

# ***Vulnerable Migrant Workers: The Responsibility of Business***



## **Church Action Guide**

Companies and investors have benefited in recent years from the development of 'flexible' labour markets that enable companies to achieve faster delivery, lower prices, higher volumes and increased profits. Flexible labour has involved many migrant workers filling seasonal and temporary positions and often experiencing limited job security, very low pay and excessive or hidden deductions, over-long hours, poor health and safety conditions, discrimination and other disadvantages.

The command to welcome and care for strangers appears repeatedly in the Bible, and churches can play an important role in building welcoming communities for migrant workers. Church communities can raise awareness of the issues that migrant workers face locally, encourage local businesses - and companies in which churches invest - to improve their policy and practice towards migrant workers, and support migrant workers personally.

This action guide is intended for use with the executive summary or full report *Vulnerable Workers: The Responsibility of Business*, published by the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) and with ECCR's companion Investors Action Guide. See below to obtain copies.

### **Know the facts and help others to do so**

Migrant workers are people in paid employment outside their own countries. There has been an increase in migrant workers in the UK and Ireland over the last decade, mostly as a result of the growing number of working people from EU accession states of Central and Eastern Europe.

Migrants often fill gaps in the workforce, accepting jobs that indigenous workers are not prepared to do and contribute positively to the economy. Studies indicate that they do not deny others work and are not 'benefit scroungers'. Migrant workers in less skilled positions, many working for agencies and gangmasters (labour providers), are often vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, and injustices often go unchallenged.

To create welcoming communities it is important to correct misinformation about migrant workers and challenge discrimination.

- Church congregations can educate themselves about migrant workers and their potential vulnerability and explore the issues through weekly worship and study groups.
- Investigate issues affecting migrant workers in your local community. Do you live in an agricultural area where migrants are employed in food production? Are migrants employed in local hotels or factories? Have there been local reports of exploitation or discrimination?
- Help your church speak out about bad practice by local employers and prejudice in the community.
- Help develop your congregation's awareness about migrant workers in the supply chains of major food brands and supermarkets and think about the implications for your own buying habits. For example, supermarkets that sell very low-priced vegetables may pressure suppliers to cut costs by reducing wages or demanding longer work hours. See below for more ideas.
- Share your knowledge with your community. For example, form a group of informed people to go out and talk about issues facing migrant workers with other groups, churches and schools.

### **Help make your church a welcoming community**

Many migrant workers attend, or would like to attend, local churches. Help ensure your church is open and welcoming to migrant workers:

- How do migrant workers know when services of worship are taking place and that they are welcome? Make information about services available in relevant languages.
- Ensure that liturgy is translated into common first languages.
- Where regular worship is offered in a language other than English, provide opportunities for social interaction between people worshipping in different languages.

If your church or any projects that it runs employ migrant workers, consider employment issues. Are you paying a living wage and not just the minimum wage?

### **Engage with companies employing migrant workers, including food retailers**

Migrants work in low-paid positions in a variety of settings, including picking vegetables for sale by supermarkets, cleaning in local businesses, and kitchen work in small restaurants. Most people interact with companies that employ migrant workers either directly or in their supply chain, and most live in communities where local businesses employ migrants. Churches and their members are in a position to talk with local and national businesses about their policies and practices towards migrant workers.

Asking about companies' policies towards migrant workers demonstrates that such questions concern the public and can help persuade companies to improve. Issues that companies employing migrant workers should address include:

- Hours and conditions of work, health and safety standards, and workers awareness of their rights.
- Whether gangmasters used in the supply chain are licensed by the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) in designated sectors (a legal requirement in agriculture, horticulture, processing and packaging, forestry and shellfish gathering in the UK) or meet equivalent standards in other sectors (or in Ireland).
- Translation into relevant languages of health and safety instructions and information about employment rights and enforcement mechanisms.
- Provision of English language classes - not a legal requirement but the sign of a good employer.
- Whether temporary, agency and self-employed workers are treated fairly.
- Whether the company takes responsibility for labour conditions in the supply chain and how it works with buyers and suppliers to improve standards.
- How the company ensures that its business practices do not have an adverse impact on working conditions, such as by selling goods at prices that transfer unsustainable cost cuts to suppliers, thus undermining labour standards.

### **How to engage with businesses**

- Write to ask the company about its policy and practices towards migrant workers, using ideas listed above. If you have heard of particular problems faced by migrant workers employed by

### **Prayer**

Our God, parent and creator of all living beings,  
Help us to open our hearts and minds to the needs of others.

Especially the strangers living here among us:

The women, men and children from Poland, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia and many other countries.

Let us share your bounteous grace with them:

There is enough food and work for everybody.

Let us help them to realise their aspirations for a better life in peace

For themselves, their children and us.

Let us show them the respect they deserve as your children

And help us to protect them from the evils of racism and exploitation.

Help us to see you in them.

AMEN

*Rev. David de Verny, Chaplain at the University of Hull,  
former Ecumenical Chaplain with New Arrival  
Communities in SE Lincolnshire.*

the company, or by a gangmaster used by the company, ask how the company is addressing this. Ask supermarkets how they ensure that their business practices do not have an adverse impact on supply chain working conditions. See the model letter in ECCR's companion Investors Action Guide for ideas (download or request one from ECCR, details below, if you do not already have a copy).

- If a company is featured in ECCR's report, ask how it is addressing the report's recommendations. Again, see the model letter in the Investors Action Guide.
- Other large companies with a presence in your area may have migrant workers in their supply chain. Write to ask how they ensure their suppliers protect migrant workers' rights and reduce their vulnerability.
- Request a meeting for your church community with company management to discuss the issues.
- Explore how churches and local companies can work in partnership to provide support to migrant workers (see below).

### **Offer workplace mission teams to employers**

Local workplace mission teams - several of them ECCR members - are well placed to engage with companies that employ migrants. Workplace missions give access to both management and workers and provide opportunities to raise issues related to migrant workers.

You may find that a local food processing factory, large hotel, care home or construction company – all likely to employ migrant workers - does not currently have a workplace mission team. In such cases you could help by linking them to the local chaplaincy service, if there is one, or consider offering such a service yourself.

### **Develop local outreach projects to meet migrant workers' needs**

Churches can take practical action to support migrant workers, who may earn live in poor accommodation, be unfamiliar with English and with local systems and culture, and feel isolated:

- Offer help with English through language classes or conversational English in a social setting. Be flexible about times, as many migrant workers work a shift pattern.
- Offer the church as a space for language classes or facilitate another community space to be used (even if you do not provide the lessons yourself).
- Offer help with form filling and understanding employment rights. Suggest other agencies that offer support (see resources below). Consider setting up a regular 'advice centre' where representatives of relevant organisations are available, information is accessible, and English or conversation classes are on offer. You could combine this with a 'café' to encourage community members to gather.
- Produce a welcome pack to your community in relevant language(s), with information about accessing services such as the library and medical surgery, the nearest Citizens Advice Bureau, trade unions and local churches.
- Provide copies of the 'shoe-sized' help booklet *Workers' Rights* and helpline card produced by the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) (designed to fit into a shoe so that workers need not fear discovery by employers). Copies are available from the GLA (contact details below).
- Set up a 'buddy' system and/or become a buddy yourself; meet regularly with a migrant worker to help with English, form filling, local knowledge, or general support and contact.

It is helpful to research what migrant workers and their families in your local area really want and need and what projects already exist. Talk to migrant workers' groups, other churches, trade unions and community groups, and where possible work in partnership with them.

### **Encourage your church to take action as an investor, and/or take action as an investor yourself**

Investors are often in a position to influence companies. ECCR encourages religious investors - whether large or small institutions or individuals - to ask companies to improve policies and practices towards migrant workers:

- Raise awareness of the issues with your denomination's central or local finance board, the bursar of your religious order or the treasurer of your church community. Ask whether the church invests in companies or sectors featured in ECCR's report, and if so urge it to engage with the companies and advocate the report's recommendations.
- Provide your church's finance specialists with a copy of ECCR's Investors Action Guide, which gives more detailed information about engaging with companies. Encourage them to read the executive summary or full report of *Vulnerable Migrant Workers*.
- Individual investors can raise concerns effectively in writing or by asking a question at the company's Annual General Meeting (AGM). For ideas, a model letter and company contact details, see the Investors Action Guide.

### **Sources of information, advice and support**

- Arthur Rank Centre: [www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk](http://www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk)
- Church Action on Poverty: [www.church-poverty.org.uk/campaigns/livingwage](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/campaigns/livingwage)
- Citizens Advice: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)
- Commission on Vulnerable Employment (TUC): [www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk](http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk)
- Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA - can advise migrants in their own language; anyone can report abuse anonymously in English, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese): [www.gla.gov.uk](http://www.gla.gov.uk), tel. 01845 602 5020
- Health and Safety Executive (infoline for reports of workplace health and safety violations): [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk), tel. 0845 345 0055
- London Citizens: [www.londoncitizens.org.uk](http://www.londoncitizens.org.uk)
- Migrant Rights Network: [www.migrantsrights.org.uk](http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk)
- Migrant workers groups and community groups: there may be groups established by or for migrant workers in your area
- Oxfam GB, UK Poverty Programme: [www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/labour\\_rights.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/labour_rights.html)
- Quaker Peace and Social Witness (an ECCR member organisation) is developing a resource to help groups think about supply chain issues and the potential vulnerability of migrant workers. Please contact Sunniva Taylor (details below) for more information.
- Trade unions: approach whichever union is relevant for migrant workers in the company(s) you are focusing on
- Work Smart (TUC): [www.worksmart.org.uk/rights](http://www.worksmart.org.uk/rights)

### **Accompanying resources**

The full report, *Vulnerable Migrant Workers: The Responsibility of Business*, an executive summary, the accompanying Investors Action Guide, and *Investment and Engaging with Companies: A Guide for Faith Communities* (which provides ideas for engagement) are all downloadable at [www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk) or can be requested from ECCR, PO Box 500, Oxford OX1 1ZL, [info@eccr.org.uk](mailto:info@eccr.org.uk), tel. 01865 245349.

### **Need help?**

ECCR can advise investors undertaking actions suggested here. Contacts:  
Sunniva Taylor, ECCR Researcher: [sunnivat@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sunnivat@quaker.org.uk); tel. 020 7663 1047.  
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### **Let ECCR know about any action you take**

Please let ECCR know of any action you take and any response you receive. If possible, send us copies of your correspondence with companies: Sunniva Taylor, ECCR, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ; [sunnivat@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sunnivat@quaker.org.uk).