

Forum : Citizen's forum of Labour

2026

Theme : Empowering the youth to drive/ thrive/ embrace and match the requirements of the future labour market

Name of the citizen : Keano Van Uythem

Family situation ☐ Married / dating ☒ Single ☐ With kids, if so how many ____	Education level ☐ Primary ☒ Secondary ☐ University
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1. How are you concerned by the subject?

My name is Keano Van Uythem, I am in my twenties, and I work as an agricultural employee and distillation operator on a small, family-owned rose farm in the Isparta region of southern Türkiye. My region is the global center for rose cultivation, supplying a significant portion of the rose essential oil used by the international luxury perfume and cosmetics industry.

My daily work is split between hand-picking flowers in the fields in the early morning and helping during the steam distillation process to get the essential oil. Farming plays a vital role in the Turkish rural economy: according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, agriculture accounts for roughly 15% to 18% of total employment in Türkiye. Thousands of young workers and families in our region rely directly on this harvest for their livelihood.

However, in my opinion, the position of my colleagues and me is very insecure. The rose harvesting season is only a few weeks in late spring (May to June). Placed at the mercy of nature, our income varies from one year to the next. Apart from a few weeks of hard work, most of us are unemployed.

According to the ILO and TurkStat, most seasonal agricultural workers in Türkiye are engaged in informal employment, representing over 80% of agricultural workers in the country. This means that most of us do not have access to social security and health care throughout the year. Moreover, working conditions in fields are associated with significant physical demands, extreme temperatures, and high-pressure distillation machinery.

2. What do you suggest on your scale ?

From my perspective on the ground in Isparta, I do not believe that strict regulations are the answer. Imposing excessive fines or unmanageable costs on small farmers would only push the sector deeper into informality or force family farms to close, leaving many workers unemployed.

To improve our working conditions while preserving the local economic state, I propose several priority actions for the forum. First, the government and the corporate end of the supply chain (specifically the global luxury cosmetic brands that buy our oil) should co-fund a subsidized rural social protection fund. This system would provide year-round healthcare coverage for seasonal labourers and anyone involved in the production chain without adding extra pressure on small landowners with extra costs. Additionally, providing direct subsidies for safety equipment, such as PPEs (Personal Protective Equipment) for harvesting and thermal processing, along with training programs for seasonal workers operating distillation machinery, would help small farms cover essential expenditures without increasing their financial burden. Furthermore, establishing a regional fair wage framework for seasonal pickers, paired with standardized, digital-friendly contracts, would help formalize employment terms across the board. Finally, introducing state-run and ILO-endorsed vocational training programs would allow rural workers to gain expertise in distillation mechanics, farming, and processing machinery, offering them a path to year-round employment with local agribusinesses.

In summary, I advocate for a realistic and fair approach: protecting the health, dignity, and income of agricultural workers is important, but it must be accompanied by financial and technical support for small family farms to secure social and economic stability across our regions.