

[Working Nights](#) by Julian Siravo, *Autonomy* (19/01/2022)

Currently, **1 in 9 people in the UK work at night**, which is the highest proportion of the workforce since ONS records began in 2005. The UK **night-time economy (NTE)** is [estimated](#) to contribute 5.1% to the UK's GDP and it is a fast-growing sector. However, whilst night-time work is celebrated for its benefits to businesses and consumers, the many challenges it presents to the night workers who make the NTE possible and profitable are often overlooked.

Night work is generally more precarious than day work. Workers on [zero-hour contracts](#) are twice as likely to work night shifts than other workers, and, in London, twice as many NTE-workers earn [below the London living wage](#) as daytime workers across all other occupations. Night workers are also denied equal access to services and infrastructure which are available to daytime workers but limited at night, such as transport, childcare and rest rooms.

Night work is characterised by distinct inequalities. In London, which represents 40% of national [night-time revenue](#), there are more men (68%) than [women](#) (32%), women are more likely to be on lower pay, and 34% of [workers are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds](#) (whilst making up 14% of the UK population).

Currently local and national governments tend to operate with a narrow definition of what and who constitutes the NTE and concentrate on the more formal and better-established occupations, like those in hospitality. **A complete picture of night work, however, must include categories like gig economy food delivery riders, sex workers, migrant domestic care workers, and workers in the retail and logistics sector.**

Accordingly, the Government should consider implementing policies that **place NTE-workers at the centre**, such as establishing:

- **'Night Time Assemblies'**. Local councils could oversee the formation of democratic structures to manage night-time activities. These would include workers' organisations, local community representatives, local business associations and council officials. A network of council-level night-time assemblies could inform decisions at a local and regional scale.
- **a 'Night Workers' Equity Commission' to advise city-regions.** With delegates from Night Time Assemblies being able to join and inform its work, this commission would be involved in shaping urban transformations that affect the night - from licensing to public space design. A possible model for this could be 'The Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm' set up by the Mayor of London to advise the GLA.
- **a 'Night Time Living Wage'**. Using the London Living Wage as an example, a Night-Time Living Wage would reflect the higher costs of working at night. Cities should promote its development, and incentivise businesses to pay their employees the Night-Time Living Wage.
- **'Night Funds' for 24-hour services.** 'Night Funds' could be drawn from profits of companies that rely on night work for their success. Public authorities and workers' organisations could collaborate to set up spaces and services for the support and wellbeing of night workers. These could include 24-hour childcare and GP appointments, 24-hour worker centres for worker support and encounter, and 24-hour rest stops – for food, drink and toilets; the latter would also help alleviate the [general acute shortage](#) of public toilets, the remedying of which is an urgent [necessity, especially for women and vulnerable people](#).

For further information contact the author at info@autonomy.work. Contact Prof Alison Scott-Baumann for access to other experts at as150@soas.ac.uk, and visit [our website](#) for more information. *The views expressed in SOAS ICOP Briefings are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of SOAS.*