



**WoRC**  
Work Rights Centre

# Evaluation Report

June 2016- January 2018

Published 15 January 2018

# At a Glance

The Work Rights Centre is a registered charity (No. 1165419) dedicated to ending in-work poverty. Starting in June 2016, every Saturday our employment rights clinic has been providing free and confidential advice to UK and EU nationals who experience precarious work: poorly paid, unprotected, and insecure employment.

Figures in this report draw on case data collected through the entire duration of our activity.

## Our Users



We helped **183 people** between June 2016 and January 2018. Due to the complexity of their issues, nearly 20% of service users needed more than one session with our caseworkers, and 4% needed more than five. The average case required **three actions** from our advisors, and could take up as much as **four hours and a half** of work.

## Their Issues

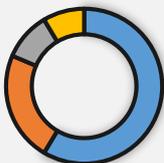


**Dangerous Informality** – As many as 50% of our users worked with no written terms, such as a contract of employment or invoices, and nearly 20% received cash payments.

**Poor employability** - 62% among them did not know how to write a CV in English, 50% did not know how to look for jobs, and a further 10% only found jobs through word of mouth.

**Precarious housing** - 43% of our service users rented or sublet informally, without the protections of a tenancy agreement.

## How We Helped



**Employment rights** – We assisted 40% of the people who saw us address a breach of their employment rights.

**Employability** – We helped 35% of them improve their employability, and enter fair and lawful employment.

**Complex issues** – As many as 16% of our beneficiaries required complex assistance with a range of employment rights, employability, social security or housing issues deriving from precarious work.

## Our Local Impact



As many as 41% of our clients were residents of Brent, reflecting our presence and sustained outreach in the borough. A further 10% were residents of Newham, indicating potential for further outreach in East London.

# Our Beneficiaries

Our Employment Rights Clinic is open to all UK and EU nationals who are in, or at risk of, precarious work. We welcome clients of all ages, genders, and religions, and maintain a free and confidential service.

Through our choice of location, work hours, and multi-lingual staff, we are committed to reaching out to those who need us the most: migrant workers, people in low skilled industries, with modest levels of education and English, who often fall below the radar of local authorities and third sector organisations, and are less able to navigate employment justice on their own. The figures here reflect this ethos.

## Demographics

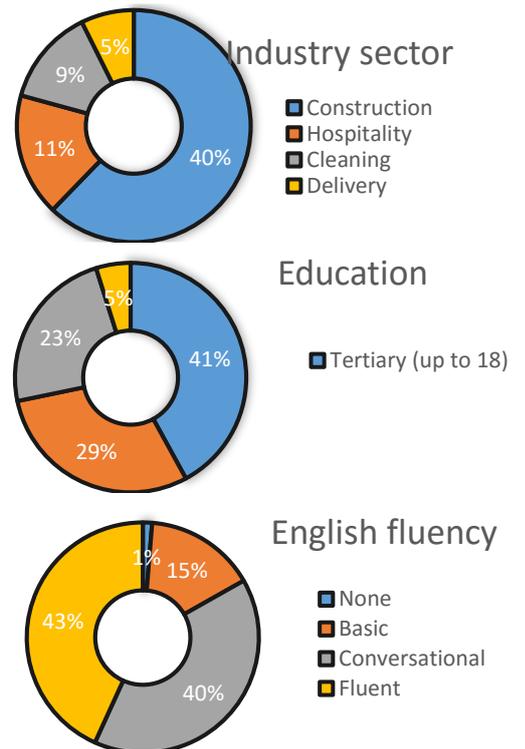
**Age** - The average age of our service users was 38.

**Gender** - They were 66% male, and 34% female.

**Trade** - Typically, our service users were active in traditionally working-class trades. The field they were most likely to work in was construction (40%), followed by hospitality (11%), cleaning (9%) and delivery (5%).

**Education** - Many were overqualified. 29% had achieved higher or postgraduate education, 41% tertiary level (up to 18), 23% secondary level (up to 16 years), and only 4% below.

**Literacy** - However, knowledge of written English was an issue. While 83% of our service users could speak English, 40% could not write it, and an additional 16% spoke little or no English at all.



## Equalities Data

**Nationality** - The majority of our service users were Romanian, reflecting our outreach in an area with a large Romanian community. We also provided advice for British and other European nationalities.

**Ethnicity** - The majority of our service users were White European, but other ethnicities included Black British, as well as Asians of British and Portuguese Goan nationality.

**Marital status** - Over half of our service users were married or co-habiting.

**Sexual orientation and gender identity** - To our knowledge, less than 1% of our service users had an orientation other than heterosexual and none were transgender. It is noteworthy, however, that as LGBT identities are still stigmatised in many communities, LGBT service users may not want to freely share with us this information.

**Disability** - 6% of service users identified themselves as having a disability.

# Their issues

Precarity is a serious state of insecurity which can take up numerous and complex forms. When we talk about precarious work, we are referring to positions characterised by poor pay, low protection and income uncertainty, which manifest in puny and unpredictable wages, irregular and excessive work hours, and a degree of informality that is rife for exploitation.

The problems with work, however, rarely stop there. Precarious employment can also trickle down into an inability to access formal housing. In the case of parents, poor employment protection devoid of parental leave creates a difficult choice between family and pay. The summary of our clients' issues reflects this grave cycle of social issues deriving from precarious work.

## Precarious work

**No written terms** – It is important to note that as many as 68% of the service users who reported working had not been given written terms of agreement, and nearly a third (30%) worked without receiving payslips or sending invoices. A further 10% only received payslips/sent invoices “sometimes”.

**No NINO** – Most worryingly, 20% of service users stated that neither they nor their employers paid National Insurance contributions, with a further 12% reporting they were unsure whether contributions were paid.

**Overwork** - 24% of those who came to see us worked over 48 hours/week.

**Cash payments** – Just as worrying is the fact that nearly 20% of those who worked received wages cash in hand, and 7% reported lacking a personal bank account.

**NMW** - 30% of those who were working were paid below the minimum wage.

**Black market and false self-employment** – The picture of informality can also point to grave rule bending. We are certain that 3% of our service users worked on the black market, while another 7% wrongly considered themselves to be self-employed when work conditions suggested a worker status. A further 10% did not know what their work status was, nor did they understand the rights and responsibilities that came with it.

## Employability

**CV** - A majority of our service users (62%) did not know how to write a CV in English. Nearly half (47%) would not know how to write one at all.

**Cover letter** - Around three quarters (78%) could not write a cover letter in English, and over two thirds (66%) could not write one at all. This points to a serious lack of ability to access the formal job market.

**Job search** – As does the fact that 52% of service users could not name any job strategy they would feel confident using, and a further 10% only found work through word of mouth.

**Computer literacy** – Over 20% did not know how to use a computer, making it significantly harder to look for jobs, deal with authorities, raise concerns about an abusive employer or research information (for example, on trade unions or rights in the workplace). A further 19% were able to use a computer, but did not have access to one at home.

## Social security

**Poor access to child support** - 36% had children and 6% had other caring responsibilities. Yet of the 54 service users who had children, only 30% received child benefit and a minority of 11% received child tax credits; the majority claimed neither despite being on low incomes. This points to a serious correlation between the informality of work conditions, and poor access to social security.

**Unpaid leave** - Equally important is that only a quarter (26%) of people who had children reported taking time off work to look after a child. Only a small fraction of those (7%) received paid parental leave. The majority (42%) took unpaid leave and 36% left work altogether. This is another indication of the serious risk that precarious work damages family dynamics and creates long-term career gaps, as parents have to choose between earning and caring.

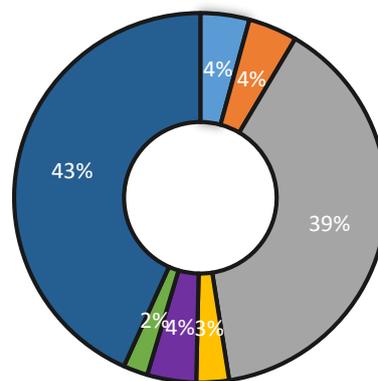
**Poor access to unemployment support** – Only a small fraction (5%) of the unemployed service users who actively sought work receive Jobseeker’s Allowance.

## Housing security

**Insecure arrangements** – It is important to note that just over a third (39%) of our users rented with the formal protection of a tenancy agreement, and just 3% accessed council accommodation. The vast majority sublet or lived informally with friends, in hostels or slept rough, in insecure conditions prone to evictions and overcrowding.

**Overcrowding** – Indeed, many of them shared a bedroom. Nearly half (42%) did so with either partner or children, and 20% shared with one or multiple unrelated persons.

**Proof of address** – 7% of our users could not provide proof of address. 5% of our service users shared the room with three roommates or more, indicating an overcrowded and likely illegal housing situation)



Housing situation

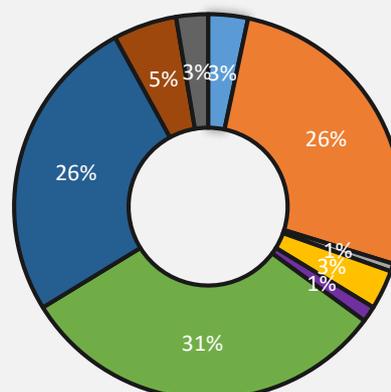
- Employer-provided
- Acquaintances- free of charge
- Contract tenancy
- Council accommodation
- Sleeping rough or hostel
- Owner-occupier
- Subletting (no contract)

## Employment Status

Self-employed contractors made up the largest category of service users, at 31% of the total.

They were followed by employees (26%) and people who were looking for work (26%)

It is also worth noting that 6% of our service users were either working on the black market, or had an unclear work status. This lack of clarity in itself can be an indication of unlawful employment.



Employment status

- Black market
- Employed
- Full-time student
- Not clear
- Pensioner
- Self-employed
- Unemployed (looking)
- Unemployed (not looking)
- Worker

# The help we provide

Our weekly Employment Rights Clinic helps clients understand their employment status, access their employment rights, and improve their employability.

We assess, inform, and provide the necessary hands-on assistance to all those who would otherwise struggle to navigate the landscape of employment legislation on their own.

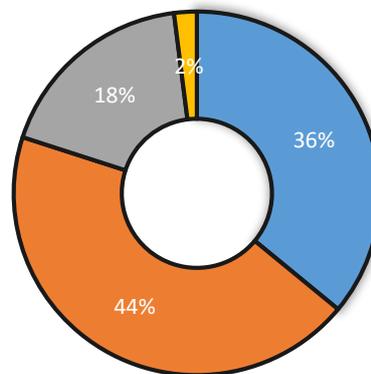
Above all, we value depth over expediency. Both employment rights and employability are multi-step areas of advice which, in the most complex cases, can take up several hours of work. While we are determined to educate and empower our service users, our utmost committed remains to providing the expert assistance needed to help them exit precarious work.

## Areas of advice

Most of our users (40%) needed help in recovering unpaid wages, clarifying their employment status, or rectifying other **EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS** breaches.

An additional 36% needed help with improving their **EMPLOYABILITY** and job hunting skills.

Precarity, however, is rarely limited to work conditions. 16% of our beneficiaries required assistance with **COMPLEX ISSUES** which span employment rights, employability, and social security, while a further 9% sought help in paying tax, housing, tax credits or other benefits relating to **SOCIAL SECURITY**.



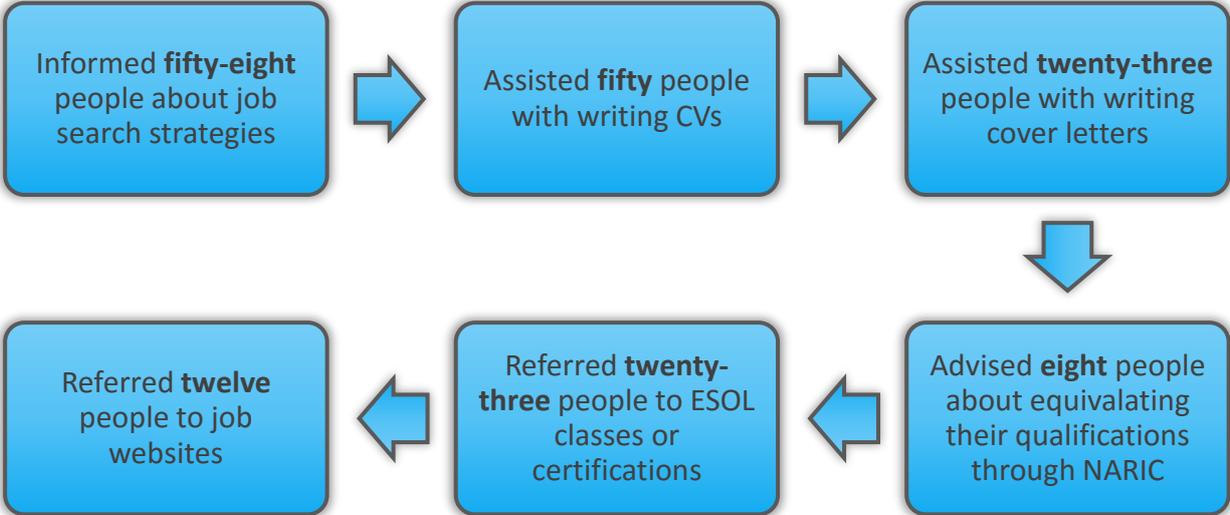
Areas of Advice

- Employment rights
- Employability
- Complex cases
- Social security

## Our employment rights work



## Our employability work



## Our work with social security

A key but rarely acknowledged aspect of precarity consists of a poor understanding of social security entitlements, and a minimal access to welfare. There is a well-documented stigma around claiming benefits, which can dissuade applications from those who are entitled to help and need welfare support the most. Committed to challenging popular misconceptions that penalise welfare claimants, our service providers have not shied away from tackling in-work poverty by informing our service users of their entitlements, and providing hands-on assistance with work related benefits.

- Advised twenty-five people with their welfare entitlements.
- Assisted six clients to apply for Jobseekers' Allowance.
- Assisted seven clients to apply for other benefits or tax credits.
- Supported eight people to apply for an EHIC card.

# About Us

WoRC registered with the Charity Commission at the beginning of 2016, and began its core Employment Rights Clinic in June that same year. Since then, both the duration of our weekly service provision hours and the size of our team have witnessed a fruitful expansion.

The organisation is governed by a dedicated board of trustees, and its everyday activities are run by an expert team of staff and volunteers. Reflecting the relative recency of our foundation, only three members of staff operate on a paid basis, while the remainder assist pro bono.

With time and funding, it is our outmost commitment to reward our members for their dedication and quality of their work by developing more paid and full time positions. The list below represents a part of a larger, multi-lingual team.

**Olivia Vicol**



Olivia is one of our funding members and chair of trustees. A doctoral candidate at Oxford University, who examined the trajectories of migrants in precarious employment, Olivia has helped fashion WoRC's vision and objective. Olivia currently supervises the charity's fundraising and reporting strategy.

**Eliza Galos**



Another founding member and head of development, Eliza has over six years of frontline and campaigning experience with vulnerable migrants, across the charity sector, local government and academia. Currently a data analyst at the IOM, Eliza is key to establishing partnerships with third sector and local government organisations, and in giving WoRC a voice in the wider campaign against precarity.

**Laura Chilintan**



Founder and operations manager, Laura has worked in the homelessness sector for two years before joining the Law Centres Network on a project dedicated to EU citizens' integration. Experienced in project delivery and record keeping, Laura oversees our financial and human resource operations.

**Adelina Cega**



Adelina is our senior service provider and fourth founding member. With years of experience in work with vulnerable individuals across the charity and local government sector, having advised on issues ranging from employability, to tackling substance misuse and exiting prostitution, Adelina is the bulwark of our Employment Rights Clinic. She is Law graduate fluent in English, Romanian and Italian.

**Raluca Enescu**



Our service provision assistant and data analyst, Raluca is an LSE graduate with four years of experience in community engagement and migrants' rights campaigning. Currently working for Tower Hamlets HealthWatch as a Community Intelligence Analyst, at WoRC Raluca is instrumental in monitoring our service provision and providing the analyses that underlie each report.

**Zac Downs**



With almost a decade of commercial experience as a software developer, and a long running interest in social mobility, Zac has been instrumental in crafting our web and print identity. Zac currently oversees the development of the website, and the production of promotional materials.

## Contact details:

For details about this report, you can contact us at:

**Email:** [contact@workrightscentre.org](mailto:contact@workrightscentre.org)

You can learn more about the Work Rights Centre at:

**Website:** <http://www.workrightscentre.org>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/workrightscentre>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/worcrights>

To drop in to our **Employment Rights Clinic**, visit us at any Saturday from 10 to 4 at:

Wembley Library  
Brent Civic Centre  
Engineers Way  
Wembley  
HA9 0FJ.

To **reference** this report, please cite: *WoRC (2017) Evaluation Report June 2016 - Jan 2018. Work Rights Centre [online] www.workrightscentre.org*

To make a **donation**, visit our website or text *WORC44 £10* to *70070* to donate by text.