



POLICY BRIEF

Data After Dark

**New evidence on the 1.32 million night workers in London,
and its implications for policies to improve wellbeing
and economic resilience.**

Executive Summary

Night workers play a vital but largely invisible role in sustaining the economy, public services, and infrastructure. Yet evidence from Data After Dark reveals they face disproportionate risks, poor working conditions, and structural inequalities across health, safety, pay, and representation.

Data After Dark confronts the longstanding lack of reliable data on night workers, which prevents detailed policy attention to their wellbeing, workplace conditions, and rights. Drawing on surveys, long-table discussions, and innovative smart data analysis across London, this research provides the most comprehensive portrait of the capital's night workers to date.

It identifies clear, evidence-led actions to improve fairness, safety, and health outcomes, while ensuring the 24-hour economy is resilient, productive, and socially just.

Policy Context

Around a quarter (1.32 million) of London's total workforce are estimated to work between 6pm–6am. This section of the workforce is essential for hospitals, transport, logistics, social care, hospitality, and retail sectors, yet those within it can experience elevated health risks, safety concerns, and financial precarity.

The findings from this research provide evidence to inform debates around fair work, gig economy reform, transport safety, health inequality, and labour market resilience. These include the Office of National Statistics' recent announcement to cease analysis of the night-time economy, amid calls for the government to appoint a dedicated night-time economy

minister; setting strategic priorities for the recently established Fair Work Agency; and employment status reform as proposed in the Plan to Make Work Pay.

Research Aims

In collaboration with the Mayor of London, Data After Dark sought to build a comprehensive evidence base on London's night workers, integrating qualitative and quantitative data sources. In so doing, it pursued a better understanding of the lived experiences, motivations, challenges, and aspirations of night workers.

It also pursued a range of administrative and smart data sources (such as mobile phone-derived footfall data) that enabled the creation of maps, unprecedented in their detail, that reveal the geography of night work across London.

Equipped with these new insights and in collaboration with the Mayor's 24 Hour London policy team, the ambition was to offer relevant insights for supporting night workers' wellbeing, safety, economic security, and representation.

Research Findings

Night workers are essential but undervalued.

London's night-time economy generated nearly £140 billion in 2024.

Yet night workers' needs are rarely factored into infrastructure design, and they lack similar levels of access to public and workplace amenities that exist for the 'traditional' 9–5 workforce (such as public toilets or hospital canteens that are only open during the day).

Precarious work, low pay, and insecure scheduling are widespread.

Nearly a third (29%) of surveyed night workers report earning less than the London Living Wage. Many work under precarious employment conditions, including freelance arrangements with limited legal protections.

Health risks can be significant and long-term.

Night workers express practical difficulties related to their work (particularly in accessing nutritious, affordable food) in maintaining healthy lifestyles and managing health conditions.

Safety concerns are acute, especially during commutes.

One in five of the surveyed night workers report feeling unsafe travelling to and from work at night, often citing a lack of frequent and reliable night-time public transport options, and lack of adequate street lighting.

Structural inequalities shape access to opportunities and exposure to harm.

Night workers are disproportionately from ethnic minority and/or migrant backgrounds. The types of work are often lower-paid positions, have limited career progression opportunities, or are otherwise precarious, exacerbating gendered and racialised inequalities, and making them vulnerable to harassment and discrimination.

Spatial analysis reveals concentrated night-time labour hotspots.

By combining open data on business types and locations, with aggregated night-time

activity patterns derived from mobile phone footfall data, the research created a map of night work in London. This offers a new way of viewing the city, which when layered with other sources of evidence has the potential to generate insights across London and enable highly targeted policy interventions at the local level.

Key Messages

Night workers are essential to London's functioning yet remain under-recognised and underserved in policy and public debate.

Poor working conditions, health risks and safety concerns require urgent and coordinated policy action.

Robust data can provide a clear evidence base for targeted interventions to improve fairness and resilience in London's 24-hour economy.

Policy Implications

Strengthen employment protections and fair pay, including mandating the London Living Wage and regulating scheduling practices.

Improve safety and infrastructure through expanded night transport and creation of Night Worker Hubs.

Address health inequalities with regulated rest breaks, mental health support, and access to affordable, nutritious food.

Support evidence-based policymaking through improved data infrastructure and geodemographic insights, as well as enhanced **representation and inclusion in policymaking processes**.

About Data After Dark

The Data After Dark research collaboration is the most comprehensive studies of night workers in London completed to date. Supported by the Mayor of London, the team includes researchers from the UCL Social Data Institute, UCL Urban Laboratory, The Bartlett School of Architecture, Geographic Data Service, and Didobi Limited.

Data After Dark is led by James Cheshire, Professor of Geographic Information and Cartography at the UCL Department of Geography, Deputy Director of the Geographic Data Service, and Director of the UCL Social Data Institute.

James is a leading geographer who has made significant contributions to the social sciences, particularly in spatial data analysis and visualisation. He has published over 100 peer-reviewed articles and conference proceedings, and his recent work has tackled the use of innovative mobility datasets, cartographic representations of social inequality and the ethics of new forms of data for population research.

His work has been supported by over £15 million in research funding, and he has helped to create data and mapping portals that have been widely used in education and policy.

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To access an online version of this policy brief, including an interactive map dashboard, and learn more about the researchers and team, scan the QR code or visit:
<https://dataafterdark.org/reports/evidence-week.html>

About Smart Data Research UK

Smart Data Research UK (SDR UK) is the national programme that's unlocking the potential of digital data for research and innovation. Backed by the UK government through a £60 million UKRI investment, our mission is to use smart data to help solve the UK's biggest social, economic and environmental challenges.

The Geographic Data Service (GeoDS), part of Smart Data Research UK, enables groundbreaking research into economic and social conditions and inequalities between neighbourhoods, cities and regions across the UK. Based at UCL, University of Liverpool, University of Edinburgh and University of Oxford, GeoDS leads academic collaboration with industry, government and the third sector to extract value from smart data and support projects for the public good.

To learn more about SDR UK, visit:
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