

KEY JUDGEMENTS AUGUST 2023

Title: Care Sector in the UK and Exploitation

Location: UK

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Disclaimer: *Please note that this assessment is based on a combination of open-source research, input from subject matter experts on the ground, survivor accounts, and data analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

The care sector in the UK is increasingly susceptible to contract labour and corrupt overseas recruiters who facilitate the employment of trafficked and exploited workers. The sector employs c.1.8m workers of which 570,000 are in domiciliary care work. Staff turnover runs at almost 30%, giving rise to a recruitment requirement of around 500,000 per year of which 160,000 vacancies are unfilled. This opportunity is being actively exploited by trafficking groups in the UK and beyond.

WE ASSESS AS FOLLOWS

RECRUITMENT

- a) To fill gaps in the workforce, care businesses recruit from overseas, particularly India, Nepal, Philippines, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Bulgaria, through third party contractors.
- b) Advertisements for such work in the named countries are posted on social media and other formal job sites and target qualified persons.
- c) There are examples of 'in person' recruiting missions to recruit hundreds of workers for the care sector. Debt bonds are common.
- d) Recent examples of recruiting and the use of debt bonds have emerged amongst Ukrainian refugee communities in the UK.

DEMAND

- a) In 2021, acute workforce shortages led to a loosening of the UK visa regime for care work. The extreme shortage appears to have fuelled criminal engagement through the recruitment and provision of exploited labour involving thousands of victims.
- b) Recruiters and contract labour providers routinely retain the travel documents of exploited workers and control all negotiations with the primary care business employer.
- c) The need for staff is such that employers in the care sector are unlikely to scrutinise the hiring and employment practices of contract labour providers too carefully. External investigation is also unlikely, so there is a low risk of discovery.

MONEY (REVENUE)

- a) There is evidence that recruiters institute debt bonds of between £13,000 and £18,000 for the 'job' opportunity, taking the victim years to repay. Travel documents are often confiscated. Unusual transactions to recruiters or contract labour providers based in the UK or in third countries in this sector may be indicative of trafficking and exploitation.
- b) The increasing use of contract labour providers by the care sector, where salaries are paid in bulk to the provider, increases the risk of exploitation. These relationships are often facilitated by 'kickbacks' to key individuals in the corporate care business. Transaction patterns between corporate care and contract labour providers will be indicative of risk.
- c) These are often minimum wage jobs whereby traffickers require large numbers of exploited persons in deployment and long-lasting control in order to create worthwhile criminal incomes. Sizeable invoicing of the primary care business is likely, with outgoing salaries unlikely to be commensurate.

INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Information on particular nationalities that predominate in the care sector contract labour force where pay is handled externally.
- 2) Recruiting agencies seeking advance fees or offering loans to secure employment opportunities.
- 3) Contract labour providers where payroll is inconsistent with income and workforce.

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