

APPENDIX 1.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

This report is based on data collected between June 2020 and July 2021 via a mixed methods approach. It is the result of a joint initiative between FLEX and two grassroots trade unions, UVW and IWGB. The project was developed in response to Covid-19 with the aim of fulfilling two purposes: increase the capacity of UVW and IWGB to respond to an increased demand for support, and document the impact of Covid-19 on workers in high-risk sectors. It funded additional casework hours for each union as well as the collection of data as part of this casework. Further data collection was conducted by FLEX in the form of focus groups and interviews with workers and interviews with relevant organisations, such as migrant community groups, homelessness charities, women's organisations, law centres and other frontline service-providers.

Quantitative data was collected by trained caseworkers at IWGB and UVW using an online survey, which included questions about access to employment rights and social protections in the context of Covid-19. Qualitative data was also collected through this survey via short 'case notes' providing additional information to supplement or clarify the quantitative data. Each survey response is a separate case. The survey was also shared by the unions with their broader membership, allowing for responses from participants who are less likely to meet with caseworkers, such as those classed as self-employed. In total, this report is based on 337 responses, with 297 cases completed by case workers and 40 direct responses from members. The data was cleaned to remove incomplete forms, duplicates, and responses from sectors that are not traditionally considered low-paid, such as solicitors. Of these responses, 296 were from non-UK nationals, 37 were from UK nationals and four were from dual UK and non-UK nationals. The majority (68%) of UK national respondents were from a Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background, including Black (57%), Asian (25%), mixed/multiple ethnic groups (14%) or from another minority ethnic group (4%). Further qualitative data was collected through approximately hour-long semi-structured interviews with three caseworkers, one branch chair, one branch support officer and one organiser. The aim of these interviews was to understand the general trends that caseworkers and other union officials were seeing during the pandemic. The interviews were conducted between December 2020 and April 2021.

As with any methodology, there are some limitations affecting our quantitative data that should be noted for an appropriate interpretation of the findings. First, because most of the survey respondents were union members seeking advice, the sample cannot be seen as representative of all IWGB and UVW members. The data will have a skew towards those members who have experienced issues at work, as they are the ones most likely to have contacted the union for support. In addition, those members who have experienced issues at work during the pandemic are more likely to independently fill in the survey than those who have not. As a result, the data should not be used to present conclusions about the proportion of union members experiencing issues at work during the pandemic. What the data provides is significant evidence of the types of problems workers in high-risk sectors were experiencing during the pandemic, prompting them to seek support via grassroots trade unions, as they are often not in contact with mainstream services.

In 2020, only 16.5% of employees in elementary occupations were trade union members.¹ This percentage is even lower in many of the sectors represented in our sample, such as Administrative and Support Service Activities (which covers cleaning), where only 11.8% of the workforce are union members, and in Accommodation and Food Service Activities, where only 4.3% are.² The level of unionisation among individuals that end up in exploitation in the UK is extremely low³, indicating that though our sample has experienced high levels of labour abuses, they are less likely to be experiencing severe labour exploitation, such as offences that fall under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. In addition, they are more likely to have access to information about their rights at work and mechanisms by which to exercise those rights than others in low-paid and insecure jobs.

Finally, trade union members, especially those who can be supported through the casework service, are also more likely to be ‘employees’ with the full spectrum of employment rights under UK labour law, rather than ‘workers’ or self-employed, who have considerably fewer rights. ‘Employees’, as opposed to workers and the self-employed, face fewer barriers to organising and seeking out support, which explains their prevalence in our sample but also has implications for our findings as those with few or no rights, and higher levels of insecurity, are less represented. The same logic goes some way to explain why most of our respondents have indefinitely leave to remain or enter – and therefore have recourse to public funds – rather than limited leave or an irregular immigration status: union membership among migrants in the UK is generally lower than for the general population, and membership rises as time spent in the UK increases⁴.

Table 1. Survey sample by employment status.

Employment status	N	%
Employee	284	84
Self-employed	22	7
Worker	19	6
Not sure	10	3
No response	2	1
Total	337	100

¹ UK Government, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), [Trade union membership, UK 1995-2020: Statistical bulletin](#), 2021.

² *Ibid.*

³ Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), [Risky business: Tackling exploitation in the UK labour market](#), 2017.

⁴ Rhys Davies, Stephen Drinkwater and David Owen, [Trade union membership among the migrant community](#), WISERD Research Note 3, 2016.

Table 2. Survey sample by immigration status

Immigration Status	N	%
Indefinite leave to remain or enter, including Settled Status	211	63
British citizenship	56	17
Limited leave to remain, including student visa, dependent visa, Pre-Settled Status	44	13
EU national without Settled or Pre-Settled Status	23	7
Prefer not to say	1	0.3
Don't know	1	0.3
No response	1	0.3
Total	337	100

Table 3. Survey sample by no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition

NRPF Condition	N	%
No	276	82
Not sure	35	10
Yes	25	7
No response	1	0.3
Total	337	100

At 63.1%, most of our sample works in cleaning, with the next largest sectors being security at 6.8% of respondents and hospitality at 5.3%. Cleaners are more likely to be classed as 'employees', which again goes some way to explain why they are overrepresented in our sample compared to workers in sectors like hospitality or the courier and logistics sector, where it is more normal to be classed as a 'worker' or as self-employed. Cleaners tend to have more than one job, often working short shifts for multiple employers, which increases the chances of needing support.

Finally, the majority (61.7%) of respondents are Latin American, as the two unions largely organise and support migrant workers from this community. As Latin American migrant community organisations have long upheld, this group of workers experiences vulnerabilities that are specific to their background compared to other migrant groups.⁵ Many have first settled in Southern European countries like Spain, Portugal and Italy before migrating onwards to the UK, mainly to London, to escape unemployment and poverty resulting from the 2008 financial crisis.⁶ Half of onward Latin American migrants in London work in contract cleaning, one third has more than one job, three-quarters earn less than the London Living Wage, and 45% have experienced exploitation at work.⁷ As onward migrants, many have dual nationality from an EU country (ibid.) which, together with the relatively high number of respondents with British citizenship (20.9%), may explain the low number of respondents

⁵ Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK (CLAUK), *Unequal impact? Coronavirus and BAME people*, 2020.

⁶ Nahir de la Silva, Lucila Granada and Dolores Modern, *The unheard workforce: Experiences of Latin American migrant women in cleaning, hospitality and domestic work*, London: Latin American Women's Rights Service, 2019.

⁷ Cathy McIlwaine and Diego Bunge, *Towards visibility: The Latin American community in London*, 2016.

with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Overall, 81.4% of respondents either had indefinite leave to remain, including Settled Status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), or British Citizenship, meaning the survey sample includes a high number of people with full entitlement to social protections.

To mitigate these limitations, we carried out interviews with 14 representatives of frontline organisations representing a broad cohort of migrants and people in low-paid and insecure work, including people with NRPF, undocumented migrants, and those experiencing homelessness and/or severe labour exploitation. These interviews, which were conducted between April and May 2021, lasted on average an hour, were semi-structured, and focused on the impact of Covid-19 on migrants in low-paid and insecure work, including whether the participants saw links between immigration status, access to social protections and risk of exploitation in their work. We also included questions on the impact of Covid-19 on the capacity of the third sector to respond to emerging needs. In addition to these interviews, we carried out a literature review focusing on reports by frontline organisations on the impact of Covid-19 on their beneficiaries.

We also conducted two three-hour focus groups with workers on their experiences at work during Covid-19. The first focus group was held in English close to the start of the pandemic in June 2020 with three participants, all of whom were migrants working in hospitality. Two were Romanian and one was an English-Italian dual national. The second focus group was held a year later in June 2021 in Spanish with seven participants, all of whom were migrants working in cleaning. Six of the seven participants were from Latin America, and one was from Spain. Two were trade union members. The first focus group was facilitated by a FLEX staff member, while the second was facilitated by a Peer Researcher⁸ who also works in cleaning, with support from FLEX. Finally, we carried out three interviews with app-based couriers, two of whom were Algerian and one who was Bulgarian.

The following graphs provide a breakdown of our quantitative data by different personal characteristics.

Table 4. Survey sample by age group

Age	N	%
16-24	10	3
25-34	39	12
35-44	72	21
45-54	103	30
55-64	47	14
65+	9	3
No response	57	17
Total	337	100

⁸ Peer Researchers are workers from high-risk sectors who, with training and support from FLEX, are carrying out interviews and focus groups with their peers and colleagues. Read more about this research approach in FLEX's 2021 report [Experts by Experience: Conducting Feminist Participatory Action Research with Workers in High-risk Sectors](#).

Table 5. Survey sample by gender

Gender	N	%
Woman	179	53
Man	157	47
Non-binary	0	0
Prefer not to say	1	0.3
Total	337	100

Table 6. Survey sample by nationality

Nationality	N	%
Spain	78	23
Ecuador	60	18
Colombia	52	15
UK	41	12
Bolivia	17	5
Dominican Republic	13	4
Romania	9	3
Peru	6	2
Portugal	6	2
Italy	4	1
Somalia	4	1
Other	34	10
No response	13	4
Total	337	100

Table 7. Survey sample by ethnicity

Ethnicity	N	%
Latin American	219	65
Any other White background	35	10
Black African	24	7
White British	14	4
White and Black African	7	2
Pakistani	6	2
Black British	5	1
Any other mixed ethnic background	5	1
White and Black Caribbean	4	1
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	3	1
Any other Asian background	2	1
Black Caribbean	2	1
Other	5	1
No response	6	2
Total	337	100

Table 8. Survey sample by sector

Sector	N	%
Cleaning	227	67
Security	25	7
Hospitality (e.g. hotels, bars and restaurants)	21	6
Courier and logistics	16	5
Transportation	14	4
Health and social care	10	3
Food production	4	1
Construction	3	1
Other	16	5
No response	1	0.3
Total	337	100