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By Fred
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Calls for seasonal visas to tackle HGV driver shortage



Logistics UK urges government to introduce seasonal visa for European HGV drivers as well as funded driver training to help combat crisis

Logistics UK is pressing the government to introduce a seasonal visa to allow European HGV drivers to work in the UK and help protect the nation's supply chains while the DVSA catches up with a backlog of driver tests.

More than 45,000 HGV driving tests are currently outstanding due to Covid-19 lockdowns, and this is contributing to an acute shortage of UK delivery drivers. As a result, there have been reports of fresh produce being dumped or left to rot in cold stores, while supermarket shelves and restaurant plates go empty.

The government this year tripled the size of its Seasonal Workers Pilot to 30,000 and Logistics UK called for the logistics sector to be treated in the same way since the food production and logistics sectors "work hand in hand".

"During the Covid-19 pandemic, understandably, all driving tests were suspended, leaving a huge backlog of potential drivers wishing to enter the logistics industry," explained chief executive David Wells.

"At the same time, 79,000 European logistics workers returned to their home countries – and this, combined with an existing shortage of more than 76,000 HGV drivers has meant that haulage firms are now struggling to recruit new drivers."

He added that the problem will be exacerbated by summer holidays for drivers who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic.

"Our members urgently need drivers to be available now," Wells said. "Without this temporary cover, there is a very real risk to the availability of the food and other vital items on which we rely during the summer months."

DVSA estimates that it can undertake 118,000 HGV driver tests in the remainder of 2021, but it will take months to catch up with all the outstanding examinations.

Even before the loss of EU workers, the logistics sector was suffering from a chronic shortage of drivers, and Wells said the government should also implement funded training to "open the industry up to as many people as possible" and "attract a new generation of drivers and other employees to the sector as older personnel retire and leave the industry".

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