

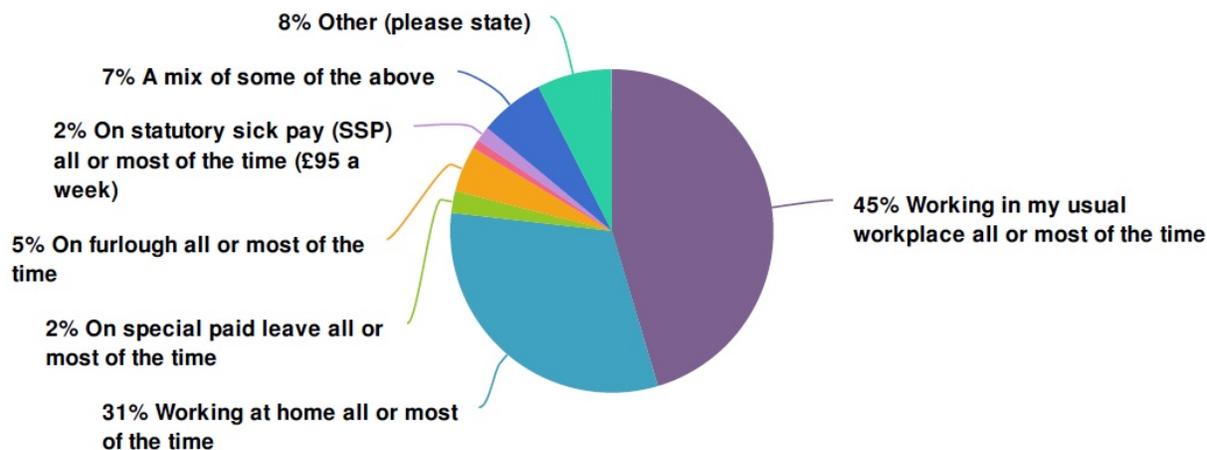
## Written evidence submitted by UNISON CVB0039)

### About UNISON

1. In UNISON's evidence to the Committee's inquiry into the unequal impact of Coronavirus (Covid-19) on people with protected characteristics earlier this year, we highlighted how Black workers were severely and disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Due to occupational segregation arising from systemic racism, Black workers are concentrated in lower paid, frontline roles, with many on insecure contracts. In addition to occupational segregation, Black workers face racism at work, exacerbating risk. This can be a barrier to raising concerns and accessing safe working conditions, including home-working, redeployment, appropriate PPE and social distancing.
2. In UNISON, 'Black' – with a capital B – is used to indicate people with a shared history. 'Black' is used in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK who have suffered from colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today's society.
3. We estimate UNISON has 185, 000 Black members, mainly working in health and local government services, with significant numbers working in social care and schools. Many deliver frontline services and many are low paid.
4. For this inquiry, we focus on how Black workers are being exposed to the virus as keyworkers, through difficulty maintaining social distancing at work and lack of appropriate PPE. We also provide evidence of the impact of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) on migrant workers.
5. We cannot look at the impact of the pandemic on Black workers without ensuring we look with an intersectional lens. The experience of Black workers is impacted by many factors including gender, age, disability, health, immigration status and socio-economic status. This submission should be read in conjunction with UNISON's evidence to the current sub-inquiries exploring the impact of Covid-19 on gender and disability.

### Safety at work

6. In late June, we surveyed UNISON Black members on their experiences of work and COVID-19. We are preparing a full report and already have clear evidence of difficulty in self-isolating because of work demands, and issues arising for keyworkers.
7. There have been 10,286 responses to the survey from across the UK. Nearly 80% of respondents (76.5%) are women, reflecting UNISON membership. Over 50% (50.8%) work in healthcare and nearly 30% (28.7%) in local government services. A significant proportion (19.8%) work delivering social care.
8. A large majority describe their ethnic origin as Black African (34%) or Black Caribbean (29%). Other groups represented include Asian UK (9%), Indian (6%), Asian other (4%) and Pakistani (3%).
9. Of those responding to the survey, a large proportion (45%) have continued to work in their usual place of work (please see figure 1).



10. Only 6% have been redeployed to a new job role to allow them to work from home or do a less risky job. Over a third (35%) felt pressured to go to work when they did not feel their workplace was safe. To date, only 40% had been offered an individual risk assessment – 60% had not. Of those who have had an individual risk assessment, a significant minority (35%) did not feel it adequately addressed the risks they face.
11. Among all responses, 79% of members said their employer had not talked to them about the risks they face as a Black worker. This is despite clear and well-publicised evidence of the increased risks of serious illness and death to Black workers from COVID-19.
12. When asked whether their workplace is following government guidance on safe working, such as through social distancing and access to handwashing facilities, 39% answered either No or Not sure. The most common issue was in relation to social distancing.
13. 67% of respondents need PPE to ensure their safety at work. Only half (50%) report being issued with the correct level of PPE for the setting in which they work. 58% had not received training in safe use of PPE (putting on, taking off, laundering, disposal). 11% had a request for PPE turned down by their employer.
14. Respondents included some detail on the issues they were facing. In addition to having to work when unwell, vulnerable or shielding, and/or without risk assessments, the main issues include:
  - Supply of, access to, fit and training in use of PPE for all at risk staff, including those in administrative roles
  - Inconsistent advice on the use of PPE
  - Employers asking staff not to wear PPE for fear of service users' reactions
  - Risk from having to use public transport
  - Access to COVID-19 testing.

*"I was told I didn't require a gown and face mask for me to administer medication and attend to the patient. The white staff who transferred the patient to our ward had gowns and face masks, not just aprons and gloves."* - **Female NHS worker**

*"I have underlying health conditions. I worked 65-75 hours a week in the pandemic and when I asked them to do better with social distancing and safety, I was fired because I was a temp."* - **Female NHS bank staff**

*"We were told by management we cannot put on face mask, gloves and gowns because we are scaring the patient."* - **Female NHS worker**

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*"[I] Asked to [wear] the mask when in class with children but was told it will frighten the children as they have not seen masks worn in school before."* - **School worker, aged over 50**

he following comments are typical of responses:

*"My problem is more than PPE. I am a cleaner [and] they send me to clean different stations. I have [been] employed [in] one permanent place but [at] this difficult time they send me place to place."* - **Male cleaner, police and justice worker**

*"I have been asked to undertake face to face assessment without training in using PPE."* - **Male social care worker**

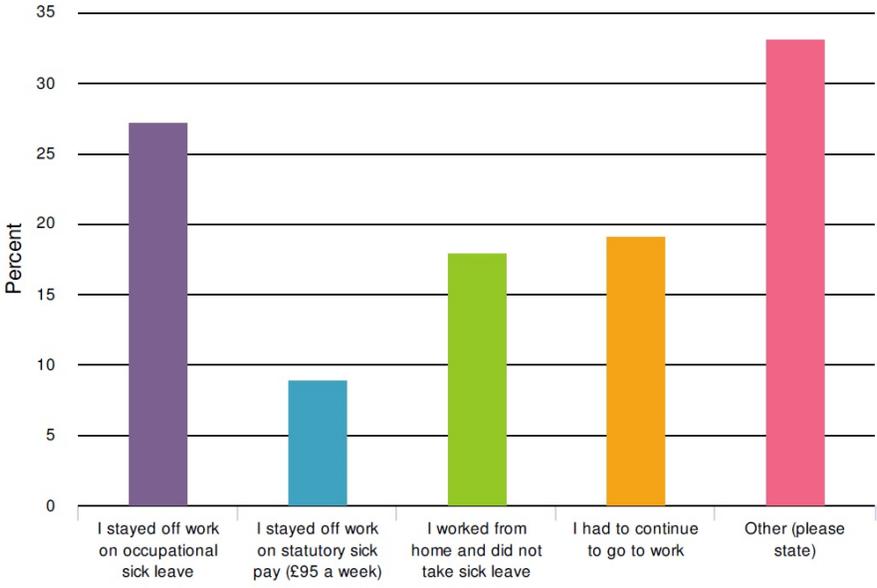
*"PPE often runs out Not enough ordered This is a short break centre no risk  
"We have been told only to use PPE when visiting a person with symptoms, however we are using public transport which also increases the risk."* - **No ID provided**

*"I am from Indian heritage and have small features as many south Asians have. The PPE is therefore too big, even in the small size, as it is made to fit white people. The mask keeps slipping off my face."* - **Female local government worker**

*"[In] March, April and May, we were given 3 masks to use for a week and we had to do personal care in the morning for over 3 people, midday 2 or 3, bedtime 3."* - **Female social care worker**

16. Asked about testing for COVID-19, a majority (54%) were not confident or unsure whether they could access testing if needed. Only 24% were very confident they could access testing. Respondents were asked whether they had been infected with COVID 19 or been in contact with someone who had it, and what happened then. Nearly 20% (19%) said they had to

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17. A worrying 34% did not know or were not sure how to raise concerns about the risk faced by themselves, their colleagues or service users. 22% said they would be uncomfortable or very uncomfortable raising safety issues at work.

**UNISON is calling for:**

- Mandatory individual risk assessments for Black workers, with risks addressed effectively and mandatory spot checks and sanctions by HSE inspectors
- All frontline workers to have recommended PPE for their role, regardless of whether they work in public or private sector and whether employee, contractor or agency worker.
- Where work cannot be made safe for that individual, paid alternatives to be provided.
- Employers to ensure decisions on working from home, deployment, redeployment, furloughing and redundancy are not discriminatory and do not result in financial or employment detriment to Black workers, now or in the future
- Employers to listen to and act on the issues and concerns Black staff have about their circumstances and experiences.

Figure 2

18. Given the particularly devastating impact on Black care workers, we reiterate our call for:
  - Care workers to have same rights and protections as NHS/local government staff, including proper sick pay, equivalent annual leave, paid breaks, unsocial hours payments, pensions, learning opportunities and job security.
19. In addition, UNISON has repeatedly called for Government to implement the recommendations of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, the Lammy Review, Theresa May's Race Disparity Audit. We call for Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 - the Public Sector Socio-Economic duty – to be enacted in England and for decisive action to close ethnic pay gaps, including statutory reporting and mandatory publication of action plans.

### **Additional issues for migrant workers**

20. UNISON has prepared a detailed briefing on the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill. We include just two points here.
21. Members have told us of heightened stress and worries about their visa and Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) applications while working to tackle COVID. Many have been kept in limbo with cancellation after cancellation of the Life in England test. With the suspension of expedited ILR application services, they are faced with the additional worry of surrendering their passports for 6 months, cut off from vulnerable loved ones overseas.
22. Many migrant workers on the COVID-19 front line are also subject to 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) and have felt forced to work even if they show symptoms of COVID-19.

#### **Case study**

A UNISON member working as a nurse is not eligible for the Government's visa waiver scheme as it currently stands. Her husband is a careworker. They and their children have moved into a one-bedroom property in order to reduce costs and save money for their visa renewals. They are NRPF – which means they have been refused free school meals, child benefit or universal credit.

#### **Case study**

A UNISON member and her husband are both careworkers. They say they are working every hour they can in order to save money for the visa renewal fees for themselves and their three children. They struggle to save money and feed their children. They were refused free school meals and are not eligible for child benefit. They do not know how they will find the money they need when their visas come up for renewal in December.

**UNISON is calling for:**

- Indefinite Leave to Remain for all key workers who are working on the COVID-19 frontline
- The suspension of No Recourse to Public Funds.

July 2020