

New report spotlights poor health of global labour migrants for the first time

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Credit: St George's, University of London

The health of labour migrants, who form the largest migrant group

globally, is critically overlooked in the countries where they are employed, according to a new study of the last ten years of data and research. Labour migrants may work in hazardous and exploitative environments where they might be at considerable risk of injury and ill health, say the authors.

The study, led by a team of researchers at the Institute of Infection and Immunity at St George's, University of London, and done as part of the UCL-Lancet Commission on Migration and Health, was a [systematic review](#) and [meta analysis](#) that pooled data from studies reporting on the [health outcomes](#) of over 12,000 [labour](#) migrants originating from 25 low- and middle- income countries, who were largely engaged in mainly un-skilled manual labour.

They found that psychiatric and physical problems were relatively common across multiple employment sectors, alongside workplace accidents and injuries.

In the meta-analyses, 47% had at least one occupational [health](#) problem including musculoskeletal pain and skin conditions. Other data showed that 22% reported accidents and injuries at work including falls, fractures and dislocations, eye injuries, and cuts.

The review included data on labour migrants in the following sectors: Agriculture; Domestic, retail and service; Construction and trade; and manufacturing and processing.

In the agricultural sector, musculoskeletal pain was the most common morbidity with prevalence estimates varying from 5% to 48%. Workers also reported dermatological infections including fungal infections or infectious skin diseases, as well as depression.

Among domestic, retail, and service workers the evidence showed that

mental health illnesses were prevalent, including symptoms of stress, social isolation and depression. Among [migrant](#) construction and trade workers, the most common morbidities were body aches, joint pains, and depression, whilst injuries were also prevalent.

Among workers in the manufacturing and processing sector, musculoskeletal pain (including [lower back pain](#) and upper limb disorders) and work-related stress were common morbidities

Dr. Sally Hargreaves of St George's, University of London led the study, which is published in *The Lancet Global Health*.

She said: "There are 150 million labour migrants globally, the largest circulating migrant group, who may experience significant occupational health issues and injuries in un-skilled low paid employment. However, they are largely ignored by policymakers and governments in the countries where they work and more needs to be done to meet the care needs of this critical working population."

She added: "For many migrant groups in Europe—including asylums seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants—their health status is poor, which requires urgent attention, including removing restrictions on access and entitlement to health services. We are calling on governments to provide universal and equitable access to health services to all migrant populations, regardless of age, gender, or legal status."

More information: Sally Hargreaves et al. Occupational health outcomes among international migrant workers: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *The Lancet Global Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/S2214-109X\(19\)30204-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(19)30204-9)

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