

## **Migrants' vulnerability to exploitation in the work place**

The Immigration Act 2016 exacerbates an already dire situation for migrants in the UK, particularly undocumented migrants, by making them feel unable to report exploitation in the work place and instilling the fear of detention or deportation. It does so by creating a new offence of illegal working, which could lead to a twelve month prison sentence with an unlimited fine for anyone found working without a work permit.

Furthermore, the Act grants immigration officials with powers to seize property and earnings, to close down businesses, to enter and search properties. These searches will undoubtedly focus on small size ethnic businesses, which have already been the target of repeated raids in areas of London where migrant communities live. The Elephant and Castle area, for instance, has seen a huge increase in raids during recent years. These are small businesses which are less able to deal with the additional burden of carrying out and recording frequent and complex immigration checks.

The Act also introduces tougher sanctions for employers who employ undocumented migrants. Employers of such workers will be in a position to exert enormous power over migrants with no entitlement to a work permit.

These measures create a climate of suspicion and mistrust, which in the long term break down communities and work against the community cohesion, so crucially important to a diverse city like London.

The presence of a diverse and dynamic migrant population in London presents major challenges to the government's aim of simplifying and 'toughening up' immigration control.

However, London is a city built on migration, as well as a capital city, in which its policy makers can to some extent choose how to respond to the national immigration and asylum agenda. The London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) in particular is well-placed to develop a cohesive and forward-looking strategy for maximising the benefits and addressing the challenges faced by migrants in the capital. It is possible that the strategies adopted for London will inform strategies pursued in other parts of the UK, addressing the demands and needs of new arrivals.

Migrants working illegally in the UK are already at risk from deportation and it is unlikely that these harsh new measures will impact on the numbers of migrants arriving in the UK. We seriously doubt that these measures will be effective in reducing immigration according to the government's plan. They will instead have the effect of further weakening the trust of migrant workers towards public authorities.

## **Migrants' vulnerability to homelessness**

Migrant homelessness is likely to increase as a result of the measures put in place by the Immigration Act 2016. First of all, the Act cuts support for asylum seeker families who have had their claim rejected but who are unable to leave the country.

Secondly, landlords across the country will be liable for a fine or up to five years imprisonment, if they let a property to a migrant who is not entitled to a 'right to rent'. The over-complicated immigration checks that landlords have to abide by in selecting tenants, will result in a deterrent to them signing tenancy agreements with people, who may look or sound foreign. This will make finding accommodation a much harder task for migrants and will drive many into homelessness or at best into the hands of rogue landlords who will use the situation to abuse and exploit them.

Access to some public services is limited for migrants depending on immigration status. Thus, welfare support, social housing and free secondary health provision are restricted for those who are not settled.

Migrant workers have limited entitlement to public funds, and therefore limited access to housing and other welfare benefits, until they acquire residency status.

London has some of the highest housing costs anywhere in the world. At the same time the social housing sector has shrunk considerably over the years. The capital has a need for extra housing supply arising partly from net migration, but also from natural growth and a decrease in average household size. However, controversies about migration and housing have tended to focus on the allocation of social housing to migrants. In this sector the demand for housing is substantial. However, the roots of the problem stem from housing policy changes in the quantity and tenure of social housing built, along with the general policy focus towards home ownership like the starter-homes initiative and the right-to-buy.

London should lead the way on making a case for progressive policies on immigration in the UK. Problems in London's labour and housing markets cannot be solved through immigration restrictions. Development of local immigration enforcement in London should be scrutinised. London's migrant strategy should be informed by migrants.

The shortage of affordable housing should be addressed through a housing strategy. Restricting migrants' access to welfare and social housing has only compounded the deficiencies in the labour market by forcing migrants to work and live under poor conditions.

Finally, migrants and immigration should be a central part of the policies that are decided at the London level, and especially the strategic plans which are the responsibility of the GLA. It is critical to involve migrants themselves in developing the city's policies on immigration.