

Making Ireland Home? Addressing the exploitation of undocumented migrants as a barrier to building resilience in the labour market

Seminar on the exploitation of undocumented migrants

Helsinki

Pablo Coppari, April 12th, 2018

Introduction

I think we are kind of scared of things, I feel like all the day they are putting things in your head like ***“you are going to loose your job”, “your life will get miserable”***. When you are trying to leave a place you are scared. Until you take a decision you start thinking ***“how I would pay the bill if they fire me in a month or two? You are on probation anywhere you start. What if I fail, I can't go back [home...]”*** So you just stay there and accept what you are given.

I think the system puts you here and you stop in the place you are. There is fear, I know I should not get it but I cannot help it. I am scared to start new things I make up excuses myself to stay in this position. When I think through, I see this reality but still **I cannot help being stuck in the place.**

Research Questions

Central Question

- What is the role of government policies in constructing precarity for migrant households in Ireland?

Secondary Questions

- How do these policies impact on their labour market trajectories?
- What is lasting impact of exploitation on their labour market positioning?
- What are the strategies used by households to minimise or exit precarity?

Methodological Approach

- The study uses qualitative methods to understand how processes of economic integration are constructed. (Penninx, 2005; Hillmert, 2002)
- Applying 'life-course' models the study builds the career paths of participants and is concerned with labour market trajectories (Fuller, 2015; Liverage, 2009)
- It seeks to shift from prevalent studies of individualised labour market characteristics towards a framework of household determinants of labour market participation (Ryan and Sales, 2013)

Sampling

- A series of descriptive quantitative analysis of a dataset of over 18,000 files was carried out to build the profile of the population studied.
- The focus is on migrants who entered Ireland on a work permit between 1999 and 2004.
- Two sectors of employment were selected: Accommodation & Food Services and Domestic Work & Care.
- 20 interviews in the A&F and 21 in the DW&C
- 15 males & 26 Females
- **On average 16 years in the country**

Work Permit System

It is a labour migration system (**akin to a guest worker model**) intended to be temporary (**permits renewed every year**) and which accounted overwhelmingly by the main entry category prior to 2004 with the Services & Retail and Accommodation & Food accounting for principal sectors.

Workers with work permits do not enjoy mobility (**they can only work for the employer and job specified**) and a termination of employment can result in loss of immigration status.

Family Reunification is not legislated for and **in practice** was only introduced in 2004. Dependents do not have automatic right to work.

Long Term Residency(**which allowed for labour market mobility**) was only introduced (**not legislated for**) in 2007.

Defining Precarity

- Precarious Employment: Vosko, (2006)
 - Incorporates **Social Context** and **Social Location**
- Precarious Migrant Status: Goldring et al. (2009)
 - Creates a continuum of **mobility** and **social rights**
- Hyper- Precarity: Lewis and Waite (2015)
 - **Constrained** choices when **exiting** severely exploitative employment

Precarious Lives

Exploitation	Incidence
Exploitative Recruitment	17
Exploitative Employment	25
Overall	27
Forced Labour	4

“...during those years I was dead inside. Who knows? Maybe If I didn’t experience exploitation I would have studied something or I would have worked in my profession. Maybe I would have brought my family over. Now I just want quietness.”

V. - On her experience of exploitation.

Precarious Lives

Irregularity	
Experienced Irregularity	19
<i>of which Still at high risk</i>	3
Experienced irregularity for over a year	11

“One day I rang the Department, I told them my permit was about to expire and my employer was not making efforts to renew it despite promises. I was told ‘Is your employer there? We can’t talk to you. We have to talk to your employer’. At that time I knew I was in prison, my employer was everything.”

E. - On becoming undocumented.

Precarious Lives

Low Pay	Incidence
Affected by Low Pay	39
Currently affected by Low Pay	20
Experienced Low Pay over half of their residence	28

“You should consider yourself lucky that you earn this and not less.”

I. - Asking for a pay rise from €9.50 after six years in service.

Analysis

The structure of the labour migration system in Ireland:

- Reduces mobility in the labour market and thus facilitates labour exploitation and entraps them in low-pay.
- Exposes migrants to irregularity, limiting their exit/voice capabilities (Hirschmann)
- Imposes barriers to family reunification, limits dependents access to the labour market which pushes them into inactivity and promotes a one-income earner model; thus a higher risk of poverty.

Barriers, Challenges and Strategies

- How do migrant households overcome:

1. Exploitation and Irregularity

- Acquiring residency, developing exit/voice capabilities, networks

2. Low-Pay and Income Poverty

- Over-time, Irregular employment , self-employment.

3. Job insecurity and lack of progression

- Upskilling, Re-Skilling, Changing jobs and sectors.

Conclusion

The Exploitation – Irregularity Nexus embedded in a low pay economy

- The State is responsible for producing irregularity and temporariness.
- Exploitation is perceived as a rite of passage.
- The permanent risk of exploitation and irregularity creates docile units of labour.
- This in turn generates an ever-present supply of low-paid workers.
- Low Pay generates stagnation both in the labour market but in their personal lives.
- And in turn, low-pay exposes workers to exploitation, and so the cycle continues.

Implications for the development of social policy in the fields of:

- Labour Market Activation
- Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- Intergenerational Mobility

Thank you !

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