

HR RESEARCH SERIES 2026 - REPORT R20 OF 10 (EXTENDED)

# Seasonal & Contingent Workforce Planning 2026

Strategies for retail, logistics, hospitality, and agriculture, hiring at volume, at speed, with consistent quality.

Seasonal and contingent workforce management sits at the intersection of volume hiring, compressed timelines and unit economics where every day of delay or unfilled shift has direct revenue impact. Retail peaks, logistics surges, hospitality seasons and agricultural cycles create predictable, high-volume hiring needs that organisations routinely manage less well than their scale and predictability warrant.

**4.2M**

seasonal jobs filled annually across European retail, logistics, hospitality

**6 weeks**

average lead time needed for a successful seasonal campaign

**31%**

lower hire quality when campaigns start <4 weeks before need

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The best seasonal hiring programmes share three characteristics: they plan 10-12 weeks ahead of peak, they invest in candidate experience and employer brand within their target talent pool year-round, and they use technology designed for volume and speed rather than precision selection.

## Planning the seasonal hiring calendar

Sector	Peak period	Ideal start	Common start	Fill rate gap
Retail (Christmas)	Nov 15 - Jan 5	September 1	October 15	94% vs. 72%
Logistics / e-commerce (Q4)	Oct 1 - Dec 31	August 1	September 15	91% vs. 69%
Hospitality (summer)	June 15 - Sept 15	March 1	May 1	88% vs. 74%
Agriculture (harvest)	Crop-dependent	10-12 weeks prior	4-6 weeks prior	82% vs. 61%
Events (festival season)	May - September	February 1	April 1	90% vs. 71%

## The seasonal talent pool, year-round relationships

- **Alumni programme**, keep previous seasonal workers in a comms list, first offer before external advertising, 38% fill rate from returners achievable.
- **Social media presence**, Instagram and TikTok aimed at the 18-25 casual talent pool throughout the year.
- **Student union and FE college partnerships**, reliable pipeline for each peak.
- **Employee referral for casual workers**, current casual staff refer friends, EUR 50-100 incentive at completion.
- **Community presence**, local charity sponsorship, events, employer brand in the local community.

## AI for seasonal screening, configuration

Seasonal AI screening must be configured differently from professional hiring. The competencies that predict seasonal worker success are reliability, attitude, and flexibility, not experience or qualifications.

Screening signal	Relevance for seasonal roles	AI configuration approach
Previous similar experience	Medium, useful but not essential	Weight lightly, don't screen out without it

Screening signal	Relevance for seasonal roles	AI configuration approach
Availability match to shifts	Very High, critical	Hard filter, remove candidates unavailable
Reliability indicators (previous tenure)	High, length of previous jobs	Positive signal for jobs lasting full contract
Local geography	High, commute affects reliability	Radius filter, adjust for transport access
Application quality and engagement	Medium	Time to apply, completeness, spelling as attitude proxy
References from previous casual work	High when available	Prioritise returners with positive reference data

## Candidate experience at scale for seasonal roles

**The most important seasonal candidate experience moment is the first day. Seasonal workers who have a good first day experience have 78% lower no-show rate for subsequent shifts. Investment in day-1 welcome (manager introduction, buddy allocation, clear briefing) pays back in reliability throughout the peak season.**

## Agency vs. direct for seasonal roles

Factor	Agency	Direct hire	Hybrid (both)
Cost per hour worked	Higher (15-30% markup)	Lower	Intermediate
Lead time required	2-4 weeks	8-12 weeks	Plan 8-12, agency for late demand
Candidate quality control	Delegated to agency	Fully controlled	Agency for surge, direct for core
Flexibility for demand changes	High	Low	Best of both
Employer brand in casual market	Agency hires are their brand	Your brand, direct impact	Mixed brand signal

## Technology for seasonal hiring

Need	Solution	Cost	Impact
High-volume application processing	AI-native ATS with semantic screening	EUR 948/yr (tenperzent)	86% faster screening

Need	Solution	Cost	Impact
Shift availability matching	ATS-integrated availability form	Included in modern ATS	Eliminates scheduling mismatches
Bulk candidate communication	SMS + email automation	Included in modern ATS	Mass comms with personalisation
Onboarding documentation	Digital onboarding portal	EUR 200-500/yr	2 days admin per hire eliminated
Re-hire alumni management	Talent pool in ATS	Included	38% fill rate from returners

## Forward outlook 2026-2030

EU Platform Work Directive reshapes contingent worker classification in 2026, AI scheduling enables just-in-time seasonal hiring by 2027, cross-employer reliability scoring (with consent) by 2028, and by 2030 labour market platforms let seasonal workers manage availability across multiple employers in a marketplace model.

**Built for what's next.**

tenperzent.com is the AI-native ATS designed for European hiring in 2026 - GDPR by default, EU AI Act compliant, free to start, €79/month to scale.

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