

IMMIGRATION

Seasonal migrant workers not finding jobs in Lleida fields

The situation in the Baix Segre, Lleida caused by a massive wave of immigration in search of work on the fruit fields has grown unstable. The number has already reached four hundred, according to police, the majority of them sub-Saharan. Frequently, they arrive only with what they are wearing and soon find themselves in what would be considered here as precarious living conditions. Worst of all, the possibility of them finding work is next to nil, Lleida government official José Flores told *La Vanguardia*. This is not, however, the first time that this has happened, and measures by the Catalan government and fieldworkers unions have done little to get the message across that, once again, in Lleida there will not be work for everyone this year. Many of the seasonal arrivals have already been settled in the area for weeks without finding work. Nowadays farmers plan far in advance, requesting as many workers they need ahead of time, and the fieldworkers union (Unió de Pagesos, UP) facilitates the hiring in the emigrants' country of origin. The UP foresees giving work to over 3,600 temp workers in Lleida for this year's harvest. Over half of them have been hired in Romania, and the rest were either contracted in Colombia or Morocco. This harvest will see a drop in production by 20 to 25 per cent, UP representative Joan Josep Vergé told *La Vanguardia*.



FRANCO PLAQUES

Fatxa symbols begone!

For decades Franco-era symbols throughout Catalonia have continued to irritate barely healed wounds. A community located in Sant Feliu de Llobregat has decided to take action to finally rid themselves of the painful markers. Ciutadania.cat has called on the removal of 67 Franco symbols remaining in the city. Its members put special emphasis on the plaques of the former National Housing Institute placed on subsidised buildings from the fifties, sixties and seventies. The group invokes a bill approved in Council in 2001 saying that Franco plaques should be removed.

LANGUAGE

Petition to Ireland over rejection of Catalan

The president of the association JN Roca i Farreras, Enric Padrosa, sent a letter yesterday with 6,000 signatures to the Irish Consulate demanding that Catalan be recognised in the EU treaty. The petition showed the support of 53 different organisations. Associació JN Roca i Farreras has requested that it be sent to Irish president Mary McAleese, to make her well aware of the "deep dismay" that is felt by Catalans over the refusal to include Catalan as a language of the EU, whose president, Pat Cox, is Irish. Padrosa emphasises the importance of Irish-Catalan solidarity.



DRIVING

Driving licenses to be revoked after twelve strikes

After twelve points against them on the traffic record, drivers will have to go take the exam all over again. Some new rules, already being implemented in other parts of the world, have been added to list such as no driving while chatting on mobile phones or without buckling up. Once both the written and practice parts of the driving test is passed, drivers will be subject to a psychophysical examination and will have to take a driving sensibility course. Only then will drivers gain the four points necessary to obtain a new license.



Bargain hunters eagerly await their big moment — the opening of the Corté Inglés for a winter sale / Mireia Sabartés

“Shop till you drop”: summer sales set to begin 1 July in Catalonia

Consumers who know a few basic ground rules can avoid headaches

ROBERT KIMPLETON

If you find yourself in or near any shopping centres or department stores on 1 July prepare yourself for an onslaught of bargain-hunting shoppers madly dashing from shop to shop looking for the best bargain. If you count yourself amongst those who plan to take advantage of the July-August sales, knowing some of the basic regulations that merchants have to follow might save you an unpleasant surprise or two.

The legal period for summer sales in Catalonia is from 1 July to 31 August. Items which are usually discounted are clothing and footwear and accessories, although you will find a variety of other items on sale from appliance and electronics to sporting equipment. Discounts typically start at about 10% in July and can get as low as 50% in August.

The objective and rationale for summer sales is to sell off all merchandise that was not bought during the regular shopping season.

Seasonal sales are not to be con-

fused with liquidation sales, which occur when a business is closing down and needs to get rid of all stock, or special offers, which might be used to promote a new product.

Summer sales merchandise should be in normal condition and of normal quality. Merchants are not allowed to use summer sales to get rid of damaged or inferior goods.

Goods on sale must have a price tag with both the regular and reduced price clearly visible. Stores must also have enough stock on hand to last throughout the sale period. Also, if a store normally accepts credit card payment for goods they must also accept them during sales without any additional charge.

Clothing items must indicate what materials items are made of as well as washing instructions. Consumers should check that all zips work and that no buttons are missing, and be on the lookout for any other signs that damaged items have been mixed in with regular merchandise.

When buying appliances or electronic goods, check the date of manufacture as a way of ensuring that there will be an adequate supply of spares should the item need repair. Manufacturers are required to make replacements for their goods available 5 years after the date of manufacture, and the store must give and stamp guarantees during sales periods just as during the rest of the year.

Of course, shoppers should keep all receipts and chargeslips to return or exchange defective goods. Merchants have to make exchanges for defective items, but not in other cases unless they have announced otherwise. If a shop accepts returns during the year they must also accept them during sales periods.

Most consumer organisations advise summer shoppers to make a list of what they intend to buy before leaving home so as to avoid impulse buying. It is wise not to buy too much on the first or second day of the sale period.

Catalan Tourism Department plans to create tourism observatory

Barcelona's Department of Commerce, Consumption and Tourism will create a tourism observatory to consolidate all the different data routinely collected from the sector with the eventual objective of devising a tourism strategy for Catalonia. A preliminary report on the new strategy is expected by March 2005.

The director of the department, Isabel Galobardes, has announced that in order to be able to prepare a Tourism Plan for Catalonia, it will be necessary to have all the necessary

data from all the relevant social and academic sectors.

She made this announcement after attending a meeting at the Forum with tourism officials from different Spanish autonomous communities. She commented that between January to May the number of tourists visiting Catalonia increased more than had been predicted. "Not only did we meet our objectives but we also surpassed the expectations of those who were expecting a good season", she said.

On the negative side, she mentioned that there is also a change afoot in the systems of commercialisation of the tourism industry in which travellers wait until the last minute to make reservations, which makes it hard for tourism operators to plan ahead.

In April, however, she had commented to PR Newswire, a news agency, that the presence of discount tour operators such as First Choice could have a positive impact on Catalan tourism.