

## **Written evidence submitted by Dr Marketa Dolezalova, Mackenzie Lunga, Ademola Adetunji, and Sipiwe Takura (IMM0021)**

Written evidence by Dr Marketa Dolezalova (Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change – CERIC - Leeds University Business School), Mackenzie Lunga (Meshebah CIC), Ademola Adetunji (NobleArise CIC), and Sipiwe Takura (Oasis Training Consultancy)

### **This evidence focuses on the following themes:**

- *International recruitment via the Care Worker visa by employers and its impact on the sector and on migrants who arrived to the UK via this route.*
- *Strategies for increasing compliance and accountability of employers using the Care Worker visa route.*
- *Building capacity and improving the effectiveness of use of the Care Worker visa route to reduce incidence of loss of sponsorship licence by employers and loss of employment by migrant workers.*

### **Key Findings:**

Brexit, and the reduction in access to EU workers in the UK, together with the Covid-19 pandemic have exacerbated long-term issues in the care sector, such as labour shortages and high workforce turnover among poor working conditions and low pay. As care employers have been struggling to recruit domestically, they have increasingly turned to international recruitment, especially after the introduction of the Care Worker visa in February 2022. This has led to a large increase in both sponsorship licences granted to employers in adult social care and the number of successful visa applications (NAO 2025).<sup>1</sup> Despite the increase in international recruitment, and oversaturation of the labour market with migrant care workers, according to Skills for Care there has only been a relatively small reduction in the number of vacancies (from 9.9% to 8.3%) and in the rate of turnover (from 29.1% to 24.8%) in 2023/24 when compared to 2022/23 (see also Appendix I).<sup>2</sup> This indicates that the Care Worker visa route has not been effective in addressing labour shortages in the sector. At the same time, there has been a significant incidence in employers losing their sponsorship licence leading to a [large number of displaced workers](#).<sup>3</sup> Research shows that there has been a lack of oversight of the granting of sponsorship licences to adult social care employers and of the ability of employers to comply with sponsorship licence conditions and consequently. Our research found that displaced workers encounter significant barriers to find new employment, such as the need to pass UK driving test before the expiration of their international driving licence. Additionally, better oversight of employers' ability to comply with licence conditions is needed together with improved support for migrant care workers to move between employers. Joined up approach with the Department of Health and Social Care and with the Care Quality Commission is needed to increase oversight and improve the effective use of the Care Worker visa route.

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**Recommended Actions:**

- 1) Provision of accessible information to care sector employers around the conditions of Sponsorship licence to increase compliance with licence conditions and reduce incidence of licence revocation.
- 2) Increased oversight of employers' ability to comply with the conditions of sponsorship licence and their ability to provide employment to workers recruited via the Care Worker visa.
- 3) Shifting the accountability for breach of licence conditions from migrant workers to employers.
- 4) Streamlining the process of finding a new employer-sponsor for displaced care workers and working with community organisations to support displaced workers to overcome barriers back into employment.

**Questions to ask the Home Office:** This in turn gives the following questions to pose for Home Office officials regarding the effective implementation of the Skilled Worker policy:

- 1) What scope is there to work with community organisations to support displaced care workers to find a new employer and to streamline the process of changing sponsorship?
- 2) How can the process of matching displaced workers to employers be improved and made more effective?
- 3) How can Departments (such as the Home Office, DHSC and DWP) work jointly regarding the design and implementation of immigration policy/Care Worker visa route to ensure that the design of the visa route works effectively to address employers' workforce needs and ensures long-term employment of migrant workers?
- 4) What work is underway to review the effectiveness of the Skilled Worker/Care Worker visa route and to improve the assessment of employer's ability to comply with sponsorship rules before the granting of a sponsorship licence?

**Expert credentials:** The author, [Dr Marketa Dolezalova](#), is based at the [Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change \(CERIC\)](#), a research centre at Leeds University Business School focused on the changing dynamics and future of work, employment, labour markets and skills, and impact of immigration on labour markets and employment. She is a Research Fellow in Labour Migration, with expertise in migration, inequality, and the wider impacts of insecure and low paid work on individuals and communities. Her previous work focused on the impact of deprivation and economic inequality on health. She is a research fellow on the ESRC funded project [Labour Mobility in Transition](#) and recently she has been focusing on the impact of the Care Worker visa on both employers and migrant workers in the care sector. Mackenzie Lunga is the director of [Meshebah CIC](#), a community organisation supporting migrants in Leeds. Ademola Adetunji is the director of [NobleArise CIC](#), a community organisation with a focus on supporting migrants in Manchester. Sipuwe Takura is the director of [Oasis Training and Consultancy](#), which provides training to healthcare workers and supports migrant health and care

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workers. Meshabah, NobleArise CIC and Oasis Training and Consultancy are members of the UK [BME Anti-slavery Network \(BASNET\)](#).

**Evidence:** The recently published [National Audit Office report](#) notes that following the introduction of the Skilled Worker visa in 2020, there has been an increase in the use of this route to enter the UK (by migrants) and of recruitment via this route by employers (p7). The report further notes that the Home Office does not have a full understanding of how the Skilled Worker route is operating and that decisions about changes to the route have not always been based on a full assessment of potential impact (p9). The ESRC funded Labour Mobility in Transition ([LIMITS](#)) project, on which the author has been working, is specifically focused on the impact of post-Brexit changes to immigration policy on recruitment and retention challenges in key low paying sectors of UK economy and on the use of the Skilled Worker route in addressing labour shortages in these sectors. This involved a [large scale survey of employers in four sectors](#)<sup>4</sup> (adult social care, hospitality, manufacture and logistics) supported with a review of secondary data, literature review and interviews with employers, workers and industry representative bodies. Additionally, since January 2025, Dr Dolezalova has been working with the co-authors from community organisations with a focus on migrant communities, [Meshebah CIC](#), [Noble Arise CIC](#), and [Oasis Training Consultancy](#), on gathering evidence about the impact of the Care Worker visa on migrants who came to the UK via this route. Evidence presented focuses on the adult social care sector and draws on the LIMITS project and on work conducted with external partners (see above) and on secondary data on increase in exploitation in the care sector after the introduction of the Care Worker visa. Evidence includes interviews with employers in the care sectors and with sectoral representatives, and further draws on interviews and focus groups with migrant workers who arrived via the Care Worker visa route after 2022, see also Dolezalova et al 2022,<sup>5</sup> and Forde et al 2024.<sup>6</sup>

**Contribution:** Since the introduction of the Care Worker visa in 2022, there has been a significant increase in international recruitment by employers in adult social care. The funding structure of the care sector, and the need for employers to bid for contracts from local authorities, alongside changing threshold of care eligibility, has meant that employers are not able to accurately predict their workforce needs. This has led to the oversaturation of the labour market with migrant care workers and to increase in reports of exploitation and modern slavery in the care sector. There have been reports of migrants being recruited via the Care Worker visa route and then not been given their contracted hours after arrival in the UK, leading to financial hardship. Whilst it is possible for migrants to change employer, the oversaturation of the care sector with displaced migrant worker, and the specific needs of adult social care employers, means that displaced workers experience several barriers to finding a new employer-sponsor. At the same time, there is still a large number of unfilled vacancies in the care sector (see Appendix I), indicating that the Care Worker visa route has not been effective in addressing the sector's workforce needs, or in

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providing long-term employment for international workers recruited via this route. Increased oversight is needed to improve the effectiveness of the use of this visa route. Key findings from our research are as follows:

1. Because of the funding structure of the adult social care sector, employers need to bid for contracts from local authorities. To win a contract, an employer needs to show that they have adequate workforce to fulfil the contract. This has led to some employers overrecruiting from abroad. In cases when an employer failed to win a contract, they have not been able to provide migrant care workers with a Certificate of Sponsorship with adequate hours to comply with the conditions of their sponsorship and visa. Employers have been granted sponsorship licences without adequate oversight regarding their ability to fulfill the conditions of sponsorship.
2. The majority of migrant workers recruited via the Care Worker visa route have borne the financial cost of coming to the UK, including the cost of their visa and travel, with the expectation of long-term employment. In many cases, this has not materialised. Many migrant workers have not been given sufficient information about their employment before coming to the UK. Examples of this include the need to obtain a UK driving licence within 12 months after arrival to the UK, which many employers require, alongside the requirement for workers to own a car.
3. Even though workers are able to work additional 20 hours for a different employer, in addition to their main employment, we found that employers are often unwilling to give employment to migrant care workers unable to prove their main employment.
4. When an employer fails to comply with the conditions of their sponsorship licence, the main burden is borne by workers with a related Certificate of Sponsorship, who lose their visa and need to find a new employer-sponsor within 60 days. This is often not possible, partly due to the large number of displaced workers and limited number of licences available.
5. Provision for matching displaced workers to employers is limited and inadequate and displaced workers have found it difficult to access it. Additionally, in some cases, displaced workers have been hesitant to access support because of fear of being told to leave the UK.
6. The design of the Care Worker visa policy, lack of oversight and of risk assessment, together with the structure of the adult social care system, have led to the current issues with high incidence of loss of sponsorship by employers in the sector, and high rate of displaced workers. There is a need for cooperation between individual government departments, sectoral bodies and migrant-facing organisation to ensure that immigration policy around international recruitment addresses the need of employers and provides long-term employment to migrants recruited from abroad.

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**Conclusions:** The Care Worker visa has led to an increase in international recruitment by care sector employers, but the lack of oversight of employer compliance and the design of the policy have led to a significant number of employers losing their sponsorship licence and workers losing their Certificate of Sponsorship. Many workers have been unable to find a new employer-sponsor and have consequently lost their right to stay in the UK. In other cases, workers have not been given their contracted hours. Consequently, many migrant care workers have found themselves in a situation of financial hardship. At the same time, the care sector continues to have a need for migrant workers. Below, we make a set of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the use of the Care Worker visa route and to decrease incidence of financial hardship and destitution by migrant care workers.

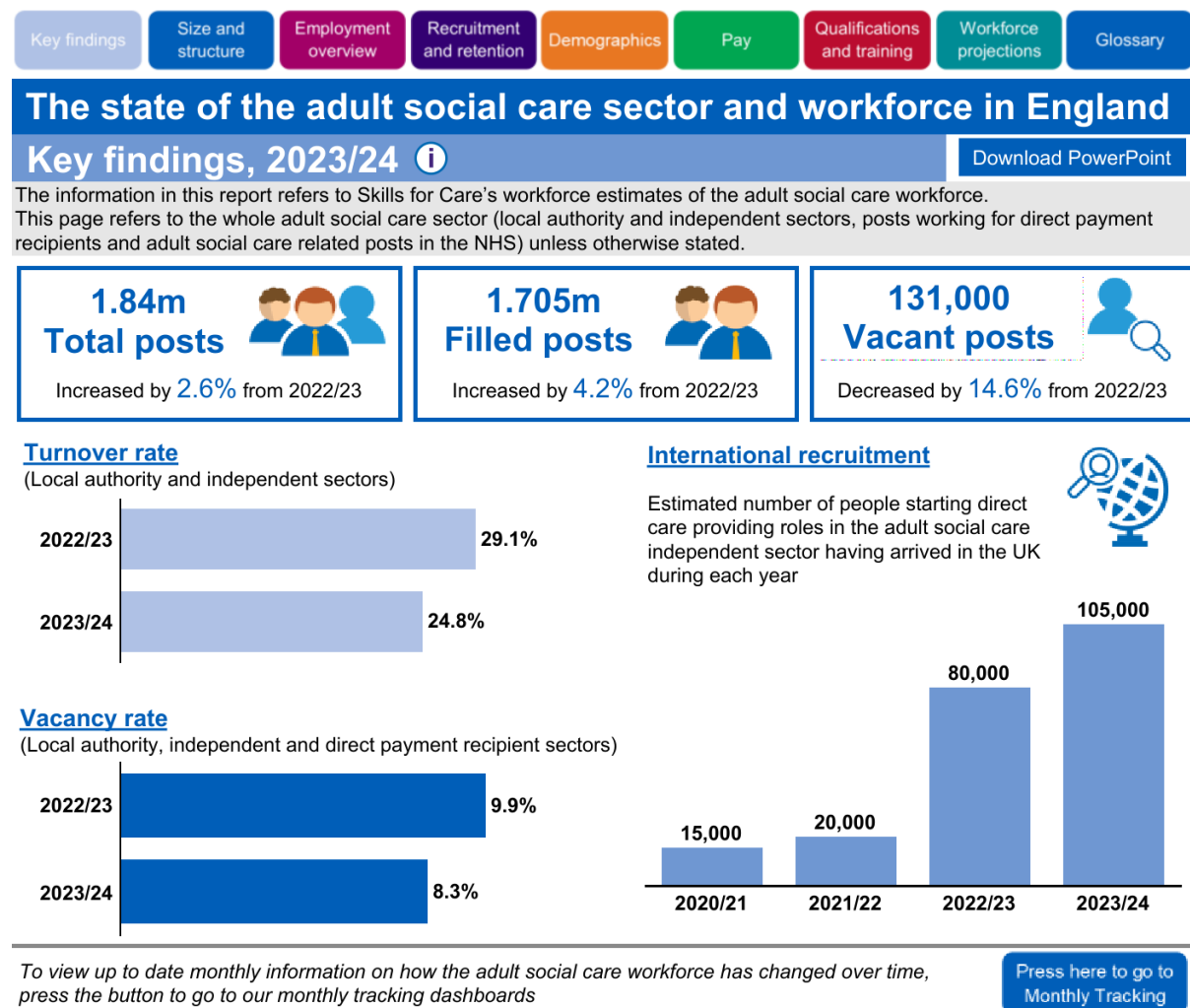
**Recommendations:**

Our recommendations focus on two main areas: 1) increasing employer compliance and 2) supporting displaced workers.

1. Review the design and the use of the Care Worker visa route and conduct a detailed assessment of the use of the Care Worker visa for international recruitment, and engage in dialogue with sectoral bodies and with organisations representing migrant workers.
2. Develop strategies to increase the Home Office ability to assess an employer's ability to comply with sponsorship conditions before being granted a licence.
3. Develop strategies for joined up approach across government departments, including the Home Office, DHSC and DWP,
4. Review the effectiveness of existing initiatives for supporting displaced workers and review the scope to scale-up effective initiatives.
5. Extend the 60-day limit for finding a new employer-sponsor and work with migrant-facing organisations to develop ways of supporting migrants back into employment.

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## Appendix I:



Source: Skills for Care (2024)

<sup>1</sup> National Audit Office, (2025), [Immigration: Skilled Worker Visa](#). Report.

<sup>2</sup> Skills for Care, (2024), [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#). Report.

<sup>3</sup> UK Government, (2025), New rules to prioritise recruiting care workers in England. News story.

<sup>4</sup> C.Forde, I.Bessa, G.Alberti, M.Dolezalova, J.Cutter, Z.Ciupijus, (2024) Employers' post-Brexit workforce strategies and their use of migrant workers: Findings from the Labour Mobility in Transition (Limits) survey of employers. Report.

<https://business.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/332/employers-post-brexit-workforce-strategies-and-their-use-of-migrant-workers>

<sup>5</sup> M. Doležalová, G. Alberti, Z. Ciupijus, C. Forde, J. Cutter, I. Bessa, (2022) University of Leeds "Migrant workers in the UK after Brexit: labour shortages in the context of the hostile environment". 6th Regional Studies Association MICaRD Research Network Conference University of Lincoln.

<sup>6</sup> C.Forde, M.Dolezalova, Z.Ciupijus, J.Cutter, G.Alberti, and E.Papargyropoulou, (2024) University of Leeds. [Working conditions and employment in adult social care: familiar challenges, but what are the possible solutions?](#)