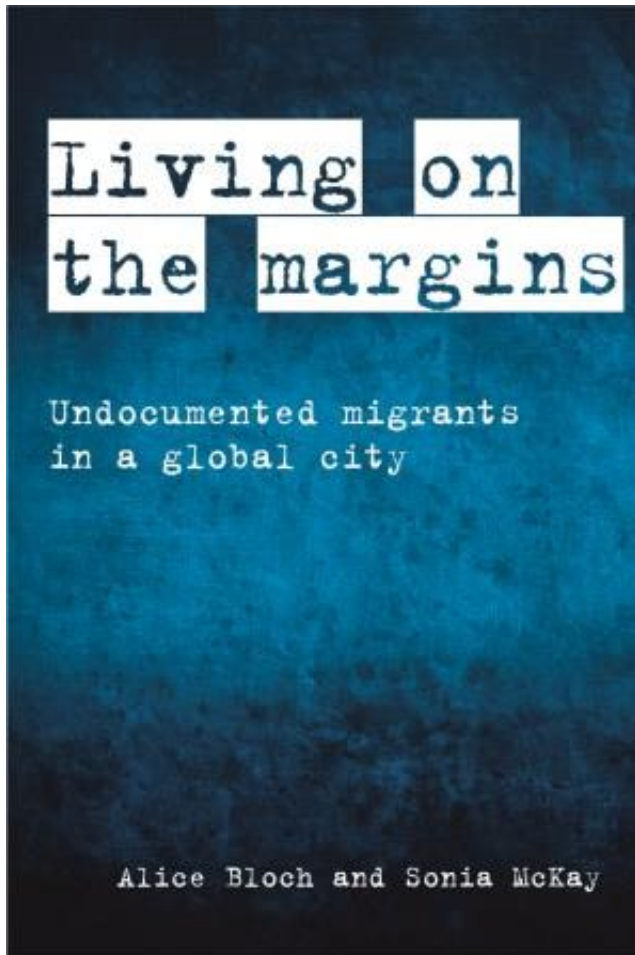


'Immigration sanctions do not work', new research says

28 January 2016



Tough sanctions against companies who take on undocumented migrants do not stop the exploitation of foreign workers, according to new research.

Professor Sonia McKay, from the University of West of England (UWE Bristol), and Professor Alice Bloch, a sociologist at The University of Manchester, say that the government fails to recognise that for most migrants there is 'no going back' – and that penalties are not enough to stop

them seeking and taking on low paid or exploitative work.

In a new book, entitled *Living on the Margins: undocumented migrants in a global city*, the authors claim that current immigration policy does not work. Through interviews with migrants, they explore how it has the unwanted effect of marginalising them – as employers offset the risk to their businesses with low wages - and damaging community cohesion by making regulated employment unavailable to [undocumented workers](#) who need to work to repay migration costs.

According to the research - which has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council - this would get worse if the government's new Immigration Bill (currently making its way through parliament) is passed. The planned change in the law proposes increasing the £20,000 maximum penalty for employers hiring undocumented workers and introducing a criminal offence of working without documents.

Professor Bloch explained, "Even though raids and sanctions around undocumented working are currently targeted at employers, our new book explains how they carry the effect of encouraging exploitative labour market practices, as employers offset the risk of being caught by keeping wages down. If penalties go up, this will serve to push them even lower.

"If this weren't bad enough, introducing a specific [criminal offence](#), with the risk not just of deportation but of prison, fails to recognise that for many migrants there is no way back; they are working not to 'break the law' but to repay their migration costs and start a new life contributing to British society and the economy."

Professor McKay said, "The government is scapegoating undocumented migrants for the economic crisis which migrants did not cause and

is using them as a cover for further attacks on welfare."

The book published by Policy Press on January 27, offers a new insight into the lives of London-based undocumented migrants from China, Turkey and Bangladesh, bringing together interviews with them and employers from the three groups.

It claims that government policy falls short in recognising that, despite sanctions, some employers will take on undocumented migrants where family obligations, political positions or a sense of solidarity compel them to do so.

It also explores how people are resourceful and find ways of surviving, building networks and managing day-to-day life in the context of their undocumented status, even if that means living on the margins and not being able to benefit society.

Professor Bloch added, "Our interviews with undocumented migrants showcase a reality that exposes contradictions in the current immigration policy but it also provides hope by showing how migrants, often marginalised by others, can be active agents of change in their own lives, shaping their futures despite the constraints society places upon them."

Provided by University of the West of England

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