# Undercover investigation exposes asylum seekers illegally working in UK gig economy to repay people smugglers



An undercover investigation by The Telegraph has brought to light the troubling practice of asylum seekers working illegally as bike couriers for food and grocery delivery services, including Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats, while housed in Home Office hotels. Many of these individuals, forbidden from working due to their immigration status, reportedly earn as much as £500 a week through schemes that involve account renting and identity fraud.

A significant portion of their earnings is remitted overseas to pay off debts to people smugglers who financed perilous crossings of the English Channel in small boats. The investigation sheds light on two substantial issues facing the United Kingdom: the inadequacy of border security and the existence of a grey labour market that attracts undocumented migrants.

The gig economy has emerged as a primary avenue for these workers, providing access to employment with minimal barriers. To start working, all that is required is a mobile phone and a bicycle. A notable loophole in regulations governing delivery services allows migrants to circumvent legal resistance. They can rent accounts from legitimate workers for weekly fees of £70 to £100, thus evading background checks and verification processes mandated for legitimate employment.

The exact number of undocumented migrants currently participating in the gig economy remains elusive. However, it is estimated that over 450,000 individuals are employed within this sector overall, with fewer than 85,000 specifically in food delivery. Research conducted across multiple cities worldwide indicates that a significant portion of platform labour consists of migrant workers. A freedom of information request filed by Reuters last year revealed that 42% of delivery riders stopped by enforcement teams during a six-day operation in April 2023 were found to be working illegally.

The lack of thorough checks and accountability is a major concern. Businesses operating within this space often evade responsibility by asserting that they do not formally “employ” workers, a stance seemingly enabled by a government that appears reluctant to confront the issue. Once regarded as a flexible job market, the gig economy has become a substantial draw for illegal immigration, as individuals can easily enter the country, receive state housing, and engage in unlawful work to repay their debts.

As articulated by a trafficker from Dunkirk, “The Government pays you, feeds you and they’ll even give you a good home. You’ll find work very easily. There are easy jobs you can do while staying in hotels they put you in.” This sentiment highlights the stark realities contributing to the influx of undocumented individuals seeking refuge in the UK.

The implications of these findings suggest that the repercussions of this situation extend beyond the migrants and the delivery platforms, placing a financial burden on the British public. As issues of illegal employment and immigration persist, the landscape of the labour market continues to evolve in ways that pose significant challenges to established regulatory frameworks.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/08/16/takeaway-delivery-rider-illegal-channel-migrant/> - This article discusses the issue of asylum seekers working illegally as bike couriers for food and grocery delivery services, including Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats, while housed in Home Office hotels. It highlights how the gig economy has become a primary avenue for these workers, providing access to employment with minimal barriers, and how migrants can circumvent legal resistance by renting accounts from legitimate workers for weekly fees of £70 to £100.
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67371473> - This BBC investigation reveals that social media account holders are selling or renting accounts for the three main delivery apps, including Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats. The investigation found that some sellers offer to rent their accounts for £70 per week, stating that age does not matter and that the apps do not check age, highlighting the loophole in regulations governing delivery services that allows migrants to circumvent legal resistance.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/moped-delivery-drivers-from-major-firms-targeted-in-illegal-working-crackdown> - This government news release details a week-long crackdown on illegal working by delivery drivers from major firms, including Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats, resulting in 60 arrests across London and the south. The operation targeted offences such as illegal working and possession of false documentation, shedding light on the inadequacy of border security and the existence of a grey labour market that attracts undocumented migrants.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/deliveroo-just-eat-uber-eats-illegal-migration-working-home-office-b1154754.html> - This article reports that Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats have agreed to implement direct immigration checks on their UK riders' status after pressure from the Home Office to combat illegal working and exploitation. The companies will now verify that substitute riders have legal rights to work in the UK, addressing concerns over the inadequacy of border security and the existence of a grey labour market that attracts undocumented migrants.
5. <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2023-12-11/united-kingdom-government-increases-enforcement-targeting-unlawful-immigrants-working-in-food-delivery-services/> - This article from the Library of Congress discusses the UK government's increased enforcement targeting unlawful immigrants working in food delivery services, including Uber Eats, Deliveroo, and Just Eat. It highlights that heightened enforcement activity by immigration enforcement teams revealed high levels of unlawful migrants working in the food delivery sector, with over 250 enforcement visits resulting in the arrest of 380 delivery drivers, shedding light on the inadequacy of border security and the existence of a grey labour market that attracts undocumented migrants.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/deliveroo-uber-eats-just-eat-illegal-workers-home-office-immigration-raid-delivery-rider-b1099423.html> - This article reports that 66 delivery riders have been arrested in London amid a Home Office crackdown on illegal workers and employers who 'turn a blind eye'. The enforcement visits have ramped up this year, with the Home Office carrying out more than 3,200 enforcement visits for illegal workers, arresting 3,959 people and detaining almost 1,000 within two days following an arrest, highlighting the inadequacy of border security and the existence of a grey labour market that attracts undocumented migrants.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMihgFBVV95cUxPNHpFTUJELXVtQTh0di1pLUJvUTFVbWFZbmlSWW5PRkg4VjJyWkNHbnlSYWpncm5GQ1B2cHJnYXRDMGF3STNDODQ2MnQzakJ2NUxSVndLWkFRaUJxbUNuQ2pOUWVVZ1FSV3o0Qnl6NzUtekhvUUwtX05HN0FjQzFpZF95RFRiZw?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data