

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

Migrant care staff exploitation

UNISON is calling for the government to take over sponsorship of migrant care staff from employers.



Migrant care staff having to share beds, sleep rough and charged thousands in illegal fees

Some migrant care workers have paid more than £20,000 to intermediaries in return for a job before they even arrive, according to [Caring at a Cost](#), a report released by UNISON . They can then be housed in overcrowded, substandard accommodation and subjected to appalling racist abuse in the workplace, according to the research.

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The report is based on findings from a survey by UNISON of more than 3,000 people who have come to the UK on health and care worker visas. It is the first major piece of work on migrant care staff conducted by the union.

More than one in seven (15%) paid money to an employer and one in eleven (9%) to a recruiter or agency before coming here.

This is in return for filling jobs during a recruitment crisis in social care, says UNISON.

The union is calling for the government to take over sponsorship of migrant care staff from employers. UNISON says the current system, where care companies sponsor migrant care staff who can then apply for a visa, allows unscrupulous bosses

to abuse their power.

Staff who whistleblow are particularly vulnerable because bad employers often threaten them with deportation if they challenge poor practices or mistreatment in the workplace, warns the union.

UNISON also says when care companies go bust the staff lose their jobs, but those from overseas have the added risk of being deported if they can't secure a new sponsor within 60 days.

Caring at a Cost is based on responses from workers who came to the UK from Zimbabwe, India, the Philippines and other countries around the world. The findings lay bare the appalling treatment to which they are subjected by some employers, says UNISON.

Dozens of care staff said they paid fees of above £10,000 in return for the promise of shifts in residential care, in people's homes and other areas of adult social care.

In one case, a care worker paid £13,500 for a certificate of sponsorship to an agency that promised to secure them a care job in the UK. However, the worker says they have not had any work in a year.

Staff who paid fees to their employer before arriving in the UK gave recruitment (70%) as the top reason followed by visas, flights to the UK, administration/paperwork, training and accommodation.

Around 18% of survey respondents said employers had deducted money from their salary since they'd arrived in the UK. Fees for administration, uniforms, cars, loans, training, hotel rooms, and airport pick-ups were among the reasons given. A smaller proportion (4%) had paid to be released from their contract with a social care employer, despite this being illegal, says UNISON.

Problems with pay affected three in ten (31%) migrant care staff. This included not getting paid for travel time between visits or sick pay when ill and unable to attend work. Others were paid late, or employers deducted wages without any good reason.

More than a quarter (27%) were paid below the legal minimum wage of £11.44 an hour,

and 13% of respondents received less pay than non-overseas care staff.

Caring at a Cost outlines in shocking detail the impact of care firms not paying staff properly, says UNISON. Three quarters (75%) of those affected said they didn't have enough money, and more than half (57%) were unable to pay their bills.

Others had to borrow money to get to work, couldn't pay their rent or had to miss meals. One care worker had to sleep rough because their employer did not pay them for shadowing other colleagues.

The report also highlights the unacceptable conditions in which migrant workers can live. Three in ten (31%) said their employer had provided them with accommodation, but nearly one in ten (9%) said the housing was either poor or in a very poor state.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of those living in care company accommodation shared a bedroom with other workers. One said 15 people were staying in a one-bedroom flat, and another was among nine sharing a three-bedroom property.

Racism experienced by care staff at work affected more than four in ten (46%) of survey respondents. This included verbal insults and physical abuse.

The majority of the perpetrators were someone the staff were looking after followed by other care workers, senior managers, employers, family members or friends.

More than a third (36%) said they or a migrant worker colleague had been threatened with dismissal or redundancy for raising issues about their treatment at work.

UNISON says these findings highlight how unscrupulous employers use visa sponsorship to threaten care workers who challenge mistreatment and exploitation.

The union says poorly paid, mistreated and overworked staff are far less likely to be able to provide high quality care. They are also likely to stop working in the sector, increasing vacancy rates.

Social care has become reliant on overseas workers to fill vacancies, a situation driven by

years of underfunding and a low pay culture in the sector, says UNISON.

The union believes the best way to resolve the ongoing staffing crisis is to boost pay for all care workers through the government's fair pay agreement, which is currently being developed in discussions between unions, employers and ministers.

This agreement is the first step towards creating the government's promised national care service for England that would improve provision, raise standards and help relieve pressure on the NHS, says UNISON.

Commenting on the report, **UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea** said:

"These shocking findings highlight widespread exploitation of migrant care workers. They underline the urgent need for reform with a national care service and fair pay agreement in social care.

"Only when wages rise with the promised fair pay agreement will the care sector be in a better position to recruit and hold on to the growing number of workers needed to deliver quality care to an ageing population.

"Care staff who come here from overseas are shoring up a crumbling sector. These workers should be treated with respect, not taken advantage of and abused. No one deserves to be treated in this despicable way.

"Some workers are effectively being employed as indentured labour. This is not only immoral but also illegal. They've come to the UK in the expectation of getting work and training, but instead many are forced to exist on the breadline.

"The government must overhaul the sponsorship system as a matter of urgency. This would help prevent exploitation and drive up standards across the care sector."

[Read or download the complete report](#)