



## EVALUATION OF MIGRANT WORKER CONTRIBUTION IN CONSTRUCTION

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### **Abstract**

Recent decades have seen a considerable rise in the number of migrant workers, particularly in industrialised nations, as a result of globalisation, wars, conflicts, poverty, and economic challenges. Construction is a labor-intensive sector of the economy, making it a popular place for migrants to settle. While this wave offers migrant labour and construction companies a number of benefits, it also has drawbacks for governments and host populations, including higher native worker unemployment and an unregulated informal sector. This essay tries to review studies on migrant workers in the construction industry. It is challenging to collect up-to-date data and statistics about the quantity, issues, and advantages of the migrant workforce because a sizeable amount of migrant labour is illegal. In order to get more solid information regarding the issues encountered, benefits offered, and long-term strategies that should be used for the proper management of future scenarios in the construction sector, a thorough literature review is done.

**Keywords:** migrant labour, literature review, immigration, and construction.

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### **Introduction**

Along with the so-called globalisation process, there has been a discernible increase in the flow of migrants. People migrate from their home countries either forcibly or voluntarily for a variety of reasons, including bad economic conditions, social unrest, political unrest, and environmental calamities. Internally, from rural to urban settings, or internationally, these migration movements might take place. The United Nations 2017 International Migration Report has the most recent estimate, which states that there were around 258 million international migrants worldwide in 2017. The same organisation expected that figure to be 173 million in 2000, therefore it looks that migration is a rapidly expanding occurrence.

High-income nations, notably those in Europe and North America, are seeing an increase in the number of international migrant workers because financial concerns and finding work are the main obstacles faced by both forced and voluntary migrants

(ILO 2015). After the global financial crisis, notably in European nations and the US, discussions about how the growing immigrant population will effect locals' economic circumstances, the local economy, and society began. According to Anderson and Ruhs (2010), the idea of returning unemployed migrants to their home countries was supported by more than half of the general population in the US, UK, Italy, Spain, and Germany. After the financial crisis, numerous nations, including the UK and Spain, explored tightening their laws on workforce mobility.

According to the foreign Labour Organization's most current assessment, there were 150.3 million foreign migrants working throughout the world in 2013; of these, 26.7 million (17.8%) were employed in the manufacturing and construction sectors. Due to local labour shortages, migrant labour, which is more likely to work under lower wage circumstances, and the physically taxing and unskilled activities of the industry, construction is thought to be

a labor-intensive sector of the economy. While migrant workforce helps to address issues with labour shortages, the hiring of low-cost migrant labour is a significant issue that could enhance the financial situation of employers. Additionally, hiring foreign workers can solve the labour shortage problem when the demand for labour exceeds the supply at the current rates of pay and employment. According to Anderson and Ruth (2010) and Fellini et al. (2017), migrants "help fill labour and skills shortages and/or to do the jobs that locals will not or cannot do."

The rate of undocumented employment is exceptionally high, for example; according to estimates from the Indian construction industries, undocumented workers made up around 36.6% and 14% of the entire labour force, respectively. In addition, behaviours like relying on existing networks and word-of-mouth practises in the recruitment of labour generally leads to the informal employment in the construction industry, which could have detrimental effects on worker welfare such as denying access to labour rights and leaving workers vulnerable to safety risks. The vast majority of migrant labour in the construction sector is temporarily employed by sub-contractors. There have been a number of migrant-related concerns at the construction site that have an impact on the performance of both the sector and the project, such as subpar or flawed building techniques and a lack of safety measures. In addition, social and legal challenges for the workforce, such as issues with education, subpar lodgings, abuses of human rights, and health and safety issues, are widespread in the global construction sector. Researchers in the social sciences appear to have given the problem enough consideration because migration and the resulting workforce appear to be expanding phenomena. However, while looking at the construction industry, the effects of migrant worker employment on the sector, society, and migrants themselves have not been given

the due consideration in the field of construction research.

The current study intends to contribute to discussions about hiring foreign labour in the construction industry. In order to get more reliable results about the issues encountered, benefits offered, and long-term strategies that should be used for the effective management of future scenarios in the construction sector, a thorough systematic review for the entire period is conducted using the Scopus database. Note that the research is restricted to publications in the Scopus database that deal with construction research. Additionally, by highlighting the gaps in the field of study, the current study may provide insight into future construction-related research initiatives.

### **Review of Studies on Hiring Migrant Labour in the Construction Industry**

This section offers a thorough summary of the studies on migrant labour in the literature on construction. A closer look reveals that studies are grouped under four key areas and classified into major subject categories. These subjects include "socio-cultural impacts", "health and safety issues", "impacts on sectoral and project performance", and "training, skill development, and career plans". This study looked at a total of 26 studies, most of which dealt with sociocultural, health, and safety-related topics. The amount of research specifically focused on "training, skill development, and career plans" seems to be quite low.

### **Socio-cultural Impacts**

Cultural variations are crucial to the efficient administration of building projects and businesses. Numerous studies have examined the effects of cultural differences on society at large as well as building professionals. According to Kim et al. (2015), failing to address cultural concerns relating to migrants may result in serious social difficulties such crime, human rights abuses, health issues, sickness, immigration

challenges, and educational issues. The research suggests that the most obvious problems in the construction sector are becoming acclimated to the work environment and its practises and communicating with other experts. According to Ling et al. (2013), migrant workers in the construction industry share and differ in certain cultural aspects. The findings show that among Chinese, Indian, and Thai workers, migrant workers from Thailand demonstrated the least unfavourable features in terms of working styles, attitudes, and methods of settling disagreements. A number of management techniques are also suggested by the authors to deal with cultural variations, including tighter control over attitudes and contracts, incentive systems, and workplace training for higher quality and increased safety. A comparative investigation of the effects of cultural disparities on productivity in the Korean construction sector was done by Kim et al. (2015). In order to establish ways for addressing productivity issues caused by cultural differences, the authors have evaluated the significance of economic, social, and psychological elements for migrant workers from a number of nations. In Morgan et al.(2008) Examine the function, circumstances, and hopes of migrant workers in the South Wales construction sector, paying particular attention to the methodological difficulties involved in gathering workers' perspectives. The authors stress that using social networking sites may present useful chances for gathering information on the circumstances, experiences, and narratives of migrant workers.

Their vulnerability to discrimination by local employers is one of the major issues raised in the literature on migrant workers in the construction industry. Employers, migrant and local workers participated in questionnaire surveys performed by Abdul-Aziz (2001). The author also stationed observers on construction sites to provide more accurate information on the social

structure, interactions between different nationalities, safety concerns, relations between employers and workers, and opportunities for worker housing while highlighting the challenges associated with collecting data from migrant workers (particularly the illegals). In all sample groups, including supervisors, unskilled workers, semi-skilled workers, and skilled workers, the author finds that migrant workers earn less money than locals. In addition, migrant workers experience worse housing conditions and more work-related injuries than locals. Although Abdul-Aziz (2001) has partially explored the situation of migrant construction workers' housing, the search has only turned up one study that focuses entirely on the problem. Wang et al. (2016) employ modular building technology to create a prefabricated accommodation system on site for migrant workers who commute from rural areas to cities, highlighting the inadequate accommodations and bad living conditions. The authors draw attention to the fact that unsatisfactory living conditions can have detrimental effects on a person's physical and mental health as well as the environment's natural and social environment. These effects include conflicts resulting from a lack of privacy or security, feelings of insecurity, fires, unfit buildings, burglaries, and more. Santoso (2009) used focus groups with migrant workers from Thailand and Indonesia to analyse the variables that must be taken into account in a multi-cultural construction site, with an emphasis on unfair treatment and discrimination. The findings show that the main factors that should be taken into account in order to improve the efficiency of the sector in Brunei are communication issues caused by language barriers, low wages, the assignment of simple tasks born of a lack of trust, scapegoatism, and religious differences which affect the social interactions between workers from different nations.

In this study, Abdul-Rahman et al. (2012)

highlight the detrimental effects brought on by foreign labour and methods to lessen such effects in the Malaysian construction industry overall. According to the authors, the primary negative effects are an increase in crime, diseases, or social issues, the existence of illegal employees, and an overreliance on foreign labour, which can lead to a currency outflow and decreased productivity. However, poor workmanship was not viewed by industry experts as having a significant detrimental effect. Participants' solutions to these issues include hiring more locals for the construction business, stopping illegal immigration, and changing legislation.

Other significant issues that might adversely affect project performance, workforce costs, and productivity include absenteeism and turnover. However, it appears that the search turned up only one study that was specifically focused on the problem. Loganathan and Kalidindi (2016) investigated the factors of migrant workers' turnover and absenteeism in the Indian construction sector. The main causes of employee turnover and absence seem to be illnesses, accidents, a lack of basic amenities like water and restrooms, and payment delays. Notably, the study of Loganathan and Kalidindi (2016) focuses on rural-urban migrants rather than foreign nationals, similar to Wang et al. (2016). Golden and Skibniewski (2007) analyse the existing employment practises of immigrants in the US construction industry and forecast the economic impacts of a reform to immigration laws and enforcement that would tighten immigration regulations. The authors contend that although worker shortages are improbable, employment prices may rise as a result of the law's pay provision.

### **Health and Safety Issues**

According to literature and research studies carried out in various nations and industries, migrant workers are more likely than native-born employees to be involved in work-related accidents (Abdul-Aziz 2001;

Orrenius and Zavodny 2009; Byler 2013). Despite the labor-intensive nature of construction and the growing number of immigrants engaged in the sector, the health and safety concerns of immigrants have not yet received adequate attention in the field of construction research. However, studies concentrating on health and safety issues stand out among the papers analysed as part of the current study.

Migrant workers make up a large share of low-level roles in the construction industry and interact with their coworkers in their home tongue. This phenomenon, referred to as "linguistic ghettos" in the workplace by Trajkovski and Loosemore (2006), can obstruct integration and second-language learning. The main impact of linguistic variety on the construction industry is that migrant workers may not be able to understand warnings from peers, engineers, and supervisors about potential working hazards. There is a need to offer required safety trainings in other languages that are often used at work and to accompany those trainings with translated print materials because this situation might most certainly have very serious implications. Hare et al. (2013) also made mention of the language barrier that migrant workers must overcome. The authors created a lexicon comprising 118 essential health and safety terms as well as a graphical inventory of images that were specifically suited to the produced lexicon in order to create and test safety images that might be utilised on construction sites where migrant workers who are not fluent in English are present. After that, 50 migrant construction workers employed in the UK were asked to rate the photographs. According to the findings, migrants from European nations were more likely to recognise safety images than those of African and Indian descent. The synchronisation of safety indicators between the U.K. and Europe was suggested as a possible explanation for this discovery. Authors also emphasised that graphics should support current

communication channels rather than replace them. To reflect on the practice-based aspect of learning and sharing occupational health and safety (OHS) knowledge through examples, Tutt et al. (2013a) performed an ethnographic study with migrant curtain wall installers. The results can be read as indicating that migrants may not have been aware of the amount of risk and hazard because local knowledge about safety may be more specialised to delicate conditions. In order to achieve safe working conditions on construction sites, authors recommended that intersections between institutional and local knowledge be further examined ethnographically and acknowledged. The ethnographic research conducted by Oswald et al. (2015) further highlights the communication problems on construction sites. According to their research, while migrant workers are a less expensive alternative for a labour force, they pose a greater risk in terms of following safety rules, and managing the communication problems and the various working practises requires a large amount of time and money. Through the use of a case study on a multinational big construction project in the UK, Oswald et al. (2018) sought to understand the difficulties encountered by those charged with overseeing the safety of a migrant workforce. Through the observations, checks, and conversations conducted on the site, it became clear that there are major safety management problems related to the non-UK enterprises' ignorance of UK laws and the variations in safety management practises resulting from regional cultural variances. To ensure and keep their jobs, both UK and non-UK workers engage in risk-taking activities and overwork, which increases the difficulty of safety management. The authors pointed to poor worker wellbeing as the primary cause of workers' opinions.

Goodrum and Dai (2005) examined the statistical information of the US Bureau of Labour with an emphasis on workers' occupations to analyse the variations in

illnesses, injuries, and fatalities among Hispanic and non-Hispanic construction workers in the country. The results showed that, although not always negatively towards Hispanics, there are inequalities in injuries, illnesses, and fatalities between Hispanic and non-Hispanic construction workers. The authors emphasised that the variations are due to the varying degrees of danger associated with distinct construction vocations. Goh and Sa'adon (2015) concentrated on the cognitive variables affecting migrant workers' safety conduct when working at heights. 40 migrant construction workers from Bangladesh, India, and China participated in a survey conducted by the authors. The results show that subjective norm is the primary element influencing a worker's decision to take safety precautions or not while working at heights. The writers emphasise that the country cultures of the migrant workers are the cause. The urgent need for practical initiatives to enhance migrant workers' safety and health is highlighted by Chan et al. (2016). To rank OHS measures for migrant workers, the authors conducted 22 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with safety experts in Hong Kong. The three most crucial tactics are: "offer safety training in the migrant workers' native language," "government and industry associations should play an active role in promoting migrant workers' awareness of health and safety," and "encourage the migrant workers to learn local language." Suresh et al. (2017) examined Saudi Arabia's safety practises and climate by surveying 90 supervisors and on-site employees. The results showed that on-site OHS standards have significantly improved, but off-site conditions, particularly for migrant employees, are not satisfactory. Physical and physiological pressures brought on by unpaid wages and a lack of social services have a direct impact on how well employees perform on the job in terms of motivation, productivity, and interest in health and safety.

### **Impacts on Sectoral and Project Performance**

The unique social, economic, and cultural circumstances of migrant workers have an impact on their performance on-site, which in turn has an impact on project and sectoral performance. The goal of Sepehrdoust (2013) was to assess the effectiveness of building activities in several Iranian provinces and, in turn, to ascertain how migrant labour from the surrounding nations affected the overall economic effectiveness of construction activities from 2006 to 2009. The author claims that Iran has benefited from the Afghan migrants despite suffering enormous costs associated with housing more than a million refugees. The efficiency scores of the construction operations have also been found to significantly vary between states. When compared to states with a lesser concentration of this labour, it was discovered that the efficiency scores of those using more Afghan labour were worse. Hu et al. (2012) conduct yet another performance-based study. The performance of the Shanghai exhibition, dubbed the largest exhibition in history, was examined by the authors. With an extremely short timeline for completion, its construction included more than 40,000 migrant workers. It was discovered that the client, Shanghai Expo Construction Headquarters (SECH), satisfied four performance factors during construction: construction quality, construction safety, and management of migrant workers. The Expo was finished on time and within budget, finishing 11 days early. Despite the presence of more than 40,000 migrants on the site, no fatalities related to construction mishaps, contaminated food, or epidemic illnesses were recorded.

China offers a wealth of employment prospects for the construction industry thanks to its enormous population. The competitiveness of the Chinese construction industry was investigated by Deng and colleagues in 2013. Migrant workers are

one of the aspects in competitiveness that are taken into account. Local governments pay attention to migrant employees' training because they lack a lot of construction experience. Despite their low pay and housing conditions, migrant labourers find the construction sector to be quite enticing. It is crucial that better governmental regulations satisfy both the competence of these individuals and the output of the entire industry.

Golden et al. (2010) examined the impacts of immigration on project costs and worker wages in their analysis of the influence of immigration on construction project costs. In the wake of immigration reform, they discuss four factors that affect construction costs: prevailing wage provisions, forced tax compliance, market correction from currently depressed wages due to migrant-penetration into the workforce, and a labour shortage caused by a depleted supply of migrant labour. The industry may have some effects from the ongoing increase in immigration law enforcement. According to the analysis's findings, a large general contractor might accept a 3% rise in project expenses, while subcontractors might not appreciate a 14% increase in trade labour costs. Therefore, legislation that either reforms or enhances current immigration regulations would be detrimental to the trade industry. Chan (2011) emphasised that there are differences between Australian and Malaysian attitudes towards the usage of the labour force. The majority of the labour force in Australia is local, highly skilled, and paid well per hour. In contrast, the majority of the labour force in Malaysia's construction industry is made up of migrants from nearby nations who typically work without authorization and for meagre wages. The author looked at the cost structures of precast and conventional methods of construction in Australia and Malaysia and reviewed the extent to which the availability of low-wage migrant workers in Malaysia affects the choice of technology for the construction of buildings

in order to analyse the proportion of labour and capital as inputs to the construction sector. Findings show that while Malaysia's low salaries for migrant construction workers prevent the use of the more capital-intensive precast technology, Australia's higher labour costs lead to a more cost-effective precast solution. It was also discovered that Malaysia's current fiscal incentives were insufficient to encourage the adoption of industrialised construction systems. The author suggested that it might be simpler for construction companies to increase capital input and decrease manpower input in order to reduce costs in developed economies with high labour wage rates, such as Australia. building companies in poor nations like Malaysia who have access to inexpensive migrant workforce may opt to reduce building costs by utilising labour contributions.

### **Training, Skill Development and Career Plans**

As can be seen from the previous three sections, chances for training, skill, and career growth are strongly tied to the issues that immigrants and the sector confront, such as low salaries, poor safety conditions, and poor job quality. Therefore, encouraging migrant workers' access to skill development is essential for the creation of a more equitable working environment and increased industrial output. Despite the significance of issues related to migrant workers' training and skill development, there haven't been many thorough studies in the literature on the subject. Iskander and Lowe (2010) looked at Latino construction workers' informal training and skill-development pathways in the US. The authors propose enhanced cooperation with unions, migrant advocacy groups, and other labour market institutions that encourage skill-based progress for migrant workers with less education in order to address training and skill development difficulties. Using data from the UK's construction industry, Tutt et al. (2013b) looked at the social and communication networks that migrant workers use to get jobs

and advance their careers. The study discovered that the industry's informal hiring practises heavily rely on current networks. Additionally, they contend that translators and interpreters may be crucial in facilitating enhanced skill-based progress by facilitating improved communication between migrant and local workers. In their 2017 study, Hammond and Cattell investigate how migrant workers' development of skills in South Africa is impacted by transient work relationships with short-term contracts. According to research, South Africa's construction industry offers little assistance for acquiring formal credentials and developing one's abilities. The authors of this notion propose that future study should concentrate on skill development, particularly for migrant worker who is semi-skilled and unskilled.

### **Conclusions**

Although concerns involving migrant construction workers have not attained a well-deserved place in the construction research community, increased migration and the resulting workforce have attracted considerable attention in social science literature. The current research examines studies on the hiring of migrant labour in the literature on construction. First, a deeper look reveals that studies are divided into four primary categories and grouped according to their major areas. These subjects include "socio-cultural impacts", "health and safety issues", "impacts on sectoral and project performance", and "training, skill development, and career plans". It was noted that there are very few studies across all topics. While there are just a few studies that specifically address health and safety issues, there is a serious deficiency in migrant workers' training and skill development. However, it is clear from the current research that issues with health and safety procedures, on-site performance, and ensuing project and industry performance are closely tied to weaknesses in training, skill development, and career development. Therefore, additional research should focus on migrant workers' skill

development in order to provide a more equitable working environment and increase industrial production.

This may be related to migrant employees' reluctance to engage in studies because they worry about jeopardising their connections with employers by disclosing their unfavourable experiences. The difficulty is particularly valid for gathering information related to discrimination, according to the research's concluding investigations. This could also explain why so few research have been done. It makes sense that migrant workers would be more restrained in interviews since they place more value on job security than locals do. However, as the current study's focus is only on the Scopus Database's construction literature, a more thorough investigation that included looked at the literature in the social sciences would provide insight into more effective methodological strategies for migrant worker studies.

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