SLAVES NO MORE

# SEVERE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

## The right to become protagonists

Slaves NOmore

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**WOMAN LIFE FREEDOM**

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## The right to become protagonists

Extract from 2022 and 2024 Reports

*Someone's crime was dancing with her hair in the wind*
(Toomaj Salehi)

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PART TWO

# EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES



## Migrant women in the UK and risk of labour exploitation

*Lucila Granada*

### *1. Introduction*

> They will accept work without rest, without breaks, 24-hours of being on call. 'It's better than nothing', they would say. Because it's better than nothing, really, isn't it?[193]

This article builds on the understanding that severe forms of labour exploitation, such as human trafficking for forced labour and modern slavery, must be consider in relation to the broader range of experiences that workers may face in formal economies of the labour market. Labour abuses that may seem less impactful when considered in isolation can accumulate to a point where workers face such a high level of dependency and vulnerability that they cannot refuse to work under abusive conditions. Moreover, ongoing violations to labour standards also contribute to a more general undermining of working conditions across the spectrum (Skrivankova, 2010).

The prevention of the most severe forms of labour exploitation, therefore, leads us to seek a better understanding of workers' experiences across the spectrum. This approach can allow to identify the systems and structures that create vulnerabilities for certain groups of workers, such as workers in low pay, migrant workers, and women workers, and to identify positive steps that governments can take to tackle some of these issues through, for instance, better informed labour market enforcement and social protection policies, as well as safe labour migration routes.

#### *1.1 An intersectional approach to understanding gender and labour exploitation*

Women face additional vulnerabilities in the workplace that are related to gendered cultural and structural issues, such as unequal treatment, discrimination related to pregnancy and maternity, and gender-based violence. There is significant evidence showing the impact of gender inequalities on earnings (ONS, 2023), while traditional gender roles often lead women to carry a disproportionate care burden, which may push women into more casual employment and make them less able to leave abusive situations. Women are also disproportionately represented in low-paid and precarious work, where they may also face unequal treatment (House of Commons, 2023).

[193] Trustee, Kanlungan Filipino Consortium (FLEX, 2021).

While this article focuses on the experiences of women, evidence shows that trans and gender non-conforming individuals, are "likely to face significant and pervasive inequalities in the work environment" (Rundall and Vincent, 2010).

In addition to this, workers at risk of poverty, destitution, social exclusion or facing other forms of discrimination are at higher risk of exploitation. It is therefore important to look into this issue from an intersectional feminist approach that recognises that gender inequality often intersects with social inequalities that create different levels of vulnerability, such as discrimination related to people's age, religion, race or origin. Black and minority ethnic women are, for instance, more likely to be employed in insecure jobs (1 in 8) compared to white women (1 in 16) and are overrepresented on zero-hour contracts (TUC, 2016; TUC, 2023).

Sexual harassment is a particularly pervasive issue affecting women at significantly high rates. Studies have found that 40% to 50% of women have faced unwanted sexual behaviour in the workplace (House of Commons, 2018; TUC, 2016b). The incidence is even higher for young workers (63%) and LGBTQ+ workers (68%) (TUC, 2019), as well as for disabled women (68%) (TUC, 2021); while minority ethnic women reported having experienced it as a form of double discrimination based on gender and race (TUC, 2016).

In order to identify solutions that effectively address and help prevent labour exploitation from happening in the first place, it is crucial to understand the factors that create vulnerabilities for workers. An intersectional gender perspective can allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics that drive labour exploitation and facilitate the identification of opportunities for the improvements of relevant policies.

This understanding must be informed, as directly as possible, by the experience of those affected by these higher levels of vulnerability. This is not only because it is an important form of justice to ensure that those affected by an issue can access spaces where their voices are heard, but also because their insights, knowledge and understanding of the problem are crucial to identify priorities for intervention, interactions across policy areas, and prevent unintended negative consequences of well-intended policy recommendations.

This article, which is based on evidence collected by FLEX over the past 5 years, provides an overview of the key findings related to the experiences of women workers in three high risk sectors in the UK, including two feminised sectors, cleaning and hospitality and a men-dominated sector, agriculture.

This work has been primarily based on data collected through primary research using participatory methodologies, such as a community researcher and a Feminist Participatory Research Approach that involved workers as peer researchers (FLEX, 2021). It will give an overview of issues faced by migrant women, and the impact of sexual harassment, a particularly pervasive yet still overlooked form of gender-based violence at work.

## *2. Migrant women workers' experiences in UK high risk sectors*

This section explores the experiences of young and adult migrant women working in elementary jobs in three high risk sectors for labour exploitation in the UK: commercial cleaning, hospitality, app-based delivery services, and agriculture. The studies





into feminised sectors have also documented a small proportion of responses from men, these were kept in the original analysis and so the breakdown is reflected in this section.

### *2.1. Cleaning*

> Zero-hours' – the name itself tells you... My word, that is exploitation. Young people, people who don't speak English, and the ones recently arrived, just joining the queue last. So, you are left walking on thin ice, total instability, you don't know if you'll be able to pay your rent. They look for migrants, people without power.[194]

Commercial cleaning or general building cleaning[195] in the UK is a growing industry that employs more than 370,000 workers and generates an annual revenue of around £7.7 billion (ONS, 2021). With an overwhelming majority of those in elementary cleaning occupations and cleaning supervisors being women (81% and 76% respectively in 2018), cleaning is a highly feminised sector (FLEX, 2021b), where the vast majority (73%) works part time (British Cleaning Council cited in FLEX, 2021c). Ethnic minorities and migrant workers are overrepresented in the sector, with a large proportion of the cleaning workforce in London being from these backgrounds (42% and 53% respectively, see FLEX 2021b).

Due to the increasing use of subcontracting and outsourcing, commercial cleaning is becoming a key ancillary service supporting a growing range of industries. Cleaning is a central element of occupational health and safety as it helps reduce the risk of accidents and work-related illnesses. It is also key to ensuring the maintenance of clean and hygienic public environments. The global pandemic has also brought to the front how essential cleaning services are to help prevent the spread of infections, as well as to support sectors such as food retail and the health system, to keep operating. In spite of this, cleaning remains a largely overlooked low-paid sector of the UK economy, with the evidence available indicating that cleaning is a high-risk sector for labour abuse and exploitation (De La Silva et al, 2019; EHRC, 2014).

A FLEX report published in 2021 and based on 134 responses from migrant women and young migrants working in the cleaning[196], found that the majority had experienced issues with their pay (61%), including underpayment and non-payment of wages and holiday pay, late payments, and being paid less than the minimum wage. In consequence, 60% reported experiencing financial difficulties, including having to resort to loans and other financial support from family or friends, welfare benefits, overdraft and credit card debt, payday loan companies. This is also compounded by a lack of adequate access to sick pay in the UK, with statutory sick pay only being

[194] Focus group, Spanish-speaking cleaners, 02 February 2020 (FLEX, 2021b, p.33).
[195] The provision of routine, non-specialised cleaning of buildings such as offices, shops, banks, hospitals, and other public and commercial spaces.
[196] This report was part of a research project that sought to address the knowledge gap concerning experiences and drivers of labour abuse and exploitation in understudied low-paid sectors of the economy. The study looked into the working conditions of migrant women and young migrant workers with European Economic Area passports in three low paid and often precarious sectors – cleaning, hospitality and app-based courier and logistics work in the gig economy. The sections on cleaning and hospitality presented in this article therefore include a small percentage of responses from migrant men, as their responses can also contribute to build a better understanding of the experiences of workers in feminised sectors.

available for those who are ill for at least four days in a row and who meet an earning requirements.

On the other hand, most respondents also reported working under dangerous conditions (60%), with over a third having been asked to work without protective equipment (38%) and a staggering 86% having experienced health issues related to their work, including back, neck or joint pain (64%); skin problems (53%), slips or trips (27%), and burns or scalding from chemicals (15%) and from heat (9%)[197].

A third of the sample (28 migrant women and 5 men), reported having experienced 11 different types of sexual harassment, which included sexualised comments about physical appearance, pressure for dates, groping and unwanted touching, sexual advances, exposing of genitalia, stalking, kissing sounds, and intrusive questions about a person's sexuality, among others.

## *2.2. Hospitality: room attendants, kitchen staff, waitressing and bar staff*

> They always see housekeeping as the lowest. They will always pay housekeeping the lowest wages.[198]

The hospitality sector in the UK encompasses a range of accommodation and food and beverage services, including restaurants, cafes, pubs, catering, hotels and other accommodation (Hutton, 2022). The hospitality sector has severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the labour shortages resulting from the end of free movement with the EU (ONS 2021b), with its industry's share of the UK economy falling from 3% in 2019 to 2% in 2020 and 2021 (ONS, 2022). In spite of this and thanks to its rapid recovery, it remains one of the largest sectors of the UK economy, which is dominated by service industries (ONS, 2023c). In the months leading to July 2023, the industry employed 1.6 million people, with women accounting for 55% of the workforce (ONS, 2023b).

A 2021 FLEX report drawing on 115 survey responses and 40 interviews with hospitality workers (94% migrants, 67% women, 32% men, 21% young people), including hotel room attendants, kitchen staff, and waitressing and bar staff, found that the majority experienced issues with pay (62%), with a significant proportion experiencing unpaid hours (39%) or not being paid at all (17%). In addition, almost a fifth had experienced not being paid on time (18%), as well as deductions to pay for uniform or equipment costs (19%). As a result, a large number of workers reported experienced financial difficulties (59%), which mostly involved resorting to debt (67%), either with family, friends, or with their banks (FLEX, 2021c).

In addition, almost two thirds felt that they could not take time off due to illness (60%), an issue related to not having access to any type of sick pay (35%) and to a widespread fear of losing work (44%). In this context, workers have no choice but to work when ill or injured, or to take time off as annual leave.

Strikingly, almost all survey respondents reported having experienced health issues directly resulting from their work (94%), with most participants experiencing back, neck and joint pain (68%) from carrying heavy loads and working in awkward positions. Workplace accidents, which included cuts or bruises (56%), as well as scalding and chemical burns (10%), were associated with working in a fast-paced environment for long hours, often without breaks. The majority also reported having experienced mental health issues and illnesses (74%), including burn-out (55%), anxiety (46%) and insomnia (35%).

[197] Focus on Labour Exploitation. 2021. *If I could change anything about my work…" Participatory Research with Cleaners in the UK*. Working Paper No. 1.
[198] Interview, Romanian Head Housekeeper, 15 May 2019 (FLEX, 2021c).





The study also found that 16 of the 18 young migrant workers engaged in the research had experienced some form of verbal or physical abuse at work, and 7 out of the 15 young migrant women workers had experienced different types of sexual harassment, including sexualised comments about their physical appearance, pressure for dates, unwanted sexual advances, stalking, and an attempt of sexual assault.

> …where because they're older than you, they'll push you around. And a lot of people in hospitality are quite young. So, obviously, if you're eighteen, nineteen, and a thirty-year-old man is telling you to do something, you'll probably do it.[199]

## *2.4. Agriculture: Women in the Seasonal Worker Visa route*

There is widespread recognition of the fact that agriculture is a high-risk sector for labour abuse and exploitation. There are significant market pressures pushing costs down in food supply chains, which can lead to significantly worse working conditions and wages for workers. In addition to this, agriculture typically takes place in remote areas, where workers are more likely to face barriers to accessing information, advice, and alternative work. These, alongside other factors, such as the seasonal nature of the work and the high levels of job insecurity in the sector, result in labour shortages. In response to these challenges, the sector is increasingly reliant on migrant labour and temporary migration programmes, such as the Seasonal Worker Visa route in the UK. Temporary migration programmes are typically associated with a number of risk factors, such as migrant workers' facing high levels of debt, limited access to social security systems, and to information about their rights, among others. In this context, the sector-specific risks that are present for all workers in low-paid jobs in agriculture are then compounded by an additional set of risks introduced by labour migration programmes that put migrant workers at higher risk of labour exploitation, such as the UK's Seasonal Worker Visa route for horticulture.

In 2019, the UK Government introduced the Seasonal Worker Visa route to enable the recruitment of migrant workers into the UK's agricultural sector. Initially launched as a pilot to bring up to 2,500 workers into edible horticulture from a limited number of countries via two labour providers, this visa route was significantly expanded in subsequent years and at the time of writing, only four years later, it's open to bring up to 57,000 workers via seven labour providers who can source workers from virtually any country in the world and into a wider range of seasonal roles. This rapid expansion was not accompanied by a proportional increase in resources dedicated to monitoring recruitment, working and living conditions for workers on the scheme. For more information about this scheme and the restrictions attached to these visas see FLEX, 2023.

[199] Focus Group, Young EEA Workers in Hospitality, 5 June 2020 (FLEX, 2021c).

FLEX's has recently published the first of a series of research reports based on 399 surveys and 82 interviews with migrants working in the Seasonal Worker Visa scheme, the largest independent sample collected to date documenting the experiences of UK temporary migration agricultural schemes (FLEX, 2024). Women make up one quarter of the sample (28.1%) and this first report focuses on risk of exploitation arising from recruitment practices.

Data from this research shows that, compared with men, a higher proportion of women had to take out a loan to travel to the UK for work (76.8% vs 69.9%), while they were also more likely to receive inaccurate information prior to departure. For instance, a higher proportion of women (82.8%) reported earning less than they had been told they would earn at the recruitment stage than men (75.1%).

## *3. Conclusion with recommendations*

The structural inequalities that contribute to driving labour exploitation of women in high-risk sectors must be tackled via proactive policy making that recognises how gender dynamics significantly shape women's experiences at work. In addition, there needs to be recognition of the ways in which gender discrimination intersect with other inequalities, increasing risk of exploitation for certain groups, such as migrant and ethnic minority women, and that, in turn, these abuses contribute to a more general undermining of working conditions across the labour market.

There is also a lack of research around the experiences of gender non confirming, non-binary, and gender queer individuals in the workplace. Addressing these gaps and reducing risk for migrant women would require the development of gender-responsive labour market enforcement and immigration systems that truly recognise the value of their work.

This would involve the following key steps:

1. The development of a gender-responsive labour market enforcement system that:

a. Seeks to identify the factors driving exploitation for women workers, both in feminised and non-feminised labour sectors, and the opportunities for risk mitigating policy interventions.

b. Develops sector-specific strategies that are tailored to meet the needs of women workers.

c. Ensures labour inspectors and policy leads are equipped to identify and respond to risks affecting women by mainstreaming gender awareness across its operations.

d. Is adequately resourced to enforce sexual harassment rules, addressing current enforcement gaps.

2. The development of safer labour migration routes that:

a. Are designed with the understanding that immigration restrictions must be considered vis-à-vis other factors compounding risk of labour exploitation, including gender inequalities, and embed safeguards to mitigate those risks.

b. Provides legal routes into low-paid jobs in response to labour shortages in order





to help prevent employers engaging workers irregularly, without the full protection of employment laws.

c. Ensure that migrant workers engaging in labour migration routes can access their employment rights in practice, regardless of the length of their visas, as well as report workplace abuse without fear of facing immigration consequences.

3. Effective consultation which:

a. Ensures that all policies and strategies are informed by minoritised groups facing higher risks, including migrant women workers, who have gained important insights and knowledge through direct experience of the issue. This will contribute to develop better informed solutions, support the empowerment of affected groups, and reduce risks of unintended negative consequences.

b. Involves a broad range of stakeholders, including specialist organisations providing direct support to the different groups at risk, in order to ensure that strategies and policies are informed by their analysis and expertise.

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# Trafficking in human beings in Czech Republic. Actual situation

*Markéta Hronková*[200]

Czech Republic is having due to its recent political history and geographical location a specific position when it comes to trafficking in human beings. Historically a country of origin and of transit, during the last two decades it became also a highly profiled country of destination. Actors working in the field of trafficking in Czech Republic, both on the side of criminal justice, and on the side of victims support and assistance, have to be able to confront the vastly different problems, needs and specifics of trafficked persons face as citizens returning home from trafficking situation, or foreigner nationals being trafficked into the country. This fact is making the work in detection, identification investigation, but also support, assistance and access to compensation for trafficked and exploited persons really dynamic and diverse.

In following pages I will recap briefly the history and development, institutional framework. I will also sum data and trends and developments in recent years and pay a special attention to the situation in trafficking in human beings in the aftermath of outbreak of war in Ukraine.

In the 90s, the main purpose for trafficking and the main field of interest of law enforcement authorities was in a trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation mainly of Czech women internationally. During the first decade of 21st century, the legislation related to trafficking got broadened and today we are encountering five main purposes of trafficking in Czech Republic; sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, trafficking for the purpose of criminal activities, forced begging and forced marriages. No case of trafficking of human organs or forced military service was registered. The composition of trafficked and exploited persons from the point of view of gender did change within the time too, from mostly female victims in the 90s, to 60% or slightly more male victims (trafficked for forced labor) today.

From the point of view of nationality composition, there are as many Czech citizens (trafficked either internally within the borders of Czech Republic, or abroad mainly to Great Britain and other Western countries), as there are foreigners trafficked into Czech Republic. Among the foreigners both EU citizens and third country nationals are represented.

[200] Director of La Strada Czech Republic.