Introduction

1. UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry.

2. We are the largest trade union in Scotland and represent over 160,000 members. Since its inception UNISON has enshrined within its rule book the principle of self organisation. Self Organisation is a key element of UNISON's strategy for achieving equality. It plays a vital role in enabling members who face discrimination to participate in the union. Successful implementation of the union's policies on equality depends on the fullest possible involvement of women, black members, disabled members and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (lgbt) members who have traditionally been under-represented at all levels of the union. It has also allowed us to develop specialist knowledge in all areas of equality.

3. UNISON has a proud history of using its collective strength to protect vulnerable workers. Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation because of the problems they have enforcing their rights at work.

4. Migrant workers are a substantial proportion (13%) of the workforce in the public services organised by UNISON in the UK. Despite recent claims that “they are all going home” there is no evidence that the number of migrants working in the public service will decrease and there are convincing reasons to believe that in the medium to long term the numbers are likely to increase in crucial growth areas such as social care.

5. In 2007 just under half of UNISON branches that held information reported having migrant workers in membership, but only 12% of UNISON branches reported having migrant worker activists. UNISON is committed to ensuring that the make-up of its representative bodies broadly reflects the membership and that same year we established the Migrant Workers Participation Project, with the assistance of the Union Modernisation Fund. The project aims for:-
   - greater levels of participation in the democratic processes of the union by migrant workers
   - increased numbers of migrant worker stewards and activists at all levels
   - reduced economic and social exclusion of migrant workers in the workplace
   - UNISON services that better meet the needs of migrant workers.

6. In December 2009 we published the evaluation report.
http://www.unison.org.uk/migrantworkers/docs_list.asp
7. UNISON is also rolling out to all branches in Scotland a national project on Challenging racism in the Workplace which will incorporate our position on supporting migrant workers in Scottish society and in the workplace.

UNISON Response

8. Whilst UNISON welcomes the Committee's decision to consult on this important issue, we believe there are a number of questions that can only be answered by Scottish government departments and other specific public bodies, eg ACPOS.


10. The report establishes migration as a policy issue for Scotland, focuses almost exclusively on A8 migrants, highlights the gaps in evidence, and makes a number of key recommendations on the need for research and data sources to be continually updated and developed to inform the range of policy agendas associated with migration.

11. Consequently, UNISON has focussed it’s response on the areas relating to:-
   - The contribution of migration to the Scottish Economy and in particular the public sector;
   - How positive messages regarding the contribution of migrant populations to Scottish society can be effectively disseminated;
   - The degree of awareness of the rights of migrants.
   - Trafficking issues

Contribution of Migration to the Scottish Economy

12. According to the latest estimate Scotland's population increased for the sixth year running. Scotland's population (on 30 June 2008) was 5,168,500 - the highest since 1981. There are almost 114,000 more people in Scotland than in 2002 when the population hit its lowest level since just after the Second World War. The increase of 24,300 people on the previous year was mainly caused by net in-migration with around 20,000 more people entering Scotland than leaving it. There were also around 4,000 more births than deaths. The General Register Office for Scotland is projecting an increase to 5.54 million by 2033 and then a slow decline.

13. The Scottish Government recently commissioned research into the impact of migration to Scotland and the key findings can be summarised as follows:
   - Employers value migrant workers highly yet they are often subjected to poor employment practices. Workers are often over qualified for the jobs they do.
   - Demand on public services is lower than expected. No additional pressure on the NHS.
   - They are housed largely in private rented accommodation – not social housing.
Little research on the impact of migration on education, although demand for English language teaching has increased.

Scottish public more welcoming than other parts of the UK and migrants generally report a positive experience.

Migrants are more likely to be victims of crime. No evidence of higher criminal activity by migrants, despite some media headlines.

How can positive messages regarding the contribution of migrant populations to Scottish society be effectively disseminated

14. The number of migrant workers in the areas that UNISON organises has nearly doubled in the last decade. In the UK, foreign-born employees in education, health and other public services increased from 7.6% of the workforce in 1997 to 11.3% in 2007 and 12.8% in 2008. There are now around one million foreign-born workers in the public services. A recent report has claimed that of the 1.4 million EUA8 workers (that is workers from those countries that became members of the EU in 2004, who had come to the UK between May 2004 and March 2009) almost half had returned by the end of 2008 as a result of the recession in the UK and increased opportunities in Poland. Although this statistic is dramatic, it still means that 700,000 EUA8 workers have remained and that migrant workers will continue to be a substantial element of the UK labour force.

15. The figure is also misleading as the majority of the migrant workers in the public services come from outside the European Union and there is no evidence that they are going back¹.

16. UNISON is of the view that public services in Scotland would struggle to cope without the skills of migrant workers. This is particularly the case in the health and social care fields. Like domiciled workers they are also contributing to the Scottish economy through income tax and national insurance contributions.

17. Whilst we are aware that this inquiry is focussing on migrant workers, UNISON is keen to highlight the fact that our work goes beyond that particular group and also includes our work for and on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers.

18. For example, since its establishment in Scotland we have worked closely with, and sponsor, Show Racism the Red Card, particularly on their projects with refugees and asylum seekers. We also participate and sponsor community events with the Scottish Refugee Council during Scottish Refugee Week. Please see enclosed links.

http://www.theredcard.org/resources/films/srtrc-scotland
http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/asylumbooklet/index.html

¹ Khan and Ker, 2009
The degree of awareness of the rights of migrants


http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/brief185migrantworkers.pdf

20. The impetus for the charter came from the establishment of our Overseas Nurses Network, in recognition of the needs of the overseas health workers in Scotland. We started with six members and now we have over 800 all over Scotland. The Network was set up as an information point, a social contact and information exchange point.

21. The Migrants Workers Charter covers ethical recruitment, pay and conditions, accommodation, discrimination and how to address language and cultural issues. The Charter was published and promoted in response to the increasing number of cases being referred to our organising and legal staff relating to the exploitation of migrant workers in relation to their employment rights.

22. Whilst this charter is aimed at all employers it is particularly important that the governments at UK and Scottish levels together with public bodies lead the way as an exemplary employer, not only with directly employed staff but through the procurement of goods and services. Governments can also ensure that the enforcement agencies pay particular attention to the issues highlighted in the charter within their remit.

23. UNISON also has a number of organising initiatives targeted at migrant workers in Scotland. A key resource is the UNISON Organising Migrant Workers handbook. This and other materials are available on the UNISON UK website http://www.unison.org.uk/migrantworkers/

24. This includes details of the new migrant workers participation project that will include training for stewards and migrant worker activists. The best way to challenge exploitation is by getting migrant workers organised in UNISON.

Trafficking issues

25. The only comment we would make on the issue of trafficking is to draw the committee’s attention to the UNISON Scotland response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on “Safeguarding the Children in Scotland Who May Have Been Trafficked”.

http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/traffickedchildren.html

UNISON
April 2010