

FACT

S E R V I C E

- 41 Migrant workers are exploited and abused
- 42 Unemployment falls further to 2.45 million
- 43 Holiday pay must be paid to sick staff
Earnings growth puts on a small spurt
- 44 Unions worldwide back cabin crew action
Garlic bread – it's the future, says ONS

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Migrant workers are exploited and abused

Evidence of the widespread mistreatment and exploitation of migrant and agency workers in the meat and poultry processing sector has been uncovered by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). These workers also had little knowledge of their rights or how to make complaints.

Workers reported physical and verbal abuse and a lack of proper health and safety protection, with the treatment of pregnant workers a particular concern. Many workers had little knowledge of their rights and feared raising concerns would lead to dismissal. While migrant workers were most affected, British agency workers also faced similar mistreatment.

The inquiry uncovered frequent breaches of the law and licensing standards in meat processing factories – some of which supply the UK's biggest supermarkets – and the agencies that supply workers to them. It also highlighted conditions which flout minimum ethical trading standards and basic human rights.

However, the inquiry also found examples of good practice with firms treating permanent and agency workers of all nationalities with respect. These

firms benefitted as a result, by being able to attract and retain well motivated, loyal and increasingly skilled workers.

As a result of the inquiry, the commission is making a number of recommendations. They include supermarkets improving their auditing of suppliers; processing firms and agencies improving recruitment practices, working environments and the ability of workers to raise issues of concern; and for the government to provide sufficient resources for the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority to help safeguard the welfare and interests of workers.

The commission will review action taken over the next 12 months by supermarkets, processing firms and recruitment agencies, and will consider taking enforcement action if necessary.

The inquiry, which was launched in October 2008, examined the employment and recruitment practices in the sector to identify differences in pay and conditions between agency and temporary workers and employees with permanent or directly employed status.

One-third of the permanent workforce and over two-thirds of agency workers in the industry are migrant workers. At one in six meat processing sites involved in the study, every single agency worker used in the past 12 months was a migrant worker. This is in part due to difficulties in recruiting British workers to what is physically

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demanding, low-paid work. It may also be due to perceptions amongst employers and agencies that British workers are either unable or unwilling to work in the sector.

More than eight out of 10 of the 260 workers that gave evidence said that agency workers were treated worse than directly employed workers. Seven out of 10 workers said they thought they were treated badly in factories or by agencies because of their race or nationality.

Physical and verbal abuse were not uncommon, with a fifth of workers interviewed reporting being pushed, kicked or having things thrown at them by line managers; over a third of workers interviewed said they had experienced, or witnessed verbal abuse, often on a daily basis.

Workers also reported being refused permission to take toilet breaks, and subsequently urinating or bleeding on themselves at the production line.

A quarter of those workers interviewed said they had witnessed mistreatment of pregnant workers, such as the instant dismissal of agency workers who had announced they were pregnant. Pregnant women were also forced to continue to undertake work that posed risks to their health and safety, including heavy lifting and extended periods of standing.

Nearly one-third of workers endured this awful treatment without complaint both because of fears that their work would be terminated as a result, and that it would affect their goal of securing stable employment.

www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Inquiries/meat_inquiry_report.pdf

Unemployment falls further to 2.45 million

Unemployment fell once again to bring some good news to the start of 2010.

Under the Labour Force Survey (LFS) count, unemployment fell by 33,000 to 2.45 million in the three months to January compared with the previous three months. As a result the jobless rate fell to 7.8%.

The number of unemployed men was down by 20,000 to 1.51 million but their unemployment rate remained at 9.0%. Meanwhile, the number of jobless women fell by 13,000 to 938,000 and their unemployment rate was down to 6.5% from 6.6% previously.

The LFS count includes people who are looking for work but are not eligible for benefits, and is the government's preferred measure.

On the downside, long-term unemployment covering those out of work for more than a year rose again – this time by 61,000 to 687,000.

The claimant count, which only includes those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), showed a sharp drop. It showed a monthly fall of 32,300 to 1.59 million in February and the unemployment rate fell to 4.9% from 5.0%.

Unemployed men on benefit fell to 1.15 million and their unemployment rate was down to 6.6%. The number of women claiming JSA was down by 5,400 to 431,600, but their jobless rate remained at 3.0%.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber, commenting on the new good news, said: "Today's record fall in dole claimants is great news for the millions of people across the UK desperate to get back into work.

"But with millions still 'under-employed' and future economic growth far from guaranteed, it would be a desperate blow to British families to throw all this away on a programme of unnecessary early spending cuts."

Unemployment seasonally adjusted

	Claimants (000s)	% ¹	LFS ² (000s)	%
2004	853	2.7	1,424	4.8
2005	862	2.7	1,465	4.9
2006	945	3.0	1,671	5.4
2007	864	2.7	1,653	5.3
2008	905	2.8	1,781	5.7
2009	1,532	4.7	2,395	7.6
2009				
January	1,254	3.9	2,060	6.6
February	1,390	4.3	2,127	6.8
March	1,456	4.5	2,227	7.1
April	1,506	4.6	2,277	7.3
May	1,536	4.7	2,377	7.6
June	1,558	4.8	2,432	7.8
July	1,583	4.9	2,470	7.9
August	1,606	4.9	2,465	7.8
September	1,627	5.0	2,461	7.8
October	1,633	5.0	2,491	7.9
November	1,622	5.0	2,458	7.8
December	1,612	5.0	2,457	7.8
2010				
January (r)	1,617	5.0	2,449	7.8
February (p)	1,585	4.9		

¹ Percentage of working population – the employees, unemployed, self-employed and the armed forces. ² The Labour Force Survey definition of unemployment – the number of unemployed people who want a job and are ready to start work in two weeks, and have looked for work in the past four weeks. Each figure is the average of the past three months – a rolling average. (p) provisional (r) revised

Regions The claimant count fell in 11 of the 12 regions in February – the odd one out was Northern Ireland where it rose.

The unemployment rate was above the UK average of 4.9% in six regions. The highest rates were 7.1% in the North East, 6.4% both in the West Midlands and Northern Ireland and 6.0% in Yorkshire and the Humber.

There were mixed results for the LFS count – with a fall in seven regions and rises in five. The largest falls were in London and the West Midlands, where unemployed numbers were down by 20,000 and 17,000 respectively.

There was a five-figure rise in one region – Scotland – where it rose by 16,000.

The unemployment rate was above the UK average of 7.8% in six regions. The highest rates were: 9.5% in both the West Midlands and the North East, and 9.2% in Wales.

Region	February claimants		LFS Nov – Jan	
	Number	%	Number	%
North East	85,200	7.1	120,000	9.5
North West	195,800	5.6	290,000	8.6
Yorkshire & the Humber	157,600	6.0	230,000	8.7
East Midlands	109,900	4.9	173,000	7.5
West Midlands	176,100	6.4	254,000	9.5
East	118,100	4.1	196,000	6.6
London	225,400	4.6	359,000	8.8
South East	153,000	3.4	274,000	6.2
South West	91,800	3.3	164,000	6.2
Wales	78,000	5.5	133,000	9.2
Scotland	138,500	4.9	205,000	7.6
Northern Ireland	55,700	6.4	52,000	6.3

www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/lmsuk0310.pdf

www.tuc.org.uk/welfare/tuc-17732-f0.cfm

Holiday pay must be paid to sick staff

Employers must pay staff their full holiday entitlements if they are off sick for more than a year and are unable to take their leave, a tribunal has ruled.

James Rawlings, who was off sick for more than a year before leaving his company, was entitled to be paid his full holiday entitlements upon resignation because his absence from work had prevented him from taking his leave, the tribunal said.

The ruling in the *Rawlings v The Direct Garage Door Company* case reaffirmed a judgment by

the House of Lords last year in *Stringer v HMRC*. The Lords held that workers could accrue holiday pay while on sick leave and that it could be carried forward to the next leave year – despite the UK Working Time Regulations stating that it is unlawful for employees to carry over more than eight days.

Putting the judgment in the *Stringer* case into practice, the Sheffield tribunal found Rawlings, whose sickness absence lasted for the whole of 2005 and until he left the company in 2006, was entitled to be paid for the holiday he had been unable to take during the time off.

www.personneltoday.com/articles/2010/03/11/54817/holiday-pay-owed-to-employee-on-sick-leave-for-year-tribunal.html

Earnings growth puts on a small spurt

Growth in average weekly earnings showed some recovery at the start of the year, the latest official figures show.

Monthly figures show average earnings for the whole economy rose by a provisional 1.0% in the year to January on a year earlier – up from the revised annual figure of a 0.7% rise for December. This is according to the average weekly earnings figures now used as the new standard by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Headline earnings growth (the latest rolling three-month average) for the whole economy rose to a provisional 0.9% in the three months to January.

In the manufacturing sector the rise was up to 3.2% from 2.2% in the three months to December.

Earnings growth in the services sector was down to 0.6% in the three months to January from 0.8% in the previous three-month period, while earnings stood still in the private sector with no increase in the latest three-monthly period to January compared with a 0.1% rise in the three months to December.

In the public sector, earnings growth rose by 2.6% in the three months to January compared with 2.5% growth in the previous three-month-period.

The figures used by *Fact Service* for the public sector exclude financial services – the nationalised banks – which are included in another measure produced by the ONS.

Average weekly earnings ¹

£ a week

2000 =100	Whole economy				
	annual % rise	Manu- facturing	Services	Private sector	Public sector ²
2009					
January (r)	437 -0.6	498	415	429	442
February	417 -6.3	494	415	427	445
March	445 -0.9	503	424	440	443
April	448 1.4	507	434	450	447
May	448 0.8	502	433	447	446
June	449 1.2	505	434	447	449
July	448 0.6	499	432	443	448
August	449 0.7	506	433	445	449
September	450 0.8	507	436	447	452
October	451 0.5	509	436	448	452
November (r)	449 0.8	512	435	447	453
December (r)	448 0.7	517	435	448	451
2010					
January (p)	442 1.0	520	414	426	455
% annual rise for January		4.3	-0.2	-0.7	3.0
% increase in headline rate for January ³		0.9	3.2	0.6	2.6

¹ Average weekly earnings in Great Britain, seasonally adjusted, including bonuses, but excluding arrears. ² Excludes financial services. ³ The average of the seasonally adjusted data for the latest three months compared with three months a year earlier. (p) provisional, (r) revised

The table below gives estimates of full-time average weekly earnings by occupation. It is based on figures from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2009, "uprated" by the 1.3% decrease in the average weekly earnings figures between April 2009 and January 2010.

Full-time average weekly earnings by occupation

£ a week

All workers	579.70
All male	634.60
All female	494.70
Managers	851.80
Professionals	773.70
Associate professionals	598.70
Admin & secretarial	406.30
Skilled/craft	478.20
Services	344.70
Sales	320.30
Operatives	438.20
Other manual jobs	342.20

www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/lmsuk0310.pdf

Unions worldwide back cabin crew action

Rising support for the British Airways cabin crew industrial action from their colleagues around the world has been reported by the civil aviation section of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF).

Gabriel Mocho, secretary of the ITF section, said: "The ITF supports the cabin crew and Bassa/Unite in this dispute. In particular, we commend the efforts they have made to find a solution to a conflict which began with the company's apparent imposition of new working conditions while negotiations were still open."

"Unfortunately BA management demonstrated their seeming indifference to the deteriorating situation on Friday when they withdrew an offer that might have solved the dispute.

"Unite members have been quick to show solidarity with their colleagues around the world in the past, and they now want to return the favour."

www.itfglobal.org/press-area/index.cfm/pressdetail/4286

Garlic bread – it's the future, says ONS

The bread so loved by comedian Peter Kay – garlic bread – replaces pitta bread in the latest revision of the basket of goods used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to compile the Retail Prices (RPI) and Consumer Prices (CPI) Indexes.

The ONS' basket is updated annually as part of a process of continual improvement and to ensure that it is representative of consumer spending patterns. Food and drink and new technology dominate the changes. Altogether 13 new items have been added to the basket, and 13 items removed.

Other new food items are cereal bars and frozen fish in breadcrumbs or batter. And fruit drink in a bottle replaces fruit drink in a carton and a small bottle of still mineral water replaces a fizzy canned drink.

Blue-ray disc players and computer games with accessories are added to the shopping basket, while the disposable camera is disposed of.

Lip gloss and liquid soap replace lipstick and a bar of soap respectively, while electrical hair straighteners are in and hairdryers out.

And for parents, baby food is replaced by powdered baby formula to reflect the relative spending on the two products.

www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/CPI_and_RPI_The_2010_Basket_of_Goods_and_Services.pdf

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