the highest proportion of rejectors.** In 2014, these two categories together accounted for 57% of rejectors, rising to 71% in 2015. This was roughly similar to their representation as pickers in the harvest (62.9% of all pickers in 2014, and 68.7% in 2015). Both of these categories represent a significant proportion of both volunteers and rejectors, suggesting that individuals who are not called by a person who exerts authority over them (e.g. employers or heads of colleges) have higher levels of agency in deciding whether to participate in the harvest.
- **Rejection rates of students were relatively low.** In 2014, students represented 11.2% of all pickers, but only 6% of rejectors; in 2015, students represented 8.6% of all pickers but only 3% of rejectors.
- **The main reasons provided for refusing to participate related to illness or pre-existing commitments.** The three main reasons for not participating in the harvest were:

illness (37% of rejectors in 2014, 31% in 2015), ongoing commitments in the workplace (33% in 2014, 30% in 2015), or family-related matters (21% in 2014, 32% in 2015). Other reasons provided included: simply not wanting to work (13% in 2014, 11% in 2015), cotton earnings are too low (8% in 2014, 5% in 2015), ongoing study commitments (3% in 2014, 2% in 2015).<sup>17</sup>

- **The majority of rejectors experienced no negative consequences.** In 2014, 74% of rejectors reported no negative consequences as a result of their decision not to participate in the cotton harvest. This figure rose to 80% in 2015.
- **Where negative consequences were experienced, these mostly related to the payment of replacement workers.** Some 25% of rejectors paid to be replaced in 2014, dropping to 18.2% in 2015. On average, they paid 215,000 soums (USD 67) for 14 days, amounting to 15,000 soums (USD 4.70) per day. The cost of replacement labour was the same for the 2014 and 2015 harvests. Where rejectors paid for a substitute, they usually paid the money directly to other cotton pickers (46% in 2014, 33% in 2015) or neighbours and friends (26% in 2014, 37% in 2015). A smaller proportion paid replacement fees to *mahalla* representatives (10% in 2014, 17% in 2015) or heads of enterprises (18% in 2014, 13% in 2015). A small fraction reported negative consequences, such as the loss of their job or scholarship, increased working hours, or salary reduction (2.45% in 2014, 2.3% in 2015).
- **Rejectors were most likely to have been called by *mahallas*.** In 2014, 70% of rejectors were called by *mahalla* representatives, rising to 77% in 2015. The next most likely recruitment channel for rejectors was heads of enterprises (24% in 2014, 17% in 2015), then farmers and their representatives (9% in 2014, 2% in 2015) and local authorities (3% in 2014, 4% in 2015).

### 3.5 Workers at risk of coercion

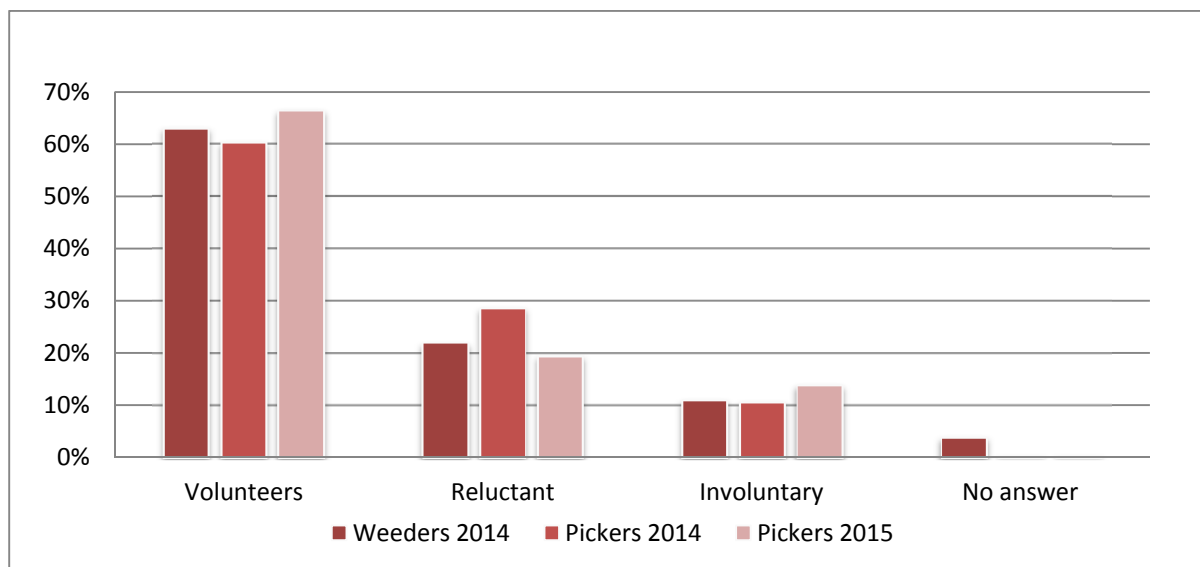
- **The majority of workers participated in the harvest on a voluntary basis, and this proportion increased from 2014 to 2015.** In 2015, 66% of cotton pickers did so voluntarily, up from 60% in 2014.
- **The proportion of reluctant cotton pickers decreased over the period.** The proportion of reluctant workers – those who felt social pressure to participate, but experienced no demonstrable threat of penalty – decreased (29% of all cotton pickers in 2014, 20% in 2015).
- **The number of involuntary cotton pickers increased over the period.** In 2014, 11% of seasonal workers participated on an involuntary basis, compared to 14% in 2015.
- **The proportion of those who said that they had to pick cotton because they could not pay for a replacement declined over the period.** In 2014, 3.5% said that they had to participate because they could not pay for a replacement, compared with 2.5% in 2015.

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<sup>17</sup> Respondents could provide more than one response, so percentages add up to more than 100.



**Graph 5: Level of voluntariness amongst seasonal workers, 2014-15**



### ***Who participated on a voluntary basis?***

- **Seasonal workers who were unemployed or economically inactive (excluding students) were proportionately more likely to be volunteers.** In 2014, these two categories together represented 51.9% of all seasonal cotton pickers and 69% of volunteers; 68.7% of all seasonal cotton pickers in 2015 and 71% of all volunteers.
- **The main reason that people volunteered was to increase their incomes.** For many, the cotton harvest is an important opportunity to raise household income, particularly women, who form the majority of cotton pickers and who often have limited access to other job options in rural areas. In 2014, 71% of voluntary pickers said that they participated in the harvest to earn more money, rising to 74% in 2015. There was a significant drop in the number of people who said that they picked to earn bonuses (36% in 2014, compared to 9% in 2015), and a major increase in the number of people who said they picked in order to be useful to the community and/or the economy (4% in 2014, rising to 44% in 2015)<sup>18</sup>.
- **There was a decline in voluntary participation amongst students and those employed in the health and education sectors.** The proportion of students who were volunteers dipped over the period – 34.2% in 2014 and 30% in 2015 – but remained roughly similar for those employed in the health and education sectors – 38% in 2014 and 37% in 2015. Students represented 11.2% of all pickers in 2014, but only 6% of volunteers, and 8.6% of all pickers in 2015, but only 4% of volunteers. Similarly, those employed in the health and education sectors represented 16.6% of all pickers in 2014, and 13% of volunteers; in 2015, they represented 14.8% of all pickers and 12% of volunteers.

<sup>18</sup> Percentages add up to more than 100%, as pickers could nominate more than one reason why they wanted to participate in the harvest.

- **The proportion of voluntary workers recruited by mahallas increased over the period.** In 2014, *mahalla* representatives recruited 25% of all workers, but 35% of all volunteers, and in 2015, they recruited 39.5% of all workers and 52% of volunteers. In 2014, farmers were an important source of voluntary workers (36% of all voluntary workers), but this dropped in 2015 (19%), reflecting in part their diminished role in the direct recruitment process overall.

### **Who participated on a reluctant or involuntary basis?**

- **Across both harvests, involuntary pickers were most likely to be those employed outside the health and education sector, those employed in the health and education sectors, and students** (see **Table 6**). In the 2014 harvest, those employed in the health and education sectors represented 16.6% of all workers, but 26.2% of involuntary workers, compared to 14.8% and 27.2% respectively in 2015; those employed outside the health and education sectors represented 20.3% of all workers, but 28.5% of involuntary workers in 2014, compared to 22.6% and 30.4% respectively in 2015; and students represented 11.15% of all workers, but 18.5% of involuntary workers, compared with 11.2% and 26.7% respectively in 2015. This suggests that cotton pickers were most likely to participate on an involuntary basis when they were withdrawn from other forms of productive activity, such as employment or study, and were reliant on their recruiter for their main income or education.

**Table 6: Profile of involuntary and reluctant workers in the 2014-2015 harvests**

	% of all pickers	% of voluntary pickers	% of involuntary pickers	% of rejectors
<b>2014</b>				
Those employed in the health and education sectors	16.6%	10.5%	26.2%	9.0%
Those employed outside the health and education sectors	20.3%	14.5%	28.5%	27%
Unemployed	8.8%	11.71%	4.4%	5%
Students	11.15%	6.3%	18.5%	6%
Economically inactive (excluding students)	42.8%	56.5%	21.8%	52%
<b>2015</b>				
Those employed in the health and education sectors	14.8%	8.2%	28%	8%
Those employed outside the health and education sectors	22.6%	16.0%	35%	24%
Unemployed	7.1%	9.4%	2.7%	3%
Students	8.6%	3.9%	18%	3%
Economically inactive (excluding students)	46.1%	62.0%	14.4%	61%

- **The occupational breakdown of involuntary workers was similar for weeders.** In 2014, involuntary weeders were most likely to be medical and education staff (31%), those who were economically inactive (excluding students) (28%) or the unemployed (19%). However, unlike picking, students represented a smaller category of involuntary weeders (4%) in 2014, in proportion to their overall participation rate in weeding (4% of all weeders).
- **From 2014 to 2015, there was a decrease in the proportion of those employed in the health and education sectors who were reluctant cotton pickers, but an increase in those who were involuntary.** In 2014, 13% of all those employed in the health and education sectors participated on an involuntary basis and 49% participated on a reluctant basis, compared to 25% and 38% respectively in 2015. One possible explanation to the increased number of involuntary medical staff may be found in the significant increase of rejectors, and the simultaneous decrease of reluctant people. This led to a situation where the total number of “pure” volunteers was not enough to ensure the full harvest, hence the call to students and medical staff.
- **Similarly, there was a drop in the proportion of reluctant workers amongst students, and significant increase in the levels of involuntary participation.** The proportion of students who were reluctant participants dropped from 59.2% in 2014 to 27% in 2015. However, in 2014, 6.3% of all students participated in the cotton harvest on an involuntary basis, and this figure rose in 2015 to 43%. In absolute terms, this represented an increase from 22,000 in 2014, to 106,000 in 2015. In parallel, there was an increase in the proportion of involuntary workers with secondary vocational education (44% in 2014, rising to 52% in 2015) and with higher education (11% in 2014, rising to 20% in 2015).
- **Over both harvests, reluctant and involuntary workers were more likely to be recruited by heads of enterprises or colleges.** In 2014, 82% of reluctant workers were recruited by heads of enterprise or colleges, dropping to 75% in 2015. In 2014, 55% of all involuntary workers were recruited by heads of enterprises or organizations, rising to more than three quarters (77%) in 2015. There was a drop in the proportion of involuntary workers recruited by *mahallas* (accounting for 36% in 2014 down to 11% in 2015 of all involuntary workers), but an increase in the number of reluctant workers recruited by *mahallas* (13% to 28% of all reluctant workers). In 2014, farmers recruited 17% of all involuntary workers, but this dropped to 7% in 2015, and their share of reluctant workers was low both years (6% in 2014; 8% in 2015).
- **In 2015, there was a jump in the proportion of men who participated in the harvest on an involuntary basis.** In 2014, men represented 29% of all pickers and 27% of involuntary pickers, but 38% of involuntary pickers in 2015, even though they represented only 28% of all pickers. The gender breakdown of reluctant pickers remained constant across 2014 and 2015: men represented 39% and women represented 61% in both years.
- **Urban residents were over-represented amongst reluctant and involuntary pickers.** In 2014, urban residents represented 34% of all pickers, but 44% of reluctant pickers and 43% of involuntary pickers. This pattern intensified in 2015, when urban residents represented 37% of all pickers, and 51% of reluctant workers and 53% of involuntary workers.
- **The level of living standards does not seem to have a strong bearing on reluctance or involuntariness.** The representation of very poor, poor, middle-income, well-off and rich

households remains relatively proportionate to their overall participation rate across all categories of voluntariness (voluntary, reluctant and involuntary). However the number of very poor who were classified as reluctant workers trebled from 2% in 2014 to 6% in 2015.

- **The main reasons given by involuntary pickers for working in the harvest related to their work, income or study.** There were substantial differences in the main reasons given by involuntary pickers from 2014 to 2015, but the underlying themes were consistent: fear of losing their income, work or place at university. In 2014, the most commonly cited reason (71.4%) for participating was the perceived risk of losing salary (in full or in part), although this dropped to 14.2% in 2015. In 2015, the most commonly cited reason was perceived risk of losing one's job (42.1%, up from 4.5% in 2014). Lack of money for a replacement was also an important reason in both years, although of decreased significance in 2015 (14%) compared to 2014 (26%).

### 3.6 Reach of 2015 awareness raising activities

- **Only a relatively small proportion of the target participation were aware of the awareness raising activities.** Nearly one in five pickers in the 2015 harvest (18%) reported seeing or hearing awareness raising messages disseminated by the Uzbek trade union. The proportion of rejectors (i.e. those who refused the call to participate) who were exposed to the awareness raising messages was roughly similar, at 15%.
- **Some awareness raising channels appeared to be more effective than others.** According to the survey, the most effective vectors for disseminating the messages amongst pickers were *mahallas* (accounting for 28% of those who had heard or seen the messages), television (24%) or acquaintances (20%).
- **There is also scope to improve take-up of hotlines operated by the trade union and government.** No seasonal workers used the hotlines during the 2015 harvest. This is consistent with official MOL figures that there were only 207 complaints to the FBM during the 2015 harvest, which represented a tiny fraction of all pickers (rising to 1902 in September to October 2016), and ILO (2015) findings that the rate of use was low.

## 4. Productivity, earnings and working conditions, 2014-2015

- This chapter presents the results of the household surveys regarding the duration of work, earnings, working conditions, productivity and health and safety during the 2014 and 2015 harvests. Where relevant, this is supplemented by material from the farmers' survey.

### 4.1 Timing and duration of seasonal work

- **On average, across the three passes from September to November, seasonal workers spent less than 30 days a year picking cotton** The average total number of working days for seasonal cotton pickers was 31 days in 2014, and 28 days in 2015. Cotton pickers reported spending more time on the first and second passes (an average of 16 days at work in September and October), and less time on the third pass (an average of 10 days) in November.<sup>19</sup> According to the farmers' survey, the average duration of seasonal work on a farm was 34 days for farms with no machinery, and 23 days where machinery was used alongside workers.
- **The average number of days spent picking cotton decreased from 2014 to 2015.** Over the period, the average number of days worked by students was higher than other workers (37 in 2014; 35 in 2015). The average number of days for those employed in the health and education sectors (29 in 2014, 26 in 2015) and reluctant and involuntary workers (30 in 2014; 28 in 2015) was broadly in line with the average across all seasonal cotton pickers (31 in 2014; 29 in 2015).

**Table 7: Average total number of working days for different categories of cotton pickers in 2014 and 2015**

Category	Days		
	2014	2015	Difference
All seasonal cotton pickers	31	29	-2
Reluctant and involuntary workers	31	29	-2
Students	37	34	-3
Those employed in the health and education sectors	29	26	-3

- **From 2014 to 2015, there was a decrease in the number of seasonal workers who worked more than eight hours per day on average.** In 2014, this figure was 36%, dropping to 26% in 2015. For both harvests, there was a higher proportion of voluntary pickers who worked more than eight hours a day during the first pass in September (38% in 2014 and 27% in 2015), which could be accounted for by the fact that higher earnings are more easily generated

<sup>19</sup> This is roughly consistent with the farmers' survey, which indicated that the average number of days spent picking by "recruited workers" (defined in this survey as non-local workers who are sent by the authorities) in 2014 was 33, dropping to 24 where machinery was also used.

during the first pass, providing an incentive to work longer hours. By contrast, during the third pass in November, reluctant and involuntary workers were more likely to work more than eight hours a day (15% in 2014; 18% in 2015) than voluntary workers (11% in 2014; 9% in 2015). Focus group discussions carried out by World Bank researchers suggested longer working days for local workers, particularly during the early stages of the harvest, starting at 5-6 am, and finishing at 4-5 pm, compared to non-local workers, who start at 8-10 am and finish at 5 pm (Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016).

- **The main reason that pickers worked more than eight hours a day was to increase their income**<sup>20</sup>. Across both harvests, more than 50% of pickers who worked more than eight hours said that they did so to increase their earnings (60% in 2014; 56% in 2015). This was even more strongly the case for voluntary workers (75% in 2014, 71% in 2015). In 2015, there was a clear increase in the proportion of certain categories of workers who also worked long hours in response to instructions (involuntary workers: 14% in 2014 to 38% in 2015; students: 43% in 2014, 35% in 2015; those employed in the health and education sectors: 31% in 2014, 30% in 2015).<sup>21</sup>
- **A small proportion of pickers paid for a replacement worker for part of the harvest.** In 2014, 5% of all cotton pickers (i.e. those who were called and picked cotton for one or more days) paid for someone to replace them for an average of 9 days across the harvest.<sup>22</sup> This dropped slightly to 4% in 2015 for an average of 9 days. Many of these workers were substituted by their relatives or others, but a significant proportion paid replacement workers. In 2014, 34% of pickers who needed substitution for part of the harvest paid a replacement worker, at an average amount of 227,000 soums (USD 71), while in 2015, 28% of these pickers paid to be substituted, at an average amount of 241,000 soums (USD 75).

## 4.2 Productivity

- Based on responses provided in the household surveys, seasonal cotton pickers collectively harvested:
  - Around 2.6 million tons of seed-cotton in 2014; and
  - Around 2.2 million tons of seed-cotton in 2015.<sup>23</sup>
- **Productivity was significantly higher during the first pass.** More than half of all cotton picked by seasonal workers was picked during the first pass in September (59% in 2014, 57% in 2015), around a third during the second pass in October (38% in 2014, 39% in 2015), and less than 5% during the third pass in November (3% in 2014, 4% in 2015).

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<sup>20</sup> ILO jurisprudence establishes that a legal minimum wage must be achievable for piece-rated workers during normal working hours and under normal operating conditions. See:

[http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/wages/minimum-wages/definition/WCMS\\_439067/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/wages/minimum-wages/definition/WCMS_439067/lang--en/index.htm)

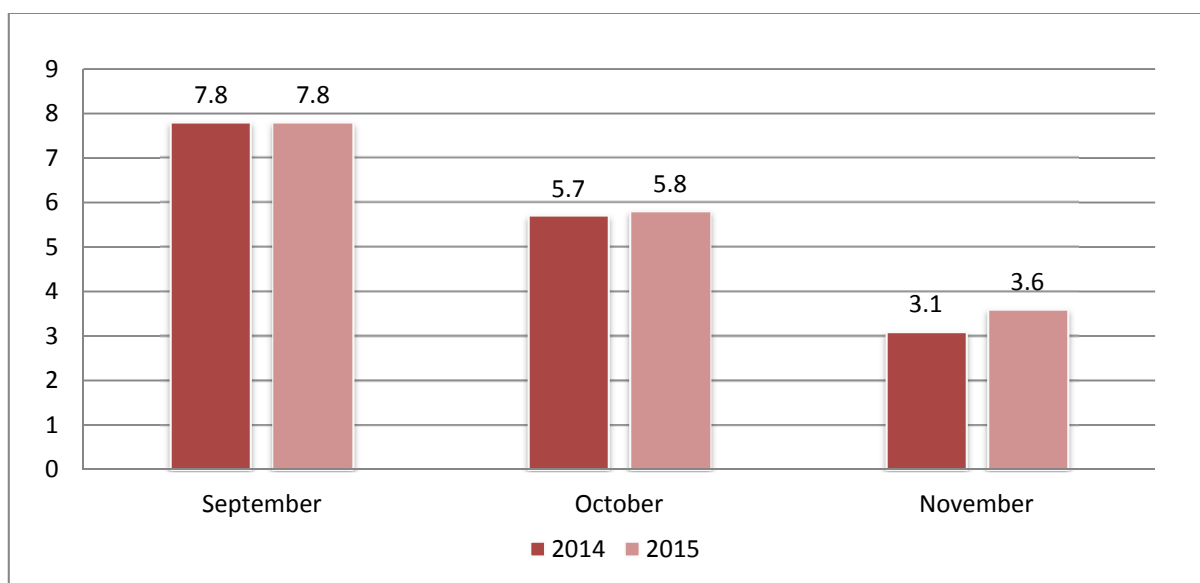
<sup>21</sup> Some of these workers also said that they worked longer hours to increase their income, alongside the need to follow instructions or orders.

<sup>22</sup> This category is distinct from the rejectors who paid for a replacement worker, referred to above in **Chapter 3**.

<sup>23</sup> This does not represent the total harvest of 3.1m MMT, as additional cotton would have been harvested by some groups who are excluded from the scope of this study (farmers, their permanent workers and family members) and by machinery.

- **Voluntary workers were significantly more productive.** There was a clear and significant differential in the amount of cotton picked per day by volunteers on the one hand, and reluctant and involuntary workers on the other (see **Graph 6**). This productivity gap increased over the period, and was at its widest during the first and second passes: in September 2014, voluntary workers were 23% more productive than reluctant and involuntary workers, and 37% more productive in September 2015; in October 2014, volunteers were 15% more productive and 36% more productive in October 2015. It is likely that this is because the main reason why individuals volunteer to participate in the harvest is to increase their incomes.
- **Workers struggled to maintain the picking quota in October and November.** Interviews conducted for the ILO indicated that seasonal cotton pickers were typically expected to pick 50 kilogrammes of cotton per day across all three passes<sup>24</sup> (see **Graph 6**).

**Graph 6: Average kilograms of cotton picked per hour, by month**



- **On average, female volunteers were the most productive pickers.** Female pickers were generally more productive than male pickers (see **Table 8** and **Table 9**), but female volunteers were the most productive category. For instance, in September 2015, female volunteers picked 8.9 kilograms per hour, compared to 5.7 kilograms an hour for male reluctant or involuntary pickers, representing a 56% increase. In interviews carried out for the ILO in 2015, it was suggested that workers of self-organized brigades were even more productive, and could pick up to 100 kilograms per day.

<sup>24</sup> This is consistent with research carried out for the World Bank, which found that pickers were encouraged to meet a quota of 50-60 kg per day (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016).

**Table 8: Number of kilograms picked per day, September (first pass), 2014 and 2015**

	2014			2015		
	Volunteers	Reluctant / involuntary	Difference	Volunteers	Reluctant / involuntary	Difference
Women	74.5	61.3	22%	71.2	53.5	33%
Men	54.4	49.4	10%	51.8	44.6	16%

**Table 9: Number of kilograms picked per hour, September 2014 and 2015**

	2014			2015		
	Volunteers	Reluctant / involuntary	Difference	Volunteers	Reluctant / involuntary	Difference
Women	8.9	7.4	20%	8.9	6.8	31%
Men	6.7	5.8	16%	6.7	5.7	18%

### 4.3 Earnings

- **Cotton pickers were paid on the basis of fixed piece rates.** On average, pickers earned 200 soums (USD 0.06) per kilogram in 2014 and 250 soums (USD 0.08) per kilogram in 2015. The majority of workers were paid on a weekly basis (87% in 2014; 81% in 2015).<sup>25</sup> The piece rate tends to be fixed across the country, but interviews conducted for the ILO in 2015 indicated that self-organized brigades had sufficient bargaining power to negotiate higher piece rates for their members. Interviews also indicated that payment systems had improved in 2014, and there were fewer delays and deductions involved in payments. If called by their normal employer, these piece rates are paid to pickers in addition to their regular salaries and stipends, (ILO, 2017).
- **Average earnings dropped by half between the first and third passes.** There is a substantial difference between workers' average earnings during the first pass, when there is more cotton to pick, compared to the third pass, when the work is harder and piece rates are considerably less attractive. For instance, in November 2015, voluntary workers earned less than half the average daily amount that they earned in September 2015 (6,300 soums / USD 1.97 and 14,800 soums / USD 4.60 respectively).
- **A number of cotton pickers were provided with at least some non-cash benefits.** However, in some cases, the value of the non-cash benefits was deducted from the wage

<sup>25</sup> According to World Bank research, farmers are said not to be involved in the payment process; rather, cotton ginnery plants (CGPs) and state banks are responsible. In one instance in Ferghana, a bank representative reportedly visited the cotton fields to pay workers directly; in Karakalpakstan, farmers reported that brigade leaders sometimes received the money and then distributed it amongst brigade members. See: Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016.



received and in general the value of the in-kind benefit was low.<sup>26</sup> During the harvest, some workers received non-monetary incentives or bonuses for high productivity: this was most commonly in the form of vegetable oil, although some pickers received electrical appliances, such as electric kettles or fans. In addition to remuneration and bonuses received for the harvest, 76% said that they continued to receive salary from their principal employment during the harvest.

**Table 10: Types of payment received by pickers**

Cotton pickers by category	Payment in cash		Payment in kind	
	2014	2015	2014	2015
All cotton pickers	80%	78%	3%	4%
Voluntary cotton pickers	84%	84%	3%	5%
Reluctant cotton pickers	72%	66%	3%	3%
Involuntary cotton pickers	77%	63%	4%	4%
Students	71%	68%	4%	2%
Pickers employed in the education sector	76%	71%	5%	1%
Pickers employed in the health sector	77%	73%	3%	2%

## 4.4 Written agreements

- **Very few pickers had written contracts.** Approximately 5% of pickers had a contract with the person who called them, and around 10% had signed a consent form that signalled their agreement to participate in the harvest. The share of students and involuntary workers who had signed these forms was around 20%.<sup>27</sup>

## 4.5 Travel

- **Average transportation time for pickers increased over the period.** For pickers who were transported to farms by bus or car, the average time for transportation was 32 minutes in 2014, rising to 39 minutes in 2015. For involuntary workers, the average time spent in buses or cars was even greater: 38 minutes in 2014, and 47 minutes in 2015. Students spent an average of 47 minutes on transport in 2014, but this dropped to 31 minutes in 2015. Conversely, average travel time for those employed in the health and education sectors increased: 34 minutes for

<sup>26</sup> The ILO monitoring report for the 2016 harvest found that, although there are specified minimum standards for wages and working conditions, their application varies: pickers working in adjacent fields often work under different conditions of employment. For instance, in some cases, deductions are made for food, but not in others. See: ILO, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> The ILO monitoring report for the 2016 harvest found that many pickers were not fully aware for whom they legally worked. See: ILO, 2017.

educational staff in 2014, rising to 40 minutes in 2015; and 36 minutes for medical staff in 2014, rising to 52 minutes in 2015. For those who travelled by foot, the average distance walked was 3 kilometres.

- **A significant proportion of pickers lived away from home in order to participate in picking activities.** One quarter of all pickers lived outside their permanent residence for an average of 27 days over both harvests (25% in 2014, 24% in 2015). This figure was significantly higher for students: in 2014, 71% lived outside their permanent residence for an average of 37 days, and 66% for an average of 36 days in 2015.

## 4.6 Health and safety

- **The results indicate that certain groups face greater health and safety risks.** According to survey results, only 0.4% of voluntary pickers sustained injuries during the 2015 harvest, compared to 1.2% of reluctant and involuntary pickers. Similarly, a smaller proportion of voluntary pickers reported a deterioration in physical health (2.4%) or mental health (1.6%) than reluctant and involuntary pickers (4.8% and 3.0% respectively) (see **Table II**). Students and those employed in the education sector were also more likely to be affected by deteriorating physical or mental health (4.3% and 2.8% in 2015 respectively). Interviews with *pakhta-shtab* and *mahalla* leaders that were carried out for the World Bank indicated that students picking cotton for the first time were more likely to get sick, as they were unaccustomed to manual labour, and the elderly were more likely to be affected by illness during the harvest (Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016). The most common illnesses reported were backache, colds, headache, allergic reactions to defoliants, and exacerbation of chronic diseases (Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016).

**Table II: Health impacts experienced by cotton pickers, 2014-2015**

Cotton pickers by category	Injuries		Deterioration of physical health		Deterioration of mental health	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
All pickers	0.9%	0.7%	4.8%	3.4%	0.7%	2.1%
Voluntary pickers	0.5%	0.4%	3.8%	2.4%	0.4%	1.6%
Reluctant and involuntary pickers	1.6%	1.2%	5.9%	4.8%	1.2%	3.0%
Students, and staff from educational facilities	1.5%	0.9%	6.6%	4.3%	1.1%	2.8%

- **The proportion of pickers who reported injuries slightly declined over the period.** According to survey results, only 0.9% of all pickers reported sustaining an injury in 2014, but this declined to 0.7% in 2015.

## 4.7 Factors influencing future recruitment

- **The survey indicates that the future recruitment of volunteers, leading to higher levels of productivity, could be stimulated by better remuneration, working conditions and accommodation.** Responses to the household survey suggest that 1.7 million people would willingly participate in future harvests under any conditions, 1.15 million would participate voluntarily if remuneration was higher, and 476,000 would participate in cotton picking if working and living conditions were improved. The data also indicates that a significant proportion (42%) of involuntary participants in the harvest were still interested in increasing their incomes, despite not being willing participants.
- **A significant proportion of rejectors indicated that they would be willing to participate in future harvests under certain conditions.** An increasing number said that they would be willing to participate if the wages were better (25% in 2014, rising to 32% in 2015), or if they needed to as a result of financial necessity (5% in 2014, rising to 16% in 2015). Of unemployed rejectors, around a third said that they would participate if there were higher wages (34% in 2014, 32% in 2015). A smaller proportion of all rejectors said that they would participate if working conditions (meals, accommodation and transport) were improved (7% in 2014, 8% in 2015). A substantial, but decreasing proportion said that they would not participate in the harvest under any conditions (66% in 2014, 44% in 2015).
- **Mechanisation plans need to take into account the fact that there are limited alternatives for income generation, particularly for women in rural areas.** In 2014, 54% of women said that they would be unable to find other work if there was no seasonal work available in cotton cultivation, dropping to 44% in 2015. By contrast, only 20% of men made a similar statement in 2014, and 22% in 2015. There was also decreasing optimism around alternative jobs, with a drop in the proportion of women and men who thought that they would earn more money pursuing other income generating opportunities (62% of women in 2014, dropping to 44% in 2015; 75% of men in 2014, dropping to 56% in 2015).



## 5. Farmer perspectives

- This chapter presents the results of the farmers' survey in 2015 and interviews conducted with farmers during the qualitative research phase.

### 5.1 Mechanisation and on-going requirements for manual labour

- **Farmers considered that there is a role for greater mechanisation in the cotton harvest, but lacked access to machinery.** The farmer survey indicated that only a very small fraction (1%) of farmers owned harvesting machinery in 2014, with an average of one unit per farm. For these farmers, this machinery met 30% of their machinery needs. Another 10% of farmers rented machinery for cotton harvesting. Farmers who owned or leased machinery said that they harvested around 40% of their crops with machinery. Around 84% of all farmers had their own machinery for weeding, which met 90% of their needs. As such, farmers continued to rely heavily on manual labour for seasonal activities, particularly picking.
- **Farmer interest in mechanisation has grown in recent years.** Farmers considered that up to 80% of picking and 74% of weeding could be carried out by machinery, but neither activity could be completely mechanised. Preferences for mechanisation were based on a belief that it is less costly, takes less time and required fewer recruited (i.e. non-voluntary) workers. Interviews conducted for the ILO in 2015 indicated that farmers have become more aware of the cost benefits; i.e. the prospects for reduced overhead costs related to wages and benefits for workers, as well as accommodation and transport. The consolidation of agricultural lands in 2009 may well be an important factor, as the use of machinery is more viable when there is more land under cultivation and it is possible to achieve economies of scale.
- **Nevertheless, farmers considered that additional expenses associated with mechanisation mean that it is only marginally cheaper than manual labour for picking.** Farmers stated that the cost of manual cotton picking was about 700,000 soums (USD 219) per hectare and the cost of mechanised picking was between 20,000 and 100,000 soums (USD 6-31) per hectare (combined estimates from ILO interviews and farmer survey). However, farmers noted that there were additional costs associated with mechanised picking, including fuel, meals for tractor drivers, pre-harvest tilling and levelling of land (to ensure that the machinery can operate at maximum efficiency). Moreover, mechanisation requires plants to be 90 centimetres apart, but farmers typically prefer to space them at 60 centimetres, as this allows them to save water and set aside extra land for higher-value secondary crops that will increase their profit margin (or help them hedge the financial risk of not meeting their cotton quota).
- **Costs associated with mechanised weeding were lower.** Farmers who owned weeding machinery incurred average costs of 50,000 soums (USD 15) per hectare. For those who leased machinery (28% of all farmers), average costs were 90,000 soums (USD 27) per hectare.
- **Many farmers are struggling to find the money to lease or purchase machinery.** Farmers tend to have insufficient funds to purchase machinery, and consider that loans or leases are not available on sufficiently favourable terms. As such, manual labour remains particularly important for smaller farmers, who are least likely to be in a position to afford to lease or

purchase machinery as a result of lower profit margins (from the qualitative survey). According to one female farmer interviewed in 2015:

*“We need machinery badly – both farmers and the population. The cost of a ‘Belarus-80’ tractor was 66 million soums [USD 20,600] in 2012; in 2014, it cost 74 million soums [USD 23,100]. We barely save the required amount and the price jumps again because of inflation. Bank loan interest rates and the cost of leasing services are too high.”*

- **More remote farms are less likely to have harvesting machinery and more likely to rely on manual labour.** The farmer survey indicated that farms located within 15 kilometres of settlements are more likely to have machinery than more remote farms, which find delivery costs for machinery to be overly high. As a result, more remote farms, which also find it most difficult to attract seasonal workers as a result of their location, are more likely to have greater need for seasonal labour during the harvest.
- **Where farmers do not have sufficient official funds to cover expenses related to machinery or wages, they may draw on ‘grey’ funds.** These funds are derived from revenues from selling animals or secondary crops; or wages funds subject to high income taxes and social deductions. Technically, it is illegal to grow alternative crops on land that is allocated for cotton cultivation; however, in practice, the authorities permit the use of 10% for vegetable cultivation provided that the farmer fulfils the quota.
- **Farmers are keen to gain better access to finance on more favourable terms.** Around half of all farmers would be willing to purchase harvesting machinery, on condition of reasonable terms and conditions for loans; i.e. around 6% interest over a term of ten years, with a warranty for the machine and service. More farmers would prefer to rent cotton harvesting machinery, at a cost of around 60,000 per hectare. Although the majority of farmers (84%) already have weeding machinery, 50% said that they would be interested in purchasing additional machinery if the terms were more favourable.
- **Farmers considered that mechanisation would help them to reduce their reliance on outside labour, but not eliminate it entirely.** Farmers believed that machinery could be used to complete around 80% of the harvest. The most common channels for farmers to learn about the GOU’s mechanisation plans were meetings at *hokimiyats* (62%), mass media (television, radio and newspapers) (27%), farmers’ councils and colleagues (28%), and machinery leasing companies (4%). Some 14% reported that they were not aware of the GOU’s mechanisation plans.

## 5.2 Farmer perspectives on seasonal workers

- **The number of pickers required by farmers during the harvest was related to the size of their land.** On average, farmers needed three workers per hectare for the first and second passes, and two for the third pass. The cost of seasonal labour during the harvest was, on average, 230 soums (USD 0.07) per kilogram, or 650 soums (USD 0.2) per hectare, with an average yield of 2.7 tons per hectare.
- **Larger farmers who were not located near rural settlements relied more heavily on additional seasonal workers provided by authorities.** About 40% of farmers mostly used workers hired directly by the farmer or by their proxy for the harvest: these are predominantly

farmers with an average farm size of 15 hectares, located near settlements with a surplus of local labour, particularly unemployed or otherwise not economically active women. These farmers tend to have higher yields, and thus offer higher potential earnings to workers, and lower expenses for transport, accommodation and food. About 60% used “recruited” (defined here as workers who are brought in from outside areas): these are predominantly farmers with an average farm size of more than 15 hectares, located more than 20 kilometres away from settlements.

- **According to farmers, local workers for the harvest were most commonly recruited by farmers themselves (28%), mahallas (22%) or presented themselves at their own initiative (18%).** Brigades accounted for 6% of local workers, and other farmers’ workers accounted for 3%. Some 28% of farmers said that they did not hire local workers. All of these workers received a piece rate in cash (from 220 to 300 soums (USD 0.07 to 0.09) per kilogram) and/or with in-kind payment of farm produce (cotton stems or other produce) or the right to sub-lease some of the farmer’s land.
- **Farmers’ requests for non-local workers during the harvest were most commonly presented to the *pakhta shtab* and *mahallas*:**
  - **First pass:** 34% of requests were submitted to the *pakhta shtab*, followed by the *mahallas* (11%), farmers’ councils (5%), public institutions (5%), other enterprises (1%) and other farmers (1%).<sup>28</sup> Some 52% of farmers said that they did not submit any requests at all.
  - **Second pass:** 27% of requests were submitted to the *pakhta shtab*, followed by *mahallas* (19%), farmers’ councils (5%), public institutions (7%), and other enterprises (3%). Some 52% of farmers said that they did not submit any requests at all.
  - **Third pass:** At this stage, slightly more requests were submitted to the *mahallas* (18%), then the *pakhta shtab* (18%), then public institutions (5%), then other enterprises (4%), then farmers’ councils (2%). Some 69% of farmers said that they did not submit any requests for non-local labour during the third pass, and 18% did not conduct a third pass.
- **Smaller farmers were less likely to ask for or receive non-local workers for the first pass.** Only 33% of farms with less than 10 hectares requested non-local workers for the first pass in 2014, compared to 55% of farms with more than 50 hectares. Similarly, only 40% of farms with less than 10 hectares received recruited workers for the first pass in 2014, compared to 76% of farms with more than 50 hectares.
- **According to farmers, public institutions were the largest source of non-local workers across all three passes.** In 2014, farmers reported that public institutions provided non-local workers for 34% of farmers during the first pass, 32% during the second pass, and 21% during the third pass. The next most important source was *mahallas* (17%, 16% and 10% for each respective pass), followed by the *pakhta shtab* and other organisations (14%, 12% and 10%), state-owned enterprises (9%, 11% and 5%), private enterprises (5%, 4% and 2%) and employment centres (1%, 1% and 1%).

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<sup>28</sup> Farmers often start their day by meeting with other farmers in the surrounding area to discuss how many people will work their land that day, and whether anyone should be relocated from one farm to another (Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016).

- **Farms with harvesting machinery had considerably lower requirements for pickers.** Farmers said that the average duration of picking for non-local workers during the harvest was 34 days on farms where machinery was not used, and 23 days on farms where machinery was used alongside manual labour.
- **Only a small proportion of farmers said that they used non-local workers for weeding.** For weeding activities, 93% of farmers said that they used only full-time farm workers, their family members or local workers. Of those who used non-local workers for weeding, 27% said that they had written agreements, mostly with representatives of the enterprise or organisation that workers came from. The duration of the weeding, earnings, transport, accommodation and meals were agreed on between farmers and workers or their representatives. Farmers disbursed cash to non-local workers approximately 40,000 soums (USD 13) per hectare on average for weeding in 2014, and their total expenses for these workers – including wages, transport and meals – were about 180,000 soums (USD 56) per hectare.
- **Only a small proportion of farmers had written agreements regarding working conditions for pickers during the harvest.** About 15% of farmers said that they had written agreements regarding working conditions during the harvest that were signed by the workers or their representatives. Of those who had agreements with local workers, 83% were verbal and 17% were written (compared with 10% written agreements for local weeders). Of those who had agreements with non-local workers, 69% were verbal and 31% were written. Some 7% of these written agreements involved the participation of one or more third parties who acted as guarantors of working conditions and wage payments, including banks, *mahallas*, farmers' councils, trade unions, the *pakhta shtab* or ginneries. In interviews conducted with farmers on behalf of the ILO, it was reported that the government had started to encourage farmers to sign contracts with their workers<sup>29</sup> and were providing incentives to formalise working arrangements by reducing mandatory social deductions from 30% to 15%.
- **Earnings and working conditions were the same for local and non-local workers, but farmers preferred to engage local workers.** Some 88% of farmers agreed that local workers worked faster and 85% agreed that cotton picked by local workers was of higher quality. This is consistent with research carried out for the World Bank, which also found that pickers from local villages pick faster than those brought in from outside areas (Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016). “Bonuses” (typically food items and consumer goods) were often given to workers who picked more than 100 kilograms per day. Outside workers are typically given some form of accommodation, often in government buildings such as schools and local colleges, and are given food three times a day (Swinkels, Romanova and Kochkin, 2016).
- **Farms mostly specified their own labour requirements, but were sometimes provided with non-local workers in excess of their requests.** Some 81% of farmers said that they specified the number of non-local workers that they required, while 19% said that the required number was specified by the *pakhta shtab*. It was usually farms located further from settlements (more than 30kms) whose requirements were specified by the *pakhta shtab*, as it was more difficult for them to attract local workers, and they were consequently more reliant on non-local workers. These farms were more likely to receive a higher number of non-local

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<sup>29</sup> The ILO monitoring report on the 2016 cotton harvest found that farmers also use the Farmers' Council to sign contracts with brigades. See: ILO, 2017.



workers from the first pass on. Remote farms were not able to refuse the provision of non-local workers, due to the lack of local labour and the risk of not meeting their quota. Farmers whose land was located close to settlements (less than 15km) were able to refuse non-local workers, because they could source voluntary labour in the local area.

- **Some farmers experienced difficulties in finding the funds to cover wages, accommodation, meals, transport and accommodation for non-local workers.** This was the case for 45% of farmers, particularly those in more remote areas (>30kms from a settlement). In such cases, farmers relied on alternative sources of funding to cover the expenses, including: the sale of vehicles, livestock or crops (29%), family savings (29%), loans from banks or ginneries (6%) or loans from individuals at 5% monthly interest rate (3%).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Note that farmers could select more than one option here, so the total adds up to more than 100%.



## Conclusions and recommendations

- This research provides an important new statistical picture of the seasonal workforce in Uzbek cotton cultivation and greater insight into how the recruitment process affects the risks of forced labour. Whilst this presentation of emerging trends should be treated with caution, given the relatively short time frame under consideration (2014-2015), it is hoped that this research will be elaborated on in future studies and will support the GOU's on-going efforts to develop more closely targeted and effective measures to eliminate the risks of coercion in cotton cultivation.
- Overall, the results suggest that recent interventions of the GOU, the ILO and others are having a positive impact and beginning to bear fruit: important progress has been made in reducing the risk of coercion in the use of seasonal labour in the cotton harvest. Significantly, over the period in question, there was a clear increase in the proportion of workers who participated in the harvest on a voluntary basis, and a decrease in the number of students and staff from medical and educational facilities who participated in the harvest. This was also accompanied by a significant increase in the number of individuals who felt empowered to refuse to participate ("rejectors"), and an increase in the proportion of rejectors who experienced no negative consequences as a result of this decision.
- Nevertheless, despite these promising signs of positive developments, there is clearly scope for further progress to reduce the risks of coercion in recruitment for work in cotton cultivation, as the survey results indicate that the risk of forced labour in Uzbekistan remains a concern. There was a decrease in the proportion of reluctant workers from 2014 to 2015 (-9.1%), meaning that a significant proportion of workers shifted into different categories from one harvest to the next. This led to an increase in voluntary participation (+6%), but also an upswing in involuntary work (+3.2%), particularly amongst students and those employed in the health and education sectors. Despite a decrease in the number of students and those employed in the health and education sectors who participated in the 2015 harvest, cotton cultivation remained heavily reliant on the participation of these groups, as they still comprised nearly a quarter (23.4%) of all seasonal workers in the harvest.
- Encouragingly, survey findings indicate that it could be possible to eliminate involuntary participation altogether, without needing to resort to full mechanisation. This research suggests that the voluntary workforce could be increased significantly with the introduction of improvements to wages and working conditions: responses to the household survey suggest that 1.7 million people would willingly participate in future harvests under any conditions, 1.15 million would participate voluntarily if remuneration was higher, and 476,000 would participate voluntarily if working and living conditions were improved. This is relevant given that estimates of the total labour force required to pick the manually-harvested cotton quota – assuming average daily picking rates between 50-100kg and between 30-40 days worked during the season – range from 700,000 workers to 1.8 million workers. Even the higher input requirement could be met without recourse to involuntary labour if labour market mechanisms could effectively attract – and retain – workers in cotton harvesting tasks.
- Wide scale mechanisation is likely to have particularly negative implications for rural households, for whom seasonal work in cotton cultivation represents a critical moment to generate additional household income in the context of otherwise scarce rural employment opportunities.

- Improving labour relations and working conditions in the sector should be considered an important element of the modernization of the agricultural sector and a pathway to sustainable development in rural areas. Better wages and working conditions will lead to higher levels of voluntary participation (including on remote farms), which will, in turn, have important knock-on effects for farm level productivity, as well as household incomes in rural areas. Both household and farmer survey results indicate that productivity is likely to be significantly higher if farms can use voluntary labour only: in some cases, voluntary workers were more than 30% more productive than involuntary or reluctant workers. However, there may be a role for increased mechanisation for more remote farms, given that these farmers find it more difficult to attract voluntary local workers, and are more likely to rely on workers who need to be brought in from other areas.
- Understanding and recognizing forced labour in the Uzbek context requires ongoing dialogue and cooperation, as well as strategically focused capacity-building and awareness-raising activities. Collaboration between different actors can help to identify the most appropriate safeguards and how they should be applied. Comprehensive and robust measures are required to change widespread and entrenched systems that have been in place for many years.

### ***Recommendations: A vision for Uzbek cotton***

The GOU has already started to take important steps towards creating protective frameworks for the employment of seasonal workers in cotton and, importantly, for reducing the risk of forced labour and child labour. In particular, the Decent Work Country Programme for Uzbekistan has proven an important vehicle for cooperating and making progress on recruitment and working conditions in the cotton harvest. The recommendations provided here take progress to date into account and offer suggestions for further consolidating and strengthening this reform process. Many of the elements mentioned here are already integrated into the GOU's National Action Plan to Modernise Agriculture and Improve Working Conditions (2016-2018).

The recommendations in this section are primarily targeted at seasonal workers in cotton cultivation, but should be applied to temporary agricultural work more broadly. They could be piloted (in full or in part) in selected locations as part of the Government of Uzbekistan's on-going cooperation with the ILO and the World Bank. In particular, these recommendations could be taken into account in discussions regarding the pilot intervention scheduled for 2017-2018, which the ILO is developing in conjunction with the tripartite constituents in order to test approaches to reducing the risk of forced labour in the cotton harvest.

#### ***1. Streamline, clarify and formalise framework for recruitment and employment***

Decision-makers responsible for the cotton sector as a whole – and for harvesting more specifically – stand to benefit from more clearly articulating its recruitment and employment model. The findings from this research indicate that there is currently a multiplicity of recruitment channels, many of which do not reflect a standard employment relationship of employer and employee, leading to a degree of complexity that creates on-going risks of coercion for certain workers and impedes efficiency and productivity. Where clearer relationships are formed and recognized between worker and employer, the worker can more effectively discharge his or her responsibilities to the employer, and the employer exercise his or her responsibilities under law. What is required is therefore continued simplification of recruitment and employment practices. This presents a positive

opportunity for all parties to reframe cotton sector employment in a modern, professional context, amenable to investment and assisted by a suitable labour relations framework based on ILO Conventions 87 and 98<sup>31</sup>.

It is of principal relevance to identify an overarching objective – as part of the on-going modernization and professionalization of the sector – of streamlining, formalising and clarifying the number of recruitment channels used to match labour demand with supply. This means both regulating and formalising the role played by key actors involved in labour market intermediation, including the Farmers’ Council, the Women’s Committee and *mahallas*. Accompanying this, there should be a reduced role played by heads of enterprises and colleges, who are currently responsible for recruiting a high proportion of involuntary labour.

A key constraint on progress is that, as long as a worker engaged in cotton harvesting does not know the identity of the legal person responsible for their employment – the employer – this worker cannot effectively assert his or her employment rights granted under law. This is also an effective restraint on the impact of any ‘awareness-raising’ on responsible recruitment practices, where the ultimate source of responsibility for employment remains unknown. Currently, many pickers are not fully aware of who is responsible for their work when they are in the fields (ILO, 2017).

A longer-term goal should be to develop and put in place a form of accreditation of recognized, responsible recruitment intermediaries: this could include, but would not be limited to, a greater role for the National Employment Service (which currently plays a very limited role in the recruitment of seasonal labour). This would help to ensure that the onus for accountability of lawful and professional employment practices lies with the employer rather than the employee. Registration would require all recruiters to demonstrate compliance with a code of conduct consistent with ILO standards (including a no-fee provision).

## **2. Foster greater ownership of recruitment and employment functions by farmers and their representatives**

Given the challenges for individual farmers to assume full employment responsibilities, the Farmers’ Council can play a fuller role as the contracting party for recruitment and employment. Recent monitoring by the ILO (2017) suggests that the Farmers’ Council may already be taking on a greater role in recruiting workers; this could be formalised in order to provide more clarity on roles and responsibilities.

Parallel efforts should also be made to increase opportunities for farmers to engage labour directly. Building on the knowledge base built in this work, and recent World Bank surveys, it is important to identify barriers for farmers to recruit and retain seasonal labour in a direct employment relationship. The administrative impediments could be addressed through the development by the MOL of standard, short-form contracts to be used for the engagement of seasonal labour.

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<sup>31</sup> ILO Convention 98 Article 4: “Measures appropriate to national conditions shall be taken, where necessary, to encourage and promote the full development and utilisation of machinery for voluntary negotiation between employers or employers’ organisations and workers’ organisations, with a view to the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by means of collective agreements.”

### **3. Support Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as key actors in rural labour provision**

Another means to create clearer frameworks for recruitment and employment is to support the development of private actors in the rural economy, with particular attention to the role of women.

The emergence of informal mobile 'brigades' provides an opportunity to support the development of MSMEs in rural areas to become functioning, viable economic entities. Immediate support needs to find ways to formalise and strengthen the functioning of these brigades. One option is to develop a pro forma short-term contracting document which would enable the brigade leader to contract directly with workers, essentially forming a micro-labour provider. Strengthening the mobile brigades would also have a positive impact on productivity, as the workers in these brigades are recognized as being amongst the fastest and most skilled pickers.

The mobile brigade model can be scaled up beyond cotton production, to other agricultural activities and construction / rural infrastructure. Upskilling these brigades and their leaders, who are predominantly female, would be one way to mitigate the impact of increased mechanisation on women, who currently represent a high proportion of cotton pickers. It is thought that women may find it more difficult to transition to jobs that involve harvesting equipment maintenance and operation as, according to gender norms, these jobs are typically considered more appropriate for men (Swinkels, Romanova, and Kochkin, 2016). Training of brigades and their leaders could provide women with business / entrepreneurial skills, as well as technical skills. This could be included within the framework of a proposed project with the World Bank to strengthen the role of women in rural areas (2016-2021).

### **4. Strengthen market and institutional mechanisms to link labour demand with supply**

It is recognized that the rural labour market in Uzbekistan functions inadequately, particularly with regard to labour inputs in cotton harvesting. Bottlenecks in skills matching between supply and demand need to be identified on a sub-regional basis, and opportunities for online platforms to match offer and demand for rural labour should be explored. This could include better provision of accurate, real-time labour market information by recruiters, including through use of mobile technology.

Where supply fails to meet labour demand through market mechanisms, it is also necessary to look at the effectiveness of incentives; principally, wages and working and living conditions for pickers (see below).

Where wages are determined solely by piece rates, and piece rates cannot deliver at least the scheduled minimum, this raises challenges of both legal and economic magnitude. Legal, because minimum wages need to be achievable through payment of piece rates under international law; economic, because this suggests that employer-employee interests are poorly aligned, counterproductive to high levels of either quality or efficiency.

Vitaly, the survey's findings suggest that, by enhancing wages and working conditions for cotton picking, the full harvest labour requirement can be met without recourse to forms of involuntary labour. In order to further develop understanding of how the cotton harvesting labour market can be optimised, the Uzbek government could focus its research efforts on an analysis of the elasticity of labour supply. This work would serve to ascertain the wage level required to stimulate full and voluntary labour supply. The World Bank and the ILO are well positioned to support a

comprehensive analysis of wage elasticity in rural labour markets, and to derive key policy implications, including for national or sectoral minimum-wage setting through tripartite consultations or through institutions for collective bargaining as set out in fundamental ILO Conventions 87 and 98 ratified by Uzbekistan. Boost incentives to work in the cotton sector, including review of worker compensation strategies

Cotton has on-going potential to drive significant value-added through the Uzbek economy, stimulating investment in higher-value manufacturing exports and contributing effectively to an upgrading and diversification of the economy as a whole.

As with agricultural sectors elsewhere, however, economic sustainability for Uzbek cotton means establishing a sector that appeals to the next generation. An appeal grounded in civic duty needs to be replaced by a positive economic rationale. Put simply, an important part of reducing the risks of coercion in seasonal labour involves making agriculture a more attractive prospect for current and future generations of workers. This includes adequate remuneration (see below), and better living and working conditions.

Increasing agriculture's attractiveness to workers is particularly important in the context of Uzbekistan's stated objectives to introduce increased mechanisation, which will mean fewer jobs for higher-skilled, more motivated workers, who will work in combination with strategic investments in mechanisation, and harvesting technology in particular.

This implies the need to develop the local talent pool for cotton sector employment – to create local labour markets where skills are developed and rewarded over multiple seasons, where return rates (and hence productivity) for seasonal workers are higher, and where non-farm employment opportunities and social protection systems provide the means to sustain rural households through the year.

The findings from this research indicate that involuntary participation increases during second and third passes, when the work is more demanding and it is more difficult for workers to make up the minimum wage via piece rates. The introduction of daily rates for second and third passes (e.g. guarantee that all workers will receive at least the equivalent of the national minimum wage) or higher piece rates would help to make the second and third pass more attractive for workers, and make farmers less reliant on involuntary or non-local labour for this stage of the harvest.

These issues are most acute where piece-rated wages are set too low to function as a market mechanism to attract and retain labour, further exacerbating mismatches between labour supply and demand. In the absence – or anticipation – of a move away from piece rates, further research could seek to analyse and correlate cotton increases to picker wage rates with the market price for Uzbek cotton lint.

The low level of cotton-picking wages is likely an impediment to investments in productivity enhancements throughout the sector, as short-term labour-cost savings are perceived to outweigh the longer-term dividends of productivity-led investment. The challenge for Uzbek agriculture is to move from a low-wage, low-productivity business model, to a sector characterized by higher levels of efficiency, quality and innovation, and accompanying higher rates of return to labour.

Furthermore, supporting improved income-earning opportunities in rural labour markets can deliver important multiplier effect for broader local economic development, serving to boost new forms of rural micro-enterprise, particularly in service sectors. These macro-economic gains can further serve to offset the costs of improvements to wages and working conditions.

Wage enhancements for rural workers can also be sustained by empowering the development of rural micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), building on the model of the 'brigades' formed by predominantly rural women. This may serve to equalize the bargaining power between labour supply and demand. Fairer wages for seasonal workers may also go some way to addressing the gender wage gap for women, who comprise the majority of seasonal pickers.

## **5. Introduce safeguards and remedies for categories of vulnerable workers**

As a corollary of measures to encourage greater voluntary participation, safeguards must be introduced for categories of workers who are most vulnerable to coercion: the research clearly indicates that students, staff from medical and educational facilities are more likely to participate on an involuntary basis than others. This may include, for instance:

- Targeting awareness raising activities at these groups, including awareness of the right to refuse to work and how to contact the MOL and FTUU hotlines, with consideration given to the 'hubs' or 'nodes' where their recruitment is concentrated – this could include, for instance, more posters and banners in colleges, universities and medical facilities;
- Eliminating the role of heads of colleges and enterprises in recruitment; and
- Training for other recruiters (e.g. Farmers' Council and *mahallas*) with respect to these groups.

However, it is very important that any measure to reduce the participation of certain vulnerable workers does not intensify the risks of coercion for others. For instance, in 2015, there were fewer students who participated in the harvest, indicating decreased recruitment focus on this category in general, but this may have resulted in greater pressure on those who did participate, as there was an increase in involuntary participation and hours worked amongst students in general in 2015.

## **6. Focus on labour productivity**

The survey shows that poor wages and working conditions are an impediment to attracting workers into seasonal labour. The survey also shows that involuntary participation leads to lower productivity. There are very real productivity gains associated with paying better wages and providing better working conditions to attract more voluntary workers, as they exhibit significantly higher levels productivity.

Mechanisation is clearly seen as an important part of the productivity equation in Uzbekistan; however, handpicking will still be required and should be recognized as providing important on-going support for rural livelihoods. Increased levels of mechanisation should be prioritised for more remote farms that find it more difficult to attract workers, and currently have lower levels of mechanisation.

There are also opportunity costs involved in civil servants and students picking cotton; even where this happens on a completely voluntary basis, they are being allocated away from more productive activities. If Uzbekistan is to reach its goal of achieving upper middle-income status by 2030, it will need to optimise its use of human capital within the economy; i.e. put everyone's talents and skills to best use. Current arrangements are an obstacle to optimal human capital development.



## **7. Support rural communities to sustain dynamism of rural labour markets**

Involuntary labour is most commonly deployed where local labour is not available, and particularly in more remote locations. This implies a need either to increase or substitute local labour supply in these regions: the former would entail policy measures to incentivise rural households not to re-locate; the latter would imply either incentivising and supporting increased mobility of pickers' brigades between rural areas (rather than transporting often reluctant urban populations to rural areas), and/or that mechanisation should focus on the most remote locations where labour is in least supply. Increasing the mobility of rural workers need not be solely the responsibility of farmers: for instance, local authorities and farmers' councils could support the provision of better worker accommodation in more remote locations.

There is a pressing need to provide better employment and income-earning opportunities for vulnerable rural populations, particularly through the winter months. Basic income is a problem for rural populations, and many face difficulties in meeting basic household needs. In this light, and recognizing the need to develop a stronger framework for the implementation of all elements of a Social Protection Floor in Uzbekistan<sup>32</sup>, seasonal agricultural work could form part of a national public employment guarantee scheme for rural households. Seasonal agricultural work would provide income-generating opportunities in the summer months, followed by alternative (non-farm/off-farm) income-earning options and/or skills development programmes in winter months. This programme would target those who need additional income (i.e. the unemployed, underemployed, poor), but would still need to provide sufficient protective safeguards and incentives to reduce the risk of coercion.

## **8. Build capacity of actors at all levels**

There is a clear and on-going need to continue to build the capacity of actors who play different roles and exert different kinds of influence over recruitment and employment practices in cotton cultivation, from national policy-makers through to actors at the local level. In its monitoring report on the 2016 harvest, the ILO (2017) has noted that, while ministries and accredited organizations are increasingly aware of the forced labour issue and are taking steps to increase their capacity, knowledge often remains theoretical and has yet to influence the operational behaviour of officials.

There is scope for a national strategy on training and capacity building that targets the following groups:

- **Policy-makers:** Key decision makers in cotton production need to have more technical assistance and training regarding the implementation of international labour standards.
- **Recruiters:** Information and training should be provided to recruiters (*mahallas*, managers, heads of colleges) on labour law, decent recruitment practices, and how to avoid the risks of coercion in the recruitment practice. (Training modules could be developed and piloted to form part of a future registration scheme.)
- **Monitors:** Provide training for national monitors and the labour inspectorate, including how to identify indicators of coercion in employment, how to engage with workers and ensure confidentiality, and how to escalate concerns.

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<sup>32</sup> See: UNDP/CER, 2014.

- **General public:** The Uzbek authorities (especially the labour inspectorate) and the FTUU should continue awareness raising activities amongst the general population regarding workers' rights in seasonal agricultural work, including the right to refuse to participate. This should take into account the findings of this research with respect to the most effective dissemination channels, and recommendations for strategic targeting of vulnerable categories (see above).
- **Tripartite social partners, including MOL.** Support should be provided to increase the effectiveness of the FBMs operated by the MOL and the FTUU. Public confidence in both mechanisms is crucial and needs to be bolstered, through enhanced clarity over the respective roles of the FBMs, and further attention to their transparency and accountability. The current government reforms in wage-determination systems, with the strengthening of tripartite consultation mechanisms, should be supported.

### **9. Continue to monitor developments and trends over time**

Finally, it is important to continue the household surveys (as commenced for this research) over time in order to monitor the impact of new government policies and projects on the development of responsible recruitment and employment practices in the cotton sector.

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## Annex: Methodology

This annex provides a detailed description of the methodology employed for the qualitative and quantitative research.

### Qualitative research

- The qualitative research consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with heads of local government (*hokimiyats* and *mahallas*), farmers, workers, heads and teachers of colleges and universities, doctors and nurses from medical facilities, employment services and others. In total, 2015 individuals were interviewed, including 70 IDIs. Interview questions focused on the recruitment practices and seasonal work in the 2014 cotton harvest.
- Interviews were carried out in Fergana and Syrdaria provinces and the Republic of Karakalpakstan from 15 February to 30 May 2015. The selection and sampling methods of regions, districts and *mahallas* were decided jointly by the ILO and its local consultants. ILO experts participated in the data collection for this stage of the research.
- The purpose of the qualitative research was to provide a deeper understanding regarding the operation of agricultural labour markets, and to generate further information regarding the nature, dynamics, characteristics and possible evolution of recruitment practices and working conditions in agriculture in Uzbekistan, with a specific focus on the cotton industry. The aim was to understand supply and demand in the labour market for temporary jobs in cotton production, taking into account plans for mechanisation. This information then informed the design of the quantitative phase of the research, particular the development of the typology of voluntary, reluctant and involuntary workers.

### Household surveys

- The household surveys were based on a probabilistic sampling methodology that would provide results at national level, particularly across the different categories of worker in the typology.
- Surveys were carried out in 3,500 households, and their members aged 18-50 years. The survey asked a number of questions regarding different aspects of individuals' experience of seasonal work in cotton production: the recruitment process, working conditions, and their plans for the following harvest. It included a separate section for those who were called but did not accept work.
- Confidentiality for respondents was ensured by excluding any personally identifiable information from the dataset. The enumerators were instructed to make sure that the respondent understood their freedom to refuse to be interviewed or to refuse to answer any question.

### Sample design

- The target population for the household surveys was the civilian population aged 18 to 50 years old. Certain groups were excluded: people doing their military service (0.2% of the adult population); people imprisoned before trial and conviction (0.3% of the adult population); and people working abroad as of 2 April 2014 (approximately 3 million or 14% of the adult population). This means that this survey covered around 85.5% of the population.
- Filter questions were designed to limit the surveys to households in which at least one member had either participated or been asked to participate in seasonal work in cotton production.

- The sample was stratified by region. There were 14 regions for stratification, including Tashkent as a separate region. Within each region, the sample was further stratified by five urbanisation levels (under 10,000; 10,000 to 49,000; 50,000 to 99,000; 100,000 to 499,000; over 1 million<sup>33</sup>), creating 50 strata in total. The sample was distributed across the 50 strata in proportion to the number of individuals aged 18 to 50 years old, which was determined using data from the State Committee on Statistics.
- The framework for selecting primary sampling units (PSUs) was the list of 15,054 *mahallas* (urban and rural neighbourhood committees). This list was obtained from the State Committee on Statistics in 2010. *Mahallas* have clear permanent borders that do not overlap. Their size ranges from 500 households in rural areas up to 2,000 in major cities. PSUs for each stratum were selected according to probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling. In total, 125 PSUs were selected across all strata.
- The average size of a household was 5.5 persons: 4.5 in a city, and 6.5 in a rural area.

### **Selection of households and respondents**

- **Selecting households:** Interviewers were provided with specific geographic starting points (houses / buildings on specific streets). With their back to the starting point, the interviewer placed his / her back to the main entrance of the structure and then moved three households to the right and then attempt contact with the inhabitants. This household is then considered the main sample household. The interviewer was then required to visit the main sample household up to three times at different times of the day, days of the week and the weekend, in order to conduct the interview. If it was not possible to obtain an interview at the main sample household, the interviewer would move to the immediate right of the main household as the first substitute, or the immediate left as the second substitute. Where both substitutes failed, the interviewer would select another main household by continuing with the three-household interval.
- **Selecting respondents:** Once the household was selected, the interviewer asked whether there were members of the household aged 16 or over and permanently living in that household. If there was more than one qualified respondent, the interviewer surveyed each household member who was available.

### **Timing**

- The household surveys were carried out at two different times of the year (August to September 2015 for the 2014 harvest – i.e. one year on; March to April 2016 for the 2015 harvest – i.e. six months on), which may have some bearing on the accuracy of results, particularly in the case of the 2014 harvest.

### **Farmer survey**

- Interviews were carried out in August and September 2015 with 420 farmers. These farmers were selected from 64 rural PSUs,<sup>34</sup> by reference to the level of mechanisation of their operations and the size of their land; and, for those farmers who used manual labour only, their distance from rural settlements. Interviews at farms were carried out with farmers or their representatives.

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<sup>33</sup> No cities in Uzbekistan fall within the size range 500,000 to 999,999.

<sup>34</sup> As the full list of farms at the national level was not available for sample design, the research team randomly selected 60 rural PSUs, and 7 farms per PSUs. The 7 farms were selected according to their level of mechanization and land size.



## Where to get more information

This report was prepared by the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (**FUNDAMENTALS**) within the Governance and Tripartism Department

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The text of the ILO standards against forced labour can be found at: [www.ilo.org/normlex](http://www.ilo.org/normlex)

Additional resources, including information about recent developments, research policies, legislation and good practices regarding combating forced labour can be found through the ILO web portal on forced labour at: [www.ilo.org/forcedlabour](http://www.ilo.org/forcedlabour)



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