

The Impacts of Migrant Labour Force on the British Housing Construction Sector

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ABSTRACT : With current international public sentiment towards migrants becoming increasingly wary, it is vital to present an objective and factual study of the actual impact of migrant labour within our industry, i.e. the British construction industry, and more specifically, the British housing construction sector. The problem is whether migrant labour has more of a negative or positive effect on the British construction sector, on varying levels of practicality and functionality. This research will present the history, current state, advantages, and disadvantages of migrant labour within the sector, as well as provide insight from the employers and the migrant workers themselves with regard to this issue. The primary aim of this research is to showcase how migrant labour affects the construction sector and whether it is truly necessary for the success and prosperity of the sector. The results collected will thereby show that the positive effects far outweigh the negative and that although there are some negative points in the reliance on migrant labour, albeit to a degree that does not affect the success or productivity of the sector itself, it is an aspect of the industry that heavily adds to its efficiency and progress. The methods used are traditional research (historical data, scholarly studies and statistical data), on-site observation and data collection at various construction sites and companies, the conduction of surveys and questionnaires directed towards several professionals in varying positions in order to obtain direct information and opinions from those affected by the problem directly.

Keywords — Impact, Migrant, Labour, British, Construction Sector, Construction Industry.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This research is the impact of migrant labour on the British housing sector on several levels, the prevalence of migrant labour within the United Kingdom (UK) and more specifically, the West Midlands, as well as the reasons behind the increase of migrant workers within the sector as opposed to local workers. By studying the effects and underlying causes of the increase and the impact of migrant labour on the housing construction sector, one hopes to shed some light on a topic that is often caused for debate among economists, sociologists, and politicians alike. The rise of migrant labour in the UK, specifically in the housing construction sector, is not something to fear nor to deride, but something that has its advantages and disadvantages, as this research will attempt to convey. The construction industry continued to develop and improve upon itself well into the twentieth century, as construction in the colonized territories also increased during this period and after the independence of many of the colonized nations following World War II, with the majority of immigration to the UK coming from the former colonies (National Archives, 2015). There are many examples of this in Britain's history, when, in the past, "Britain struggled to find construction workers, it turned to Ireland, and the Irish duly became an integral part of this nation's industry (Green, 2015).

"With the Second Industrial Revolution in the early 20th century, elevators and cranes made high-rise buildings and skyscrapers possible, while heavy equipment and power tools decreased the workforce needed. Other new

technologies were prefabrication and computer-aided design (Chang et al, 1999).” After World War II, immigration was encouraged to fill the gaps in the UK labour market, especially in the construction industry, following the need for reconstruction and recovery from the war. The annual number of immigrants to the UK increased from 3,000 economic migrants in 1953 to 136,000 by 1961 (Turner, 2003). This increase led the House of Commons to establish several new legislations to manage and control the surge in immigration to the Commonwealth. It is worth noting that not only was there an increase in immigration from the former colonies, but also from Soviet-controlled countries, such as Poland, Ukraine and other Eastern European countries. Many of these migrants volunteered to work in industries that were in dire need of skilled workers to rebuild and aid in the economic recovery of the UK, due to the nationwide damages and destruction caused by the war (Miles et al, 1988).

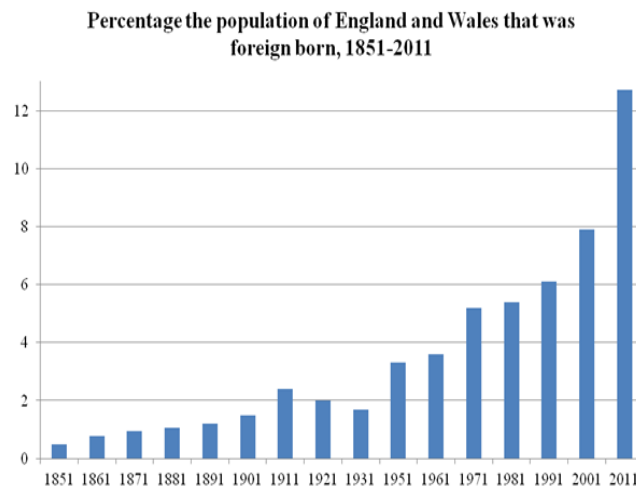


Fig. 1: Percentage of the population that was born outside of the UK since 185 (Migration Watch UK, 2014)

Prefabricated housing also saw a rise in post-WWII Britain, at the behest of then-Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in an attempt to address the housing shortage following the war. Churchill established the Burt Committee in 1942 to study the United States use of prefabricated structures in their own construction industry and how they applied it to the housing crises caused by the war. The Burt Committee’s findings were favourable to the use of prefabricated housing and following the end of the war in 1944, Churchill announced via radio broadcast that a “Temporary Housing Programme, known officially as the Emergency Factory Made or EFM housing programme, that the emergency project to build 500,000 ‘new technology’ prefabricated temporary houses directly at the end of the war was planned (Vale, 1995). Construction and migration, clearly share a mutually beneficial connection. The issue of weighing the pros and cons of migrant labour in the UK construction industry is one that is heavily dependent on the history and progress behind the numbers in the past thirty to forty years. As recently as the 1980s, the UK suffered a recession that led to a massive loss of workers in the construction industry, where unemployed British construction workers migrated to Germany in order to find employment in an industry that was flailing in their own country. The back and forth between construction and migration can influence the economy in more ways than one and fluctuate over time. As a backbone of the UK economy, it is one of the industries that simply cannot underperform, because any shortages in production or services can have direct effects on housing, retail, education, medicine, and any other industry that relies on the services of the construction industry to provide them with adequate venues for them to provide their services and perform at their best capacity.

1. Current State of Migrant Labour in the UK Construction Industry

In the years following, economic migration continued to increase steadily, and as of today, there are more than 8.7 million migrants in the UK (Shibani et al., 2021; Rienzo, 2016). Currently, the UK construction industry faces a dire shortage of skilled workers and with the looming changes that the recent referendum to exit the European Union (a.k.a. Brexit) indicates, the industry will undoubtedly be facing future shortages as well. In prospective warning, the Chartered Institute of Building (the CIOB) has advised that the “tight regulation of migration would damage construction activity in the UK” and also points out the “longstanding industry failure to train UK workers, particularly young people (Green, 2015).” This new development comes at a time when the

political debate on immigration is at its climax in the UK and throughout Europe, yet it is likely that the construction industry will continue to need migrant workers in order to continue with its activity and development. With the current political climate and international incidents that continue to shock and disparege peoples of all backgrounds and nationalities, the UK remains a nation that accepts diversity and change, however, with growing concern over national and regional security, this political climate threatens to cast a shadow over the industries that rely on migrants for a large portion of their employment and production. A shortage or sharp decrease in skilled migrant workers within the industry would severely damage the sector, mainly due to the fact that housing crises are widespread and the demand for safe and affordable housing continues to increase while the supply simply cannot keep up. It is therefore logical to conclude that with higher demand and a smaller workforce, the construction sector would not be able to handle the supply needed to fulfil the current and future demand. With “19% of the UK’s construction workforce set to retire within the next five to ten years” and the fact that “enrolment on undergraduate construction degrees has seen a 43% reduction since 2008,” there needs to be a resurgence of interest and incentive for young people to enter the industry and rejuvenate its production and innovation (Green, 2015). It is imperative to understand that migrant labour should not, by any means, become a substitute for training UK citizens in sufficient numbers and various skills that would be welcomed in the construction industry, but rather that the industry should be subsidised by it. “Looking at the supply side, migration is essential to provide the flexible supply of labour needed to meet volatile demand generated at a local level. It reduces shortages when activity expands rapidly, and also reduces unemployment among construction workers when workloads plunge (Green, 2015).” The construction sector currently makes up approximately 6% of the UK economy and with the most recent recession, the sector has suffered over 400,000 job losses that it is still trying to recover from and replace (Hilling, 2015). Yet with the lack of skilled workers and the aging current workforce in the industry, migrant labour is one of the few crutches that support the industry’s continuity at a time when the UK must safeguard its economy. As aforementioned, the rates of younger workers entering the construction industry have seen a 43% dip in enrollment and apprenticeship rates, however, this is also in part due to the fact that the costs of training in the construction industry are typically higher than those of other industries. “Estimates in 2011 of the cost to employers of training an apprentice in construction was put at £24,000, rising to £26,000 when the cost of drop-outs was factored in (Green, 2015).” The costs of university and vocational institutions offering construction-related courses are also at an all-time high, ranging from £6,000 to £25,000. These amounts were personally compiled through comparative research of several university and institution programmes and prospective brochures provided on their websites.

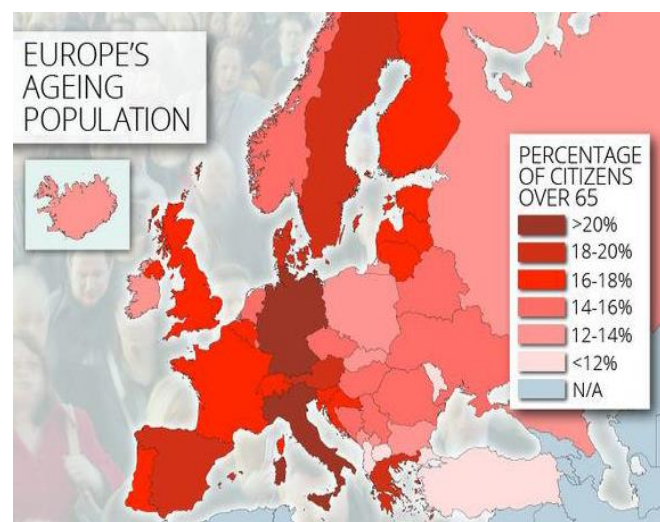


Fig. 2: Map highlighting the percentage of Europeans over 65 (Batchelor, 2015)

The rising costs of construction-related programmes could be a factor in the market-ready youth’s unwillingness to enter the construction industry, as it is one of the industries that have lower wages as compared to other industries in the UK, ranging from £20,000 (for low-level positions, associate positions, etc.) to approximately £50,000 for mid to senior-level employees in the industry, as compared to an approximate minimum of £40,000 and above for other sectors. For example, according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), brokers make an average of £133,000 per annum, marketing directors make an average of £87,890, aircraft

pilots, financial managers and directors, air traffic controllers, in-house lawyers, medical practitioners, IT specialists, etc., all make an average of £80,000 or more (ONS, 2016). Wage continues to be a major factor in young graduates' choice of career path and construction is constantly struggling to catch up to other more lucrative industries or sectors about increasing wage rates.

2. Benefits of Migrant Labour in the UK Construction Industry

“The construction industry, by its very nature, is rooted in place. The product differs from site to site, which frequently requires flexible teams of workers with a variety of skills, and the industry is highly sensitive to changes in the broader economy. Construction is thus often deeply dependent upon migrant workers because they are a mobile labour force that is also flexible and expendable in times of economic decline (Buckly et al, 2016).” It is therefore vital to recognize the benefits that migrant labour offers to the UK construction industry and its overall economy. As was previously mentioned, migrant labour makes up a significant portion of the UK construction industry and skilled migrant workers who are willing and able to fill the gaps left by the loss or lack of UK-native workers help the industry thrive at times of shortage of employees and rise of demand.

“Driven in part by factors such as skills shortages, rapid urbanization, state infrastructure spending, and ageing construction workforces, the demand for migrant labour is expected to grow in coming decades (Buckly et al, 2016),” which brings us back to the argument that the industry does, in fact, have a rather constant need for labour. Not only do migrant workers pose a solution to the shortage in labour but “in both high- and lower-waged segments of the industry, migrants bring crucial skills and tacit knowledge to the construction markets of the countries in which they work (Buckly et al, 2016).”

It is also worth mentioning that, despite the global drive to further develop and industrialise international construction industries, many skilled migrant workers simply do not have the same opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in their native countries, due to many factors, such as economic instability, lack of jobs, security issues, political climate, etc. It is therefore more beneficial to the UK to welcome these migrant workers and utilise their skills in a manner that is advantageous to both parties. This is explained in the previously referred the study by the International Labour Office on *Migrant Work & Employment in the Construction Sector*, which states that “by contrast, growing skills shortages and competition for migrants with hard-to-find qualifications (especially highly experienced professionals with project management skills and training, highly specialized technical skills or others with niche skills in civil and industrial construction) may result in upward mobility for some migrants and work opportunities that they were not able to access in their home countries (Buckly et al, 2016).”

Official Fig.s show that “across the UK, nearly 12% of the 2.1 million construction workers come from abroad (Kollewe, 2016),” which only serves to show that the industry does indeed employ a large number of foreign workers in various capacities. Simon Light at design and consultancy firm Arcadis states that “the migrant workforce has been the most effective short-term fix for the UK’s construction worker shortage (Kollewe, 2016).” This is mainly because migrant workers are highly mobile and open to diverse employment opportunities in different regions, therefore they are more willing to relocate for a position. Migrant workers can therefore fill the gaps in any part of the construction industry at any given time. This comes at a time when 53% of employers in the construction and contracting sector report skills shortages in professional occupations and 28% report skills shortages in trade occupations (Barawas et al, 2013). The construction industry has many facets and therefore requires many workers with different skills and levels spanning various capacities, and one of the major issues facing the UK construction industry is the access to labour, “without which the construction industry would be unable to function. The industry relies heavily on foreign workers to fill both skilled and non-skilled job roles, and always has done (Thomas, 2016).”

This can be correlated to the rise in immigration and the decline in unemployment, as presented in the following chart. One observes that the economy saw a dip towards the end of the year in 2014, a fluctuating rate of unemployment, and an increase in immigration at the time. It has also been shown that immigrants tend to find employment in various industries shortly after their migration to a new country and a large percentage of migrants in the UK are employed in long-term employment and in several industries, with reports placing it at approximately 10% of the workforce. According to the CIOB, “Labour Force Survey data published in a 2009 report by the OECD put foreign-born employment in construction in 2009 at 228,000. This is about 10% of the workforce. Given the loss of jobs by then from the recession, the peak is likely to have been higher. Later editions of the report measuring foreign nationals rather than foreign-born suggest migrant numbers have risen since 2010 (Green, 2015),” and as of January 2017, that rate has risen to about 11.1% of the workforce in the construction industry (ONS, 2017).

3. Factors of Influence

The CIOB suggests that an increase in financial investment into the construction industry would not only improve the discrepancy between the housing demand and supply but also in infrastructure and make up for the deficit in skilled labour within the industry itself. Not to mention the fact that migrant labourers also contribute greatly to the UK economy through taxes, expenditures, and other contributions. “HMRC Fig.s [sic] said that recent EU migrants had paid £3.1bn in income tax and national insurance in the tax year to April 2014 and claimed £556m in benefits - making a net contribution to the economy of more than £2.5bn (Travis, 2016).” Migrants also tend to provide new and interesting links and connections to international businesses and markets that companies may not have explored previously, based on their professional links to international firms or companies and sometimes through their links to their native countries. The BIS explains this opportunity in their 2015 report on the impacts of migrant labour on the UK construction industry, wherein they state that the “Expansion into new markets through migrants’ knowledge and contacts had changed businesses’ entire offering and outlook. Enhanced customer relationships led directly to new or repeat business, which increased profit. Similarly, using UK connections, migrants played a unique role in helping local businesses to engage with a new target market or to meet their recruitment needs. Many businesses felt they could not otherwise have identified or capitalised on these opportunities, due to migrants’ unique access through their knowledge, people or language skills (BIS, 2015).”

In addition to their wide range of skills, migrant workers also provide a fresh flow of innovation into the industry, as the UK has always had a strong reputation for world-class research, yet “it scores relatively low on traditional measures of innovation such as R&D expenditure in comparison with its major competitors” and “the construction sector, in particular, is perceived to have low levels of innovation, measured by R&D, compared with other sectors (Barawas et al, 2013).” This may be due to two main reasons, either measurement and classification errors, wherein firms are carrying out R&D which is not accounted for or not through formal R&D; and/or innovation levels are genuinely subpar due to barriers to innovation which persist in the market. However, innovation does not simply rely on R&D, but on other factors as well, where for example, “construction contractors invest between two and three times more in intangible assets, such as design and organisational innovation, than in tangible assets such as tools and machinery (Barawas et al, 2013).”

It is worth mentioning that “where innovation was directly or indirectly linked to migrants’ activities, it often had significant impacts (BIS, 2015),” which represents many businesses that relied on migrants’ varied experience, knowledge, and skills to improve upon certain aspects of their business. For many businesses, especially within the UK construction industry, the major impact of migrant labour was the provision of additional or complementary skills and the filling of roles that suffered a shortage of applicants or employees. In many cases, the skills and experience that migrants possessed made them overqualified for the roles they were offered, yet they were more than willing to take the job. “Therefore having access to migrants allowed the business to select the best candidate from a wider talent pool. Amongst a significant number of the businesses interviewed, having access to migrant workers led to improvements in business performance and productivity. Particularly in the highest and lowest skilled sectors in the research, migrants were often seen as essential to maintain and growing the business (BIS, 2015).”

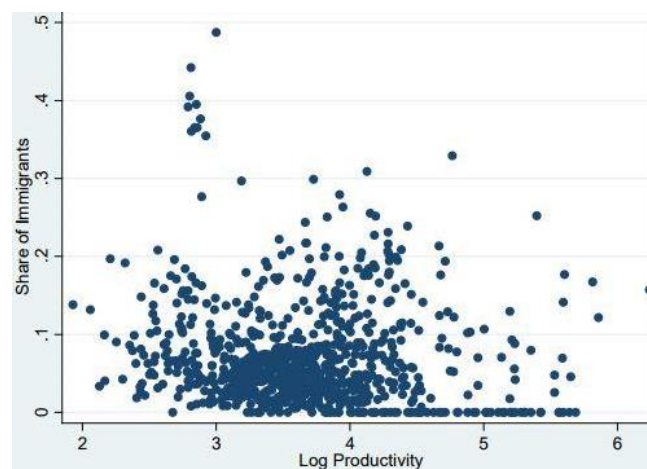


Fig. 5: Scatter plot of immigration shares and productivity

Disadvantages and Risks of Migrant Labour

As with any aspect or field of business, there are certain disadvantages or risks that come with the acquisition of migrant labour. It is vital that the author proffer these disadvantages in order to provide a fair and balanced approach to the issue at hand. It is acceptable to assume that migrants of all nationalities and ethnicities choose to immigrate for several reasons, whether those reasons be security, better living conditions, asylum, etc., but there are always risks involved in migration, despite it being one of the most enduring factors of international economic success, especially in our increasingly globalised world today. One of the main risks that come with migration is that of debt, i.e. the accumulation of payable liability by an individual, which can either be previously accrued by the individual before they arrive in the country of destination or applied to them before or after their migration. There have been many cases of illegal recruitment fees and formal or informal debts extracted from migrants who simply fell victim to a scam or were misled by poor or deceptive information on job markets, paired with the uncertain legal status that is created by migrating abroad for economic purposes further increases the risks that that migrants might bear (Buckly et al., 2016).

Another such risk is the fact that migrant workers are usually granted the right to migrate based upon the length of their contract, where arrangements limited or determined the worker's length of stay or where security clearance was required for workers to be placed on particular construction sites, and in some cases, this was more difficult to obtain for migrant workers from certain countries (McKay, 2009). This poses the risk of deportation should the contract end before the expected date or in cases of an illegal extended stay. This creates a problem, not only for the migrant worker themselves, but for the employer, who may become liable for legal fees, or, in some cases, fines should the migrant not pursue a legal solution (McKay, 2009). The major and most commonly cited disadvantage is the language barrier, which can be tempered in some cases, but in higher or skilled positions where communication is a key aspect of the job, this can cause detriment to the success or productivity of the business or project. In the construction sector specifically, communication is a vital aspect of the profession regardless of the level of the position, however, most employers assert that the issue of language can be overcome in many ways. For example, some employers pair migrants with a poor grasp of the English language with English-speaking migrants who are able to help them learn the language and assimilate to British culture in a more personable and supportive manner and act as translators, while others encourage migrant workers to participate in English language courses provided by NGOs, tutelage centres, etc., and others simply encourage them to learn "on the job," all of which can help remedy the disadvantage. Employers in the Construction industry have stressed the requirement for migrant workers to possess an adequate grasp of the English language in order to understand general health and safety instructions, and some mentioned language problems in this capacity. One employer simply stated that if the migrant workers were unable to understand the instructions in English, then the company simply could not employ them, whereas another employer in the construction industry stated that the Health and Safety Executive's website offers translations in many languages for the health and safety notices and thus may assuage the transition (Dench, 2006). An additional disadvantage as noted by some employers was the administrative workload related to the migration process and the difficulty in setting up bank accounts, and the time is taken to get National Insurance numbers (Dench, 2006), however, this is an understandable aspect of migration, considering the fact that regulatory procedures are commonplace in the hiring of foreign nationals. A less common and yet the still present disadvantage is the issue of integration and racism towards migrant workers in the construction industry. For example, some construction employers have claimed that there had been some tension between local staff and migrant workers, such as racist comments or harassment, however, most employers who were interviewed in the Home Office's main report titled *Employers' Use of Migrant Labour* mentioned that they clarified to all their employees that they would not accept any prejudice or intolerance towards any of their employees, foreign or local (Dench, 2006).

The aim of the research is to investigate the benefits of migrant labour far outweigh the disadvantages because it is something that many countries around the world also benefit from in a wide array. It would be highly detrimental to the UK construction industry to isolate itself and reduce or mitigate the influx of migrant workers into its folds, as it would cause a massive disproportion in the supply and demand of the industry. It would also remove the innovation and diversity that many skilled migrants bring with them when they enter the construction industry and reduce the chances of increased business with international clients, partners, and networks. In today's political climate, it is easy to say that the world would be better off with every nation closing off its borders and migrants staying in their homelands, yet it is a highly insulated mentality to think that way, when countless migrants around the world and especially in the UK, make the effort to integrate and assimilate to the culture of the country they are working and residing in. The construction industry has always been a welcoming industry to migrant workers, despite its fragmented and culture-centric nature, and it is vital that it remains that way because it is an industry that needs workers, regardless of their ethnic or national background. There is still a high demand

for skilled workers, regardless of their nationality, within the construction industry today, and with the lack of “fresh blood”, so to speak, in the industry, it needs someone to fill those gaps. Migrant workers can fill the gaps caused by these shortfalls and help the industry thrive until it can compensate for them. It is not to say that migrant workers should simply replace the workers that are retiring or take the places of those youths that are willing to enrol in programmes or apprenticeships but to help staunch the issues that may cause delay, profit loss, or lack of innovation in the industry. The number of migrant workers in the UK construction industry today continues to rise and one observes that it can only serve to benefit the industry in its innovation, development, and production. With housing crises on the rise, it can only help build more houses, schools, hospitals, and other structures vital to the community. What is more is that migrant workers are immigrants and therefore they are humans who came to a new country to pursue a safer, happier life, and for that, they deserve the chance.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In keeping with the objective and factual representation of the data collected and analysed, the methodology adopted for this research will be a mixed methodology approach and will consist of both quantitative and qualitative data and will be conducted within the study design chosen by the author. This design will utilise methodological research that focuses on case studies, field notes, on-site observation conducted by the author, surveys and questionnaires (Araz; 2021; Shibani et al., 2020; Shibani et al., 2021). In order to present a fair representation of both sides of the argument, a cross-sectional study will be conducted, “aimed at finding out the prevalence of a phenomenon, problem, attitude or issue by taking a snap-shot or cross-section of the population (Kelly et al, 2003).”

The quantitative analysis will consist of recent statistics, rates, and projective turnouts with regard to several aspects of the British housing construction industry that pertain to the topic of migrant labour or are directly affected by it, and the qualitative data will be in the form of surveys and questionnaires conducted and fulfilled by individuals with a direct connection to the industry itself in relation to the topic at hand (Shibani et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2021). It is necessary to pinpoint the target demographic that will be approached for the purpose of this research in order to clarify the location and population that will be interviewed and questioned on the topic. This research will focus on individuals who either have had long experience within the industry or who are currently working in the industry and have a level of familiarity with the topic of migrant labour. It is also crucial to represent the voices of those whom this research discusses, i.e. migrant labourers in the British housing construction sector, and therefore, several of these individuals will also be interviewed and questioned in order to provide equal input from both native British individuals and migrant workers within the field. This will provide honest and reliable insight into the advantages and disadvantages of both hiring a migrant worker and of being one, with regards to the economic and occupational impacts, as well as the living standards and conditions of migrant workers who are employed in the industry.

1. Case Study No.1

According to the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), approximately one-third of British construction companies rely heavily on migrant labour to fill the gaps in their companies, ranging from high-skill level positions to low-level positions (CITB, 2017). In cases of large-scale projects that have a short completion period, construction firms will increase their reliance on migrant workers in order to meet their completion date and decrease the costs of such a large-scale project. The case in question is the construction of the 2012 Olympic Stadium, which was built in order to accommodate the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. In the years leading up to the 2012 Olympic Games, it was reported that planned, large-scale construction projects, such as the Olympic Stadium, would require an additional 40,000 workers per year until its expected completion in 2012, in addition to those already in the sector. It was also widely recognised within the sector that migrant workers would play an essential role in ensuring that these projects would be completed successfully, skilfully, and punctually (Chappell et al, 2008). This case is a prime example of how vital migrant labour is to the construction industry in general, and not just in a time of need or shortage. With massive-scaled projects such as this, it is crucial to the success of such projects to maximise the input and skill that migrant labour can provide the industry with, as it allows contractors and companies to reduce their costs of construction and production while maintaining the output quality.

2. Case Study No.2

In order to provide equal representation of both the advantages and disadvantages of migrant labour, it is important to present the case of Qatar and its many shortfalls regarding the treatment of migrant workers and

the working and living conditions they have been forced to suffer through since the construction on their World Cup accommodations has begun. Since the start of construction on the various stadiums, residences, and football-related spaces, there have been rumours and claims of maltreatment and human rights abuses. According to a report by Amnesty International, which interviewed 132 contractors working on the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha and 102 landscapers working on the Aspire Zone sports complex surrounding it, countless migrant workers reported that they were “forced to live in squalid accommodation, appeared to pay huge recruitment fees, and have had wages withheld and passports confiscated (Amnesty International, 2016).” The massive-scale construction project already employs up to 6,000 migrant workers, yet Qatari sources claim that this number is expected to rise up to 36,000 migrant workers by 2018 (Amnesty International, 2016). Despite the fact that is outside of the UK, it is still an important case to discuss, because it shows the possibility of human rights violations within the construction industry against migrant workers, who are the most vulnerable to such abuse.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the author’s exchanges with both migrant workers and industry professionals, firstly in the form of informal interviews and the latter in the form of formal surveys, the findings show that there is a clear divide in the industry regarding the issue of migrant labour. With 65.22% voting in favour of migrant labour and 34.78% voting against it, it is clear that the industry is currently leaning more towards the inclusion of migrant labour as a beneficial addition to the British construction industry in general (survey is included in the Appendix, in full). Based on these results, it is also clear that many industry professionals believe that migrant labour is either detrimental or simply not beneficial to the industry as a whole. However, one of the risks of conducting one’s research in the form of interviews and surveys was that many individuals might prefer to keep their personal views or opinions on the matter private, which creates a small percentage of non-responses, due to the sensitive and controversial nature of the topic at hand. The survey created by the author asks nineteen questions regarding both socio-political and economic factors with regard to migrant labour within the British construction industry. The questions were created based on issues or opinions that were brought up many times during the course of the author’s traditional research as well as during the exchanges with migrant workers and industry professionals in preparation for the formal survey, which served as the main rubric for the exploration of this research hypothesis. When asked for the reason behind the individual or the company’s decision not to employ migrant workers, approximately 25% of respondents claimed that it was the lack of need for more employees at this time. Another 25% claimed that their focus was on employing local talent rather than relying on migrant labour. Other responses included reasons such as visa restrictions, financial restrictions, and socio-political issues as to their decision not to employ migrant workers.

Propensity of EU27, UK and non-EU nationals to work in the same industry

Employment distribution across industries by nationality (Apr15-Mar16); each column=100%

	EU27	UK	Non-EU
1. Accommodation and food services	10.7%	4.7%	9.7%
2. Manufacturing	15.2%	9.3%	7.2%
3. Administrative and support services	7.4%	4.5%	5.6%
4. Transport and storage	7.1%	4.9%	5.4%
5. Construction	8.3%	7.2%	4.4%
6. Financial and insurance	3.9%	4.0%	4.9%
7. Information and communication	3.7%	3.8%	6.7%
8. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1.0%	1.2%	0.2%
9. Mining, energy and water supply	1.3%	1.7%	1.2%
10. Real estate	0.6%	1.2%	0.6%
11. Other services	4.7%	5.8%	5.0%
12. Vehicle wholesale, retail and repair	12.1%	13.3%	12.3%
13. Professional, scientific and technical	5.8%	7.2%	7.2%
14. Education	6.9%	10.8%	8.6%
15. Health and social work	9.3%	13.5%	16.7%
16. Public admin and defense	1.9%	6.6%	3.6%

Fig. 6. Employment distribution across industries of EU & non-EU nationals(Mamertino, 2017)

In comparison, the individuals who responded to Question 5 (how likely they were to employ migrant workers) positively, their reasons were just as diverse. Some claimed that there was a “need for skilled migrants” or that their company “encourages [the] hiring of foreign nationals,” while others elaborated that “there is a need for diversity in the construction industry and thus believe in hiring skilled individuals from diverse backgrounds.” One respondent explained that “in order to expand our international scope, we believe it is vital to work with foreign nationals and skilled migrants who may provide crucial insight,” which shows a progressive and broadened perspective on the benefits that may arise from migrant labour. When asked if migrant labour, in general, was beneficial to the industry, 18 of the respondents said yes, which shows that even if the company in question decides not to employ migrant workers, the idea that migrant labour in and of itself does offer some benefits is common within the industry. However, 5 of the respondents said no, citing reasons that ranged from “lack of skilled applicants,” the “preference for local labour,” to “the current political climate deters us from hiring foreign nationals.” This shows that the most common reasons for not hiring migrant labourers are either the lack of skilled migrants and the general socio-political happenings of the time. However, when asked if migrant labour impacts the British housing construction sector negatively, the responses revolved mainly around the negative effects it might have on the local employment rates, or the fees or financial risks associated with the employment of migrant workers (e.g. taxes, visa fees, risks of fines, etc.).



Fig. 7. UK Housing Construction Sector Forecast vs Required Workforce (Colson, 2017)

With regard to the current socio-political and socioeconomic climates regarding migrant labour, the majority of respondents believe that it will affect the number of migrant workers negatively and that it will impact the industry in one way or another, whether it is relative to the influx of local talent into the industry or the fact that the industry will be impacted either negatively or positively based on the fluctuation of migrant labour. However, some of the respondents believe that this will promote an influx of skilled migrants as opposed to unskilled migrants. When asked about how shortages in the industry are impacted by migrant labour, 78.26% of respondents believe that migrant labour could be beneficial in battling recent shortages in the industry, whereas 21.73% believe that migrant labour does not directly help the industry face its shortages. Another question pertained to whether migrants could be incorporated into the industry without impacting local employment rates negatively, in which 73.91% responded positively. This shows that most industry professionals believe that migrant labour does not impact local employment rates negatively, but rather supports the industry itself. The final question asks whether the British housing construction industry would fare better with or without migrant labour and although 6 out of 23 respondents said “without,” two other respondents did not directly imply the same opinion, but rather that the focus should lie more on encouraging local labour. The remaining 15 respondents agreed that the industry would fare better with migrant labour in general. Based on these results, the conclusion can be made that the British housing construction industry does, in fact, support and thrive on the inclusion of migrant labour in its ranks, despite there being a percentage of companies that prefer not to employ migrant workers. While a result of 100% pro-migrant labour would be ideal, it is not realistic to expect such a result in such a large and prolific industry. Many of the companies that were against the employment of migrant workers were either smaller companies without the need for additional labour or companies that are simply more inclined to hire local labour. However, this does not deter the fact that the industry shows a strong leaning towards a more

diverse and inclusive culture, with a focus on productivity, efficiency, and skill rather than the nationality of the workers or employees.

Net drop in EU migration to British housebuilding and infrastructure construction

	Hard Brexit	Range	Soft Brexit
2017	23,847	5,777	18,071
2018	40,970	14,498	26,472
2019	66,708	25,174	41,534
2020	83,016	33,012	50,004
Total	214,541	78,461	136,081

*Based on an assumed 2016 house building and infrastructure workforce of 1.5m

Fig. 8. Expected drop in EU migration to British housing & infrastructure construction sectors (Brinded, 2016)

IV. CONCLUSION

In the current state of national affairs and changes, as several of the survey respondents pointed out, it is possible that migrant labour could face a sharp decrease in the near future. However, as the majority of respondents mentioned as well, this would have a negative impact on an industry that thrives on both local and foreign input for its continued success. Considering the fact that we live in a globalised world, rife with interconnected technologies and open channels for business, it would be highly restrictive to close off an entire industry to the benefits that may come of incorporating migrant labour into its folds. While it is wise to promote local labour and to cultivate local talents, it does not change the fact that there are many shortages within the industry that cannot be solved overnight. The reasons for these shortages are also issues in themselves that also require solutions, and migrant labour is only one potential solution to this national issue. All of the arguments mentioned insofar show that the industry would indeed fare better with migrant labour than without it. The benefits of incorporating migrant labour far outweigh the disadvantages, because, as in many other industries, it is the output and the efficacy of the industry itself that matters more than any social prejudices or political fluctuations. What is most crucial to remember is that this study is purely objective and for the purpose of a market-specific analysis, rather than a study in social commentary. Therefore, its results, while they may be affected by individual respondents' own personal opinions, the outcome, and the subject matter itself remain no subjective. In conclusion, the main question of this study, whether migrant labour truly has a place in the British housing construction sector, has been answered; and the answer is yes. Whether it is in technical work or skilled labour, small companies or large ones, migrant labour is an aspect of the current global system that helps industries fulfil their quotas and provide services regardless of any internal or external opinions to the opposite. Migrant labour, as was previously explained in the literature review, has been and still is a fact of life in our globalised world. As some of the industry professionals who were surveyed said, the industry needs a more diverse and global outlook nowadays, and what better way to achieve that than by incorporating the skills and ideas of skilled individuals, regardless of their cultural or ethnic background?; In terms of the limitations and restrictions within this research, the main issues were access to construction sites and obtaining permission to observe and collect data on-site. On the other hand, there was a limitation on the response rate of potential survey respondents, due to the fact that the subject matter itself is a topic of wide controversy and current socio-political importance. For example, the expected number of surveys was to be 30, but only 23 industry professionals responded. This shows a potential lack of desire to voice honest opinions regarding this topic in the industry, because of its current weight and the changes that might impact it in only a few short years. Another limitation was the language barrier, as the migrant labour force within the UK housing construction sector is highly diverse, including migrants from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

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