

Since numbers of migrant workers increased in the Northern Ireland labour force in the early 2000s, researchers and advisers have reported exploitation.

‘I met a guy not so long ago ... and when I added up what he had actually paid in terms of deductions, he’d paid £1,000 for his flight alone ... [I asked] “Do you not realise this?” and he said “No we never get a payslip.”

NGO representative

‘We had to do everything ourselves – the agency said we had to manage things ourselves. We were here a year with no documents.’

Female A2 national

‘I have not received a contract. No-one has a contract. No safety instructions, no induction, nothing.

Male A8 national

(All 3 quotations are from Les Allamby et al, *Forced Labour in Northern Ireland*, 2011.)

## **Employers**

Trade unions report instances of abuse such as:

- No written contracts
- No pay slips
- No paid holidays
- Excessive working hours
- People who object to their conditions are threatened with instant dismissal
- Women sacked because they were pregnant
- Less favourable conditions than local people
- Dismissal for minor disciplinary offences
- People sacked by text message
- No written reasons for dismissal
- Racism

(Oral presentation to the Belfast Migrant Forum by Kasia Garbal and Kevin Doherty of the ICTUNI Migrant Worker Support Unit, November 2009.)

## **Agencies**

Agency workers are supplied by agencies and employment business to work for a third party. Most contracts are for short periods, increasing levels of anxiety about future employment and the fear of upsetting the agency.

Research found that agencies and employers had been reported to

- retain passports during the period of employment;
- deduct rent from wages and provide poor housing;
- withhold pay;

- pay unfair wages in comparison to rates paid to local workers;
- enforce long hours and bad working conditions;
- deny holiday entitlements;
- fail to fulfil the contracts promised before arrival here;
- Impose disciplinary measures that are not applied to local people; and
- discriminate against people on grounds of gender.

(John Bell, *A Modern Form of Slavery? A Literature Review of Forced Labour*, Institute for Conflict Research, 2009. See also the Equality Commission publication, *The Role of the Recruitment Sector in the Employment of Migrant Workers* 2010. [www.migrationni.org/DataEditorUploads/ECMigrantfullrpt.pdf](http://www.migrationni.org/DataEditorUploads/ECMigrantfullrpt.pdf) )

The Department for the Economy has an **Employment Agency Inspectorate** [www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/employment-agency-inspectorate-eai](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/employment-agency-inspectorate-eai) with a helpline **(028) 9025 7554** Also E-mail [eai@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:eai@economy-ni.gov.uk)

There is also advice about the rights of agency workers on the **NI Direct** web site [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/agency-workers](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/agency-workers)

**NI Direct** also gives details concerning **Minimum Wage and Living Wage Rates** and help with getting the correct pay rates.

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/national-minimum-wage-and-living-wage](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/national-minimum-wage-and-living-wage)

### **Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)**

[www.gla.gov.uk](http://www.gla.gov.uk) works to protect vulnerable and exploited workers and they regulate the licencing of gangmasters in horticulture and food processing. In the past they have uncovered the following:

- forced labour
- threats and verbal abuse against workers
- workers forced to pay exorbitant deductions from wages for unsuitable or overcrowded accommodation
- workers forced to travel to work in 'death trap' vans
- workers being paid below the minimum wage
- workers whose health and safety have been put at risk
- the use of illegal workers
- the manipulation of workers' documents

The **Department of the Economy** web site gives advice on employment rights, including hours, holiday pay etc., and redress e.g. through the **Labour Relations Agency** and the **Equality Commission NI**. [www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/employment-rights](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/employment-rights)

The **Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NI)** has a **Migrant Worker Support Unit (MWSU)** [www.migrantworkersni.org/](http://www.migrantworkersni.org/)

See also the extreme forms of exploitation through **Modern Slavery** [www.embraceni.org/category/modern-slavery/](http://www.embraceni.org/category/modern-slavery/)