

Migrant workers and vulnerable employment: a review of existing data

A project undertaken by Compas for the TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment

Background

In 2007 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) established the Commission on Vulnerable Employment (CoVE) to examine the causes of, and solutions to, vulnerable employment. CoVE estimates that around 2 million workers in the UK are in vulnerable employment, defined as 'precarious work that places people at risk of continuing poverty and injustice resulting from an imbalance of power in the employer-worker relationship'. Among groups of workers who are at greater risk of vulnerability according to this definition are migrant workers.

Focus of research

This project investigates the extent of and conditions relating to vulnerable employment for recent migrant workers who have arrived in the UK within the last 10 years. It compares data from smaller-scale regional/local datasets with data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Workers' Registration Scheme (WRS). The indicators of vulnerable employment chosen for the project selected from indicators set out by CoVE are:

- Pay – below minimum wage, unfair deductions, illegal retention of wages and holiday/sick pay entitlements
- Hours – e.g. evidence of under-employment or excessive hours worked without payment
- Insecurity – e.g. lack of a written employment contract, temporary employment unfair dismissal or with no notice, payment of wages in cash, lack of a national insurance number or not being registered on the WRS
- Accommodation – e.g. unfair deductions for employer provided accommodation, restrictive/poor quality conditions

Aims

- to explore discrepancies between smaller datasets and the LFS, and, where appropriate the WRS. We hope to make some inferences about the scale of anticipated under reporting of vulnerable work for migrant workers with respect to these two datasets.
- Using the small scale but more detailed datasets to explore the relation between personal risk factors (language, age, gender, immigration status) and working in vulnerable employment to understand what conditions allow vulnerable employment to exist. This is supplemented by case studies provided by agencies.

The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform public opinion and contribute to policy debates on migration.

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Methods

The project analyses data from 1) two large scale national datasets – the LFS and WRS; 2) six smaller scale datasets of recent migrant workers relating to Birmingham and the West Midlands, and parts of the East of England and East Midlands and 3) one database (Kalayaan) relating to an employment sector that is strongly associated with vulnerable employment – domestic labour.

Datasets

- The Labour Force Survey (LFS) – a quarterly sample survey of households living at private addresses in Great Britain, designed to collect labour market information. Despite limitations of coverage for undocumented and short term, mobile migrants, it is the most comprehensive national and regional data source on migrants' labour market experiences between census counts. This project involves original analysis of the July-September quarter of the 2007 LFS.
- Workers' Registration Scheme (WRS) – designed to cover nationals of A8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) who have taken up employment (excluding self-employment) in the UK for at least one month since May 2004. The data for this project come from both the Accession Monitoring Report June 2007 and from additional and updated information supplied from a series of Freedom of Information requests.
- The West Midlands migrant worker survey (WMS) 2007 – migrants arriving in Britain from 2001 onwards, largest national group Polish, followed by Indian, Pakistani and Slovakian.
- The TUC Midlands Survey (TUC) 2007 – people of Polish nationality seeking advice on employment and welfare rights in the Birmingham area.
- Gangmasters Licensing Authority Register (GLA) - Sub-sample of labour providers in agriculture, horticulture, shell fish and associated processing and packaging industries in the UK since 2005 in the West Midlands and East of England in the GLA register
- Mobile Europeans Taking Action database (META) – recorded phone calls from May to November 2007 from migrants seeking advice on employment, housing and welfare issues in the East of England. Largest national groups Polish and Portuguese.
- Advice for Life database (AFL) – people seeking advice on employment, housing, immigration and welfare between 2005 and 2007 in Cambridgeshire, 50% of whom were A8 country nationals.
- Eastern European Migrants Advice Committee database (EMAC) – migrants from Eastern European countries seeking advice on employment and welfare rights from July 2007 to March 2008 in the Derby area, the majority of whom were of Polish origin.
- Kalayaan – records of living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers between 2006 and 2008 mainly in the London area, who have entered the UK with an employer and most of whom are on a 'domestic worker' visa. Largest national groups are Indians followed by Filipinos.

Work in progress

Analysis of datasets has been completed and the writing of the report is underway. The final report of the research will be published on the CoVE website by Autumn 2008.

Publications arising from or drawing on this research include:

Anderson, B. and Jayaweera, H., *forthcoming*. [Migrant workers and vulnerable employment: a review of existing data](#)

TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment (2008) [Hard Work, Hidden Lives: the full report of the Commission on Vulnerable Employment](#). London: TUC

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Researchers: Dr Bridget Anderson – bridget.anderson@compas.ox.ac.uk
Dr Hiranthi Jayaweera – hiranthi.jayaweera@compas.ox.ac.uk