

# What choices and constraints do undocumented migrants experience in the labour market?

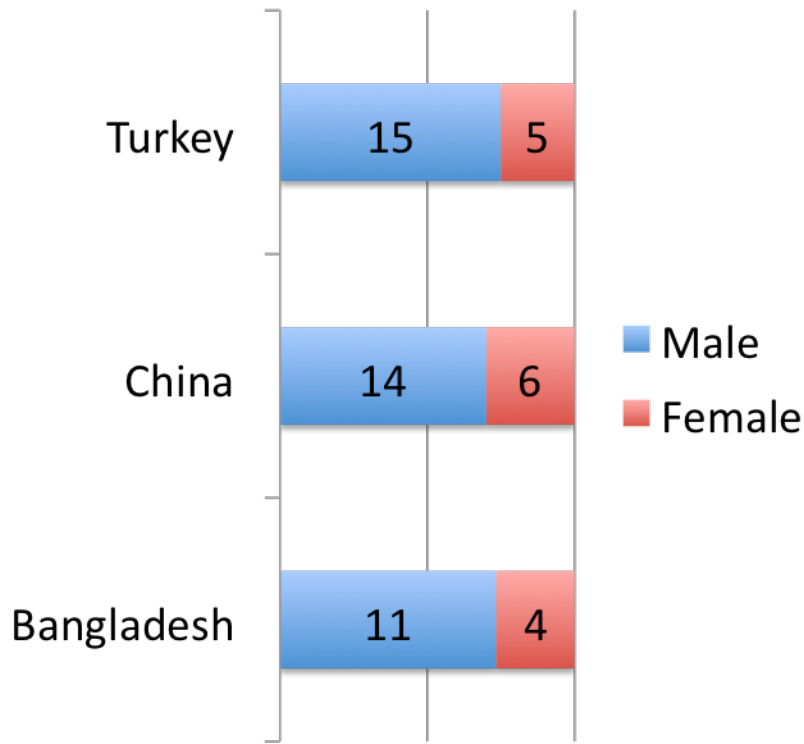
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*'Undocumented Migrants, Ethnic Enclaves and Networks: Opportunities, traps or class based constructs?' (ES/I037490/2), can be found at [www.UndocNet.org](http://www.UndocNet.org)*

*The research was carried out with Professor Sonia McKay and Dr Leena Kumarappan (WLRI London Metropolitan University).*

## Methods, Fieldwork and Sample

**Figure 1 Profile of Sample,  
Base number = 55**



- Qualitative Interviews
  - Two study populations
- Networking and snowball techniques from multiple starting points
- Indicative quotas

## Figure 2: Constraints

Types of Work e.g. sectors, jobs

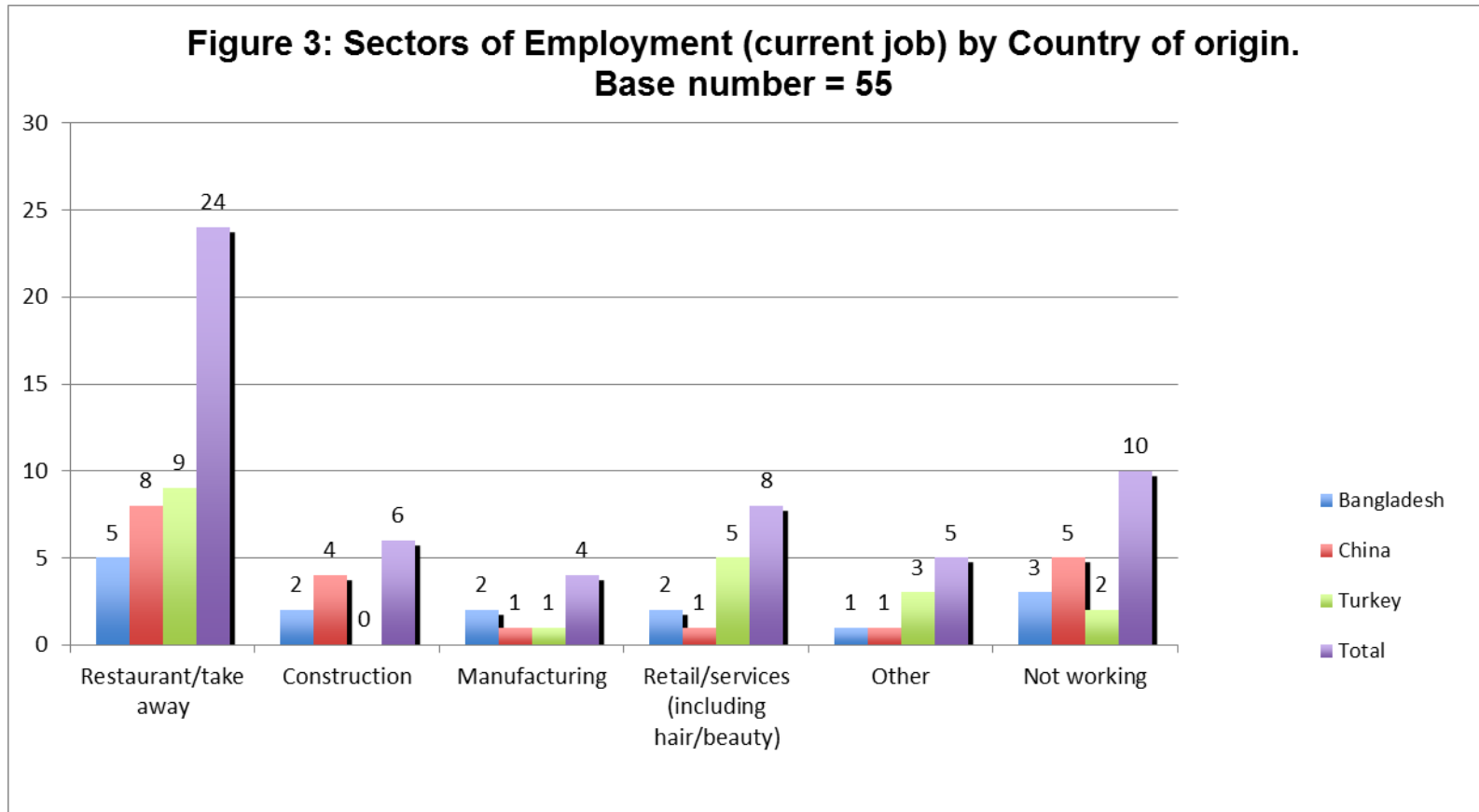
Precarious work and its consequences e.g. working conditions, lack of recourse

Workplace relations e.g. discrimination, bullying

Skills and language e.g. English language

# Current Employment Sectors

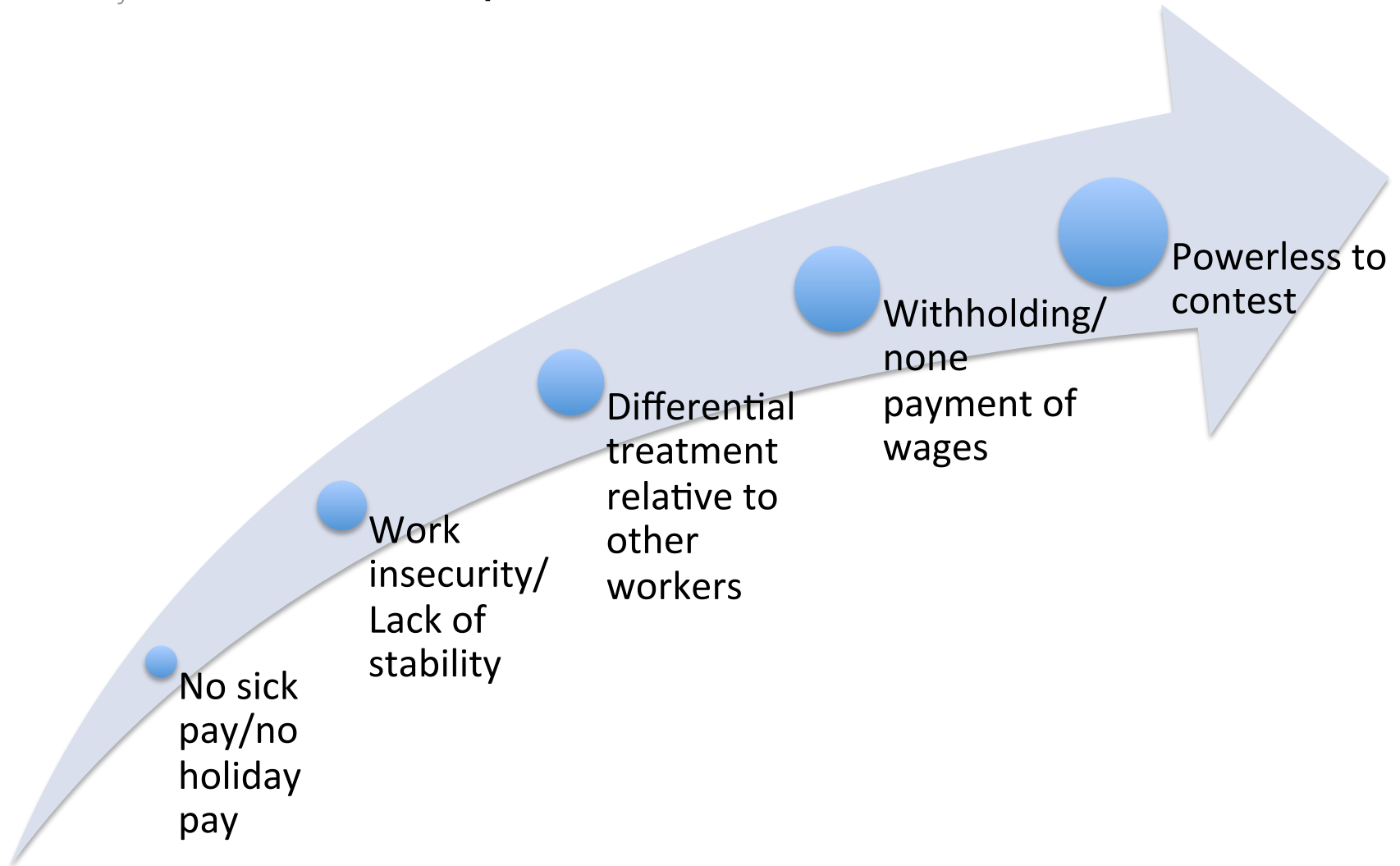
**Figure 3: Sectors of Employment (current job) by Country of origin.  
Base number = 55**



## Awareness of limitations and what's possible

- ...if you had residential status, you can find a job in Chinatown...[one]...that is *stable and long term*. But without residential status, I can't be a restaurant chef. I may work in a restaurant, but *I can't be the chef* (Bobby, from China, Male, 31 years old).
- if you are in the Turkish community...you can find a job it might be a simple non-skilled job but you can find it even if you are illegal... It is hard maybe *impossible to find a job at foreign workplaces* (Shivan, from Turkey, Male, 28 years old).
- I was new to this country. *I spoke no English*; and I knew nothing about this country. So all I could do was try somewhere where Mandarin Chinese was spoken. (Guang, from China, Male, 42 years old).

# Precarious Work and its Consequences: Main dimensions



# Workplace relations

- **Discrimination**
  - They discriminated...OK I do not say the status is the only problem...The conflict between Alevi and Sunni Kurd might also be the reason [but] due to status, they knew I would not go anywhere to look for my rights (Zilan, Kurd from Turkey, Female, 33 years old).
- **Threats**
  - He said I did not have status or work permit he said he would report me to the police (Zana, Kurd from turkey, Male, 55 years old).
- **Bullying**
  - I am tired of the infighting between people from different hometown origins. Those guys who think they have been here longer often bully the newcomers (Cheung, from China, Male, 48 years old).

## Figure 4: Choices

Electing to move jobs e.g. personal reasons, training and skills, money

Electing to stay in a job e.g. feel safe, working with friends

Geographical mobility e.g. social networks

Other choices e.g. documents, disclosure

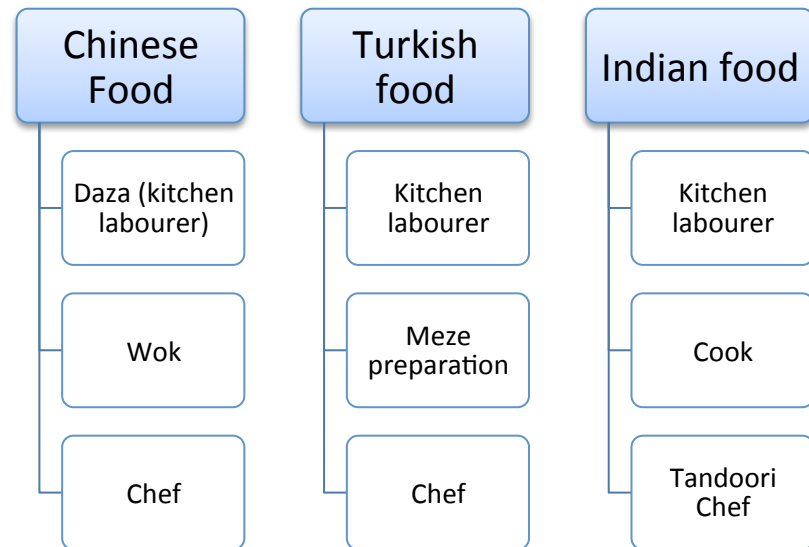


...after a month...[I]...learnt the skill for taking care of the oil-wok...I'd go to find another job to use my newly acquired skills fully (Cheung, from China, Male, 48 years old).

You always start with washing dishes... You clean around...mopping around... you bring the stuff to the cook...(Jiyan, Kurd from Turkey, Male, 44 years old).

I got a better job as a cook... increase your demand, go to different restaurants...Within the first three months, I became a cook from a kitchen porter...I was promoted...(Soumen, from Bangladesh, Male, 37 years old).

**Figure 5: Routes to progression in food preparation**



## Staying in a Job

- I stayed there for so long partly because my close friends were also working there. I was happy working alongside my friends. You'd feel some degree of comfort working with your close friends in the same place... We used to say that we'd put up with it [low wage] even though we knew full well that the wages were low...(Chow, from China, Female, 27 years old).
- I feel safe at work (Reyan, from Turkey, Female, 32 years old).

# Geographical Mobility

- **Networks**
  - In Scotland...They pay you good...I used to get £480...Here now I get £350...Scotland is very far...You feel isolated... There are always just a few Turks around. With these Turks, I also do not have same common political deeds so you cannot be friends (Jiyan, Kurd from Turkey, Male, 44 years old).
  
- **Money**
  - You do not have many expenses outside London. You do not pay for the food...You do not pay rents as the accommodation is always provided by employers outside London...You do not go anywhere. I mean club or pubs or even restaurants. so it is advantageous to work outside London if you want to save money (Hasan, Turkey, Male, 34 years old).
  
- **Safety**
  - I worked in the countryside. I have never worked in Chinatown. We only find work in the places that [we consider to be] safe (Fung, from China, Female, 25 years old).

## Other tactics

- Using or not using documents
  - I won't do that. That would be breaking the law (Lok, from China, Male, 46 years old).
  - You know there are agencies in [place name] they can make various documentation. If we get really desperate for work...we go and see the agencies and they can organise papers for us and do the negotiations with restaurants you have to pay them money £150, £200, £500. They take what they can get away with (Nasar, from Bangladesh, Male, 30 years old).
- Disclosing status or not disclosing status
  - ...he does not even know I do not have documents... I think even if I tell him, I am illegal... he will not fire me...but then he will say OK come and work 6 days for me...he will try to misuse my status (Deniz, Kurd from Turkey, Male, 31 years old).

## Figure 6: Hazy areas of choices / constraints

Compliance and acceptance e.g. low pay, poor terms and conditions,  
do not complain

Workplace relations e.g. try to be liked

## Reflections on key points

- Experiences often presented as relational
- Understanding of vulnerabilities and constraints but also choices
- No one experience of the labour market – variable and complex
- Policy will not stop migration, or the employment of workers without the correct documentation, but will further entrench marginalized workers in the most precarious and unregulated parts of the economy.