What is the picture now?

We know that limited access to good immigration advice will exacerbate hardship across many other areas of people’s lives and impact connected sectors that many funders support. For example, about 50% of London’s rough sleepers are non-UK nationals[[1]](#footnote-2); and in some inner London primary schools, 10% of pupils are from families with no recourse to public funds[[2]](#footnote-3).

It’s estimated that 18% of the workforce in the UK is made up from migrants[[3]](#footnote-4) and recent [research](https://youngfoundation.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Rights-and-Risks-Migrant-labour-exploitation-in-London-Final.pdf?x11317) commissioned by the Mayor of London and carried out by The Young Foundation and Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX) show that migrants workers in London report abuses and exploitation, often with limited knowledge or understanding of their employment rights or how to seek advice and support when they are infringed. The report also details that:

* Racial abuse of migrant workers with derogatory terms and slurs used
* Migrant workers experienced significant issues with pay with many receiving a lower rate than promised, incorrect deductions and unclear payslips
* Highly qualified migrant workers felt compelled to accept unskilled work with many working in those roles too afraid to speak up or seek formal support about their employee rights[[4]](#footnote-5)

This isn’t the only report that has exposed the levels of exploitation across the capital. In Autumn 2022, a [report](https://trustforlondon.org.uk/research/perspectives-of-migrant-workers-from-turkey-in-londons-labour-markets/?_ga=2.108983425.2078526759.1701251156-502286286.1696421635) from the Refugee Workers Cultural Association found that the Turkish and Kurdish communities showed that “many respondents had a severe lack of knowledge of basic worker rights, and often limited English, meaning they are vulnerable to exploitation and unable to look for work elsewhere”. 40% of respondents were unaware of key rights such as sick pay and pay on Christmas, and 45% faced problems from their employer, most commonly missing wages or discrimination. Alongside this many workers are low and underpaid paid with the average worker surveyed receiving £8.33 an hour, below the minimum wage and some workers receiving as little as £3 an hour.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Analysis by Work Right Centre has found that the Home Office system prioritises immigration over workers’ rights. The report ‘[Systematic Drivers of Migrant Worker Exploitation in the UK](https://www.workrightscentre.org/news/report-the-systemic-drivers-of-migrant-worker-exploitation-in-the-uk)’ states that “migrant labour exploitation risks turning into a national crisis, unless changes are urgently made to the immigration and labour enforcement system.” They go on to state that due to visas been linked to employers, with only 60 days given “vulnerable migrants are being forced by their sponsors to accept exploitative work conditions due to the short time frame, high cost, and administrative difficulty involved in changing jobs.” They go on to recommend that the government reforms the immigration system to end employer sponsored visas, strengthen the protections of workers and appoint a Migrant Commissioner to lead on the development of a Migrant Worker Welfare Strategy.

What can funders do?

The London Mayor has called for “decisive and urgent action” to support migrant workers in London who are facing employment rights violations and exploitation. Following the commission of the report he stated: “This report commissioned by City Hall has uncovered shocking evidence of exploitation of migrant workers across London – consistent with modern slavery. Migrants being subject to long hours with no pay and abuse such as racial slurs is the opposite of everything our city stands for. It is abundantly clear from the report that migrant Londoners also face too many barriers to access the advice and support they desperately need to safeguard them from exploitation and help them to work in dignity.” Following this the Mayor has pledged £750,000 investment into “City Hall’s funding to provide specialist services to ensure the most vulnerable migrant Londoners can access their rights and the support they need.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

The [report](https://youngfoundation.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Rights-and-Risks-Migrant-labour-exploitation-in-London-Final.pdf?x11317) also states that “there is a need for all actors to collaborate to build rights awareness” and that “funders and commissioners should invest in long-term unrestricted funding for advice and support organisations.” Alongside this call funders and commissioners have also been recommended that they “should invest in infrastructure support and innovation for the sector”, which could include mapping for referral pathways or co-designing with migrant workers for a tech based solution to help direct people to advice.

Our [Funding Strategy for Immigration Advice](https://londonfunders.org.uk/resources-publications/publications/strategy-funding-immigration-advice-london) in 2021 states how funders - whether they currently fund advice - or not, can contribute to change. Calling on funders to ‘act collaboratively’ to “reduce the pressure the sector” with six recommendations from “investing in sector infrastructure to co-ordinate partnerships and networks” to “building advocates for access to justice by investing in the leadership of people with both lived and technical experience.”

Further reading

Funding Strategy for Immigration Advice, London Funders - [Funding Strategy for Immigration Advice](https://londonfunders.org.uk/resources-publications/publications/strategy-funding-immigration-advice-london)

Mayoral press release, Mayor of London - <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-announces-ps750000-new-funding-support-migrant-workers-report-reveals-shocking-levels>

Rights and Risks: Migrant labour exploitation in London, Young Foundation - <https://youngfoundation.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Rights-and-Risks-Migrant-labour-exploitation-in-London-Final.pdf?x11317>

Low pay, long hours and labour exploitation, Trust for London - <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/news/low-pay-long-hours-and-labour-exploitation-life-as-a-turkish-migrant-worker-in-north-london/>

Perspectives of migrant workers from Turkey in London's labour markets, Trust for London - <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/research/perspectives-of-migrant-workers-from-turkey-in-londons-labour-markets/?_ga=2.113111943.2078526759.1701251156-502286286.1696421635>

Perspectives of migrant workers from Turkey in London’s labour markets, RWCA - <https://tfl.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Perspectives_of_migrant_workers_in_Turkey_on_Londons_labour_markets.pdf>

News article, Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/14/migrant-workers-face-exploitation-as-result-of-post-brexit-scheme-says-report>

The systemic drivers of migrant worker exploitation in the UK, WoRC - <https://www.workrightscentre.org/news/report-the-systemic-drivers-of-migrant-worker-exploitation-in-the-uk>

1. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/rough-sleeping-london-homelessness-chain/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://londonfunders.org.uk/latest/news/funding-immigration-advice-why-we-think-it-so-important> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-labour-market-an-overview/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-announces-ps750000-new-funding-support-migrant-workers-report-reveals-shocking-levels> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/research/perspectives-of-migrant-workers-from-turkey-in-londons-labour-markets/?_ga=2.108983425.2078526759.1701251156-502286286.1696421635> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-announces-ps750000-new-funding-support-migrant-workers-report-reveals-shocking-levels> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)