

Health, Safety and Welfare of  
Migrant Construction Workers  
in the South East of England

**ice**  
Institution of Civil Engineers

BEZPIECZNY  
VARNOST  
VEILIGHEID  
BIZTONSÁG  
SAFETY  
SEGURIDAD

Report for the Institution of Civil Engineers by  
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## **Executive summary**

### **Key research findings**

This report summarises the findings of a research project commissioned by the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)/Institution of Civil Engineering Surveyors Management Board in response to the growth of the inflow of migrant workers in the construction industry in London and the South East. The aim of the research was to examine the impact on health and safety of the increasing number of migrant workers being employed on construction sites in London and the South East, and to develop evidence-based policy recommendations to enable ICE to help to inform the industry of how to safely integrate the growing numbers of migrant workers now operating in the sector.

### **Desk-based study findings**

- The construction industry is enjoying one of its busiest periods of the past 20 years. In terms of employment, the total labour requirement is expected to rise from just over 2.4 million in 2005 to over 2.8 million by 2011. This is likely to lead to an increasing demand for migrant workers, particularly in Greater London and the South East.
- Drawing firm conclusions on migrant worker employment in the construction industry is problematic due to deficiencies and inconsistencies in the data available. For example, self-employed workers need not register for a work permit and so do not appear on worker registration statistics. Given that self-employment accounts for a significant proportion of those working in the construction sector it is likely that official statistics on the numbers of migrant workers underestimate the numbers actually present. This is in addition to those working as 'undeclared' labour within the sector.
- Problems with the available data notwithstanding, a review of labour market statistics reveals the scale of the migration issue within the UK. Over half a million migrants from the A8 countries are estimated to have come to work in the UK since 2004, the majority of whom are Polish. There is a clear concentration in Greater London and the South East where the net inflow is greater than the rest of the English regions combined.
- Recent immigration trends suggest that foreign inflow comprises younger workers who operate in the lower skilled end of the labour market. It would appear that even highly skilled migrants are willing to take low-skilled work within the UK.
- The number of foreign-born construction workers has risen dramatically since 2003, although there has been a concurrent rise in the number of British

construction workers over the same period. This suggests that recent migration into the sector has expanded the size of the construction labour market rather than displaced the domestic workforce. It appears that migrants from the A8 states are offsetting the outflow of Irish workers.

- Recent reports have identified an array of issues facing migrant workers, both in respect of both their working and non-work lives. These present construction as a problematic industry for migrant workers to integrate within.
- Despite widespread assertions that the recent growth in accidents is attributable to the growth migrant workers, there is no current method of identifying whether there are any specific health and safety risks for migrant workers. Indeed, the extent to which the increasing number of migrant workers operating in the industry affected health and safety statistics has been questioned by some employers. Nevertheless, migrant workers clearly face additional challenges in terms of the relatively short periods of work in the UK, their limited knowledge of UK health and safety systems, the ability to communicate with co-workers and supervisors and in gaining access to appropriate training.
- It is acknowledged that there is considerable under-reporting of accidents, particularly amongst self-employed workers. It follows that the unregistered, casual worker sector would have an even worse, if not non-existent accident reporting record. It is therefore extremely likely that reported accidents to migrant workers are very much the 'tip of the iceberg'.

### **Interview and survey findings**

- The prevalence of migrant workers in the projects examined was much greater than the official statistics suggest. In some cases virtually all of the general labour and most of the trades workers were migrants. A number of the migrant workers interviewed stated that they had never worked alongside domestic workers since coming to the UK.
- The 54 migrant workers interviewed had migrated to the UK from 16 different countries, mostly from Eastern Europe (37) and predominately from Poland (21). The length of time since first coming to the UK averaged 4.25 years.
- Only 30% (16) of the workers had any prior construction experience while working in their home country, although three quarters had worked exclusively in construction since coming to the UK. Interestingly, most employers claimed that they only employed workers with prior construction experience and they cited the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card as their entry filter. In other words, they were using the CSCS card as evidence of prior experience. This appeared to be an ineffective control measure in the context of this sample.

- Attempting to find migrant workers to interview for this study was in itself revealing in terms of the way in which they are employed. Many project managers had little idea of the nationality or employment status of the operatives working on their projects.
- Financial incentive was cited as the single most common reason for migrant workers wishing to work in the UK. Some workers reported earning six times what they could in their own countries. The majority (30) of those interviewed wanted to remain in the UK in the medium-long term.
- Employers praised migrant workers for their reliability, flexibility, positive attitude towards and relatively low cost in comparison to domestic workers. All of the employers questioned expect the numbers of migrant workers employed in the industry to increase in the next few years, particularly in general labouring, bricklaying and groundwork. There was a general reluctance on the part of labour agencies to discuss issues surrounding migrant worker employment.
- The majority of the migrant workers interviewed stated that they were employed by subcontractors. However, in reality many seemed unsure of their employment status and may have effectively been self-employed. The fact that many migrant workers did not understand their own employment status suggests a need for providing information on their rights and obligations on entering the UK.
- Half of the migrant workers interviewed were employed in unskilled work, one third were employed in construction trades (mostly bricklaying, concrete finishing and dry-lining) and the remainder were employed in specialist and engineering roles. Although some workers had made the transition from general labourer to semi-skilled or skilled roles during their time in the UK, there was no relationship between the length of stay and nature of the roles undertaken. There was also a tendency for migrant worker skills to be underutilised, with some qualified tradesmen working in unskilled roles.
- Most migrant workers interviewed were positive about their experience of working in the UK and felt that they received comparable treatment to their British colleagues. There was a view however, that employers needed to be more sensitive to the needs of workers from particular cultural backgrounds and countries.
- Communication presented the most significant challenge from the employer's perspective. Although most of the migrant workers interviewed had some English language ability, employers commented that this was not always the case and this had affected their ability to provide training to some migrant workers. Many had either employed translators or had insisted on each gang having a designated English speaker. Whilst this was seen as an effective strategy, there were some concerns that this did little to encourage migrant

workers to develop their English language skills. Many did not speak English outside of the workplace as they associated with other migrant workers.

- None of the employers interviewed offered English language training to migrant workers, although nine of the migrant workers interviewed had received training on other projects. The temporal nature of migrant worker employment and the itinerant nature of the migrant worker population clearly exacerbate the complexities in making meaningful training interventions.
- Limited English language skills have been widely recognised to compromise health and safety. Although extensive guidance and tools are available for fostering safe working amongst migrant workers, the extent to which this is being utilised by all but the largest employers remains unclear.
- There was a degree of resentment from some UK workers towards the influx of migrant workers which was manifested in incidents of racism and harassment. This appeared to have stemmed from a perception that migrant workers were undercutting UK workers when tendering for work. Workplace tension was also rooted in cultural differences between those from different migrant worker groups, particularly those from the Balkan states.
- Migrant workers appear to tend to work with other foreign workers in construction. Whilst this was seen as positive in terms of ensuring they felt comfortable, it was acknowledged that pairing migrant and UK workers through 'buddying' schemes was a better way of encouraging their integration.
- There were very weak channels for migrant workers to communicate concerns. Very few of the migrant workers interviewed were members of a trade union and so there was no means of providing collective representation.
- Most workers claimed a good understanding of safety risks and acknowledged the training that they had received. The induction or Injury Incident Free (IIF) training was commended by most of those interviewed. Nevertheless, managers and co-workers identified occasions where migrant workers demonstrated a lack of awareness of safety hazards.
- Migrant workers had a general lack of awareness of the long-term health impacts of construction work. Many did not perceive that they had any responsibility for managing their own health and safety or understand their rights and responsibilities under current legislation.
- Virtually all of those interviewed either had, or were working to obtain, a CSCS card. Workers were able to obtain translated versions of the guide book and sit the test with audio translations of the questions. However, as language competence was considered so important by employers in ensuring effective safety behaviour, it appears somewhat ironic that the CSCS test can be taken in languages other than English.

- As well as providing health and safety training, large employers saw the provision of translated health and safety information, the use of translators and the site induction process as the primary mechanisms for encouraging the healthy and safe working of migrant workers. A key problem, however, is that no single organisation is taking on responsibility for migrant worker issues in the industry. Specifically, there is a lack of a clear dissemination route for informing the sector on migrant worker employment issues and for providing support to the migrant worker population. This is limiting the effectiveness of the array of good practice guidance which is available.

## Principal recommendations

- There is a need for a pan-industry body to coordinate research and good practice on employing migrant workers and to disseminate this throughout the industry. In addition, this forum should establish routes for informing migrant workers on their rights and responsibilities and signpost them towards the support networks available. ICE could take a lead in creating and developing the terms of reference of such a forum as part of its commitment to supporting the safe employment of migrant workers in the industry.
- There is an acute need for more detailed and accurate labour market information on the prevalence and nature of the migrant construction worker population. Research should be commissioned to establish their routes to employment, the extent of undocumented migrant workers and to further understand their social integration in the sector. This research would further inform the development of appropriate employment practices for migrant workers.
- In the short-term, guidance should be developed to signpost employers and other stakeholders to the plethora of advice and guidance on good practice regarding the safe employment of migrant workers. ICE's regional and professional practice networks might provide a route for dissemination and diffusion of this good practice.
- The requirement on employers and labour agencies to ensure the competence of their workers should be strengthened. Supervisors and induction teams should be trained to improve their cultural awareness and competence in communicating to migrant workers, and migrant workers should be better informed as to their rights and responsibilities.

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## **Introduction**

The employment of migrant workers has emerged as an increasingly significant topic in recent years and is now one of the UK's most contested public policy issues (Anderson *et al.* 2006). The government has operated a managed migration policy in recent years which has resulted in an influx of economic migrants from Central and Eastern European Union accession states since 2004. Due to this, the volume and movement of migrant workers has substantially increased and new trends in the industrial and occupational patterns of these migrant workers have developed (Salt and Millar 2006). Whilst this has provided considerable benefits for the UK economy, this inflow has undoubtedly presented significant challenges for employers across many industries and sectors.

Given its fragmented structure and low barriers to entry, the construction industry forms an interesting sector within which to explore labour migration. Ongoing growth within the sector and a paucity of skilled and semi-skilled labour render it a relatively easy sector for migrant workers to gain employment. Indeed, although the data on migrants in the sector are limited, some available research evidence suggests that migrant workers are prevalent in both skilled and semi/unskilled occupations within construction. This is particularly the case in Greater London and the South East where output growth has continued at rate that exceeds its domestic labour market capacity. Much of the recent growth in migrant workers has come from Central and Eastern Europe following the entry of the EU accession states in 2004. Migrants from these states now provide an important source of labour for the sector to draw on as it delivers major projects such as the Olympics and Thames Gateway development.

Construction workers are already at a higher risk of accidents in construction than in any other industry in the UK (Craw *et al.* 2007), and the large influx of workers from Eastern European countries is presenting considerable additional challenges to employers' efforts to manage health and safety. Despite a year-on-year decline in the numbers of fatalities in UK construction for several years, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has warned of a possible 10-15% increase in fatal accidents in the industry this year (Building 2007b). Some commentators have attributed recent increases in the numbers of fatalities on construction sites to the large numbers of migrant workers who have hitherto used less safe working procedures (Owen 2007). However, there is currently little research evidence of the health and safety challenges that the influx of migrant workers presents. Indeed, although useful guidance is provided by bodies such as the ECIA<sup>1</sup>, the MCG<sup>2</sup> and the TUC<sup>3</sup>/HSE, there has been no detailed research on the health, safety and welfare issues associated with such a rapid increase in migrant labour specifically within the construction industry. It is against this backdrop that this research was commissioned.

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<sup>1</sup> ECIA – Engineering Construction Industry Association

<sup>2</sup> MCG – Major Contractors Group

<sup>3</sup> TUC – Trades Union Congress

This report summarises the findings of a research project commissioned by the Institution of Civil Engineers/Institution of Civil Engineering Surveyors Management Board (hereinafter referred to as the Board) in response to the growth of the inflow of migrant workers in the construction industry, particularly in London and the South East. The Board were particularly concerned that the growth in migrant labour might lead to an increase in accidents given their unfamiliarity with UK construction sites and language difficulties. Thus, the aim of the research was to discover the impact on health and safety of the increasing number of migrant workers being employed on construction sites in London and the South East, and to develop evidence-based policy recommendations to enable ICE to help to inform the industry of how to integrate them safely. The principal research activities were to review labour market statistics in order to reveal extent of migration in London and the South East. This was supplemented with a set of almost 70 in-depth interviews with migrant workers (54), supervisors, employers, trade unions, employers federations and client organisations exploring issues surrounding their employment within the industry, and a limited questionnaire survey of construction employers and health and safety managers. Together, the desk-based research and empirical elements of the study have provided the basis for a set of tentative recommendations for consideration by the Board and the members of the project steering group.

## **Methodology**

In order to evaluate the health and safety implications of the increasing numbers of migrant workers entering the South East construction industry the research team undertook two interrelated sets of activities. Initially a desk-based study was carried out to review recent statistics and published reports on migrant worker health and safety. This review included an analysis of the following sources of information<sup>4</sup>:

- An analysis of the forecasted growth in the South East construction market and the associated impact on skills needs (through the ConstructionSkills Construction Skills Network skills forecasts – ConstructionSkills 2007a; 2007b; 2007c) and the CIOB's recent report of skills shortages (Cambell 2006);
- Several reports commissioned by Government and non-governmental organisations on the inflow and employment of migrant workers (i.e. Anderson *et al.* 2006; Dench *et al.* 2006; Green *et al.* 2007; and Salt and Millar 2006);
- Recent industry press articles and anecdotal accounts of the extent and effects of migrant workers with a particular focus on health and safety;
- A major study on the health and safety of migrant workers across UK industry commissioned by the HSE (McKay *et al.* 2006);
- The studies commissioned by the Rowntree Foundation on migrant worker experiences both inside and outside of the workplace (Anderson *et al.* 2006; Spencer *et al.* 2007).

Following this analysis of secondary sources, a set of in-depth interviews were carried out to provide insights into the workers' motives for working in the UK, their levels of appreciation of health and safety and work experiences since arriving, their experiences of working within the sector and the issues that their employment were creating for construction employers. A primarily qualitative research approach was adopted for the empirical aspects of the study given that the purpose of the research was to develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing migrant workers in relation to health, safety and welfare. Interviews with employers' representatives and other stakeholders were juxtaposed against the worker responses to establish the extent to which opinion converged around the issues raised. The interviews were supplemented with a short questionnaire survey of employers' health and safety managers to provide further evidence of nature of the migrant worker employment, how they are currently deployed within the industry and the health and safety implications of their increasing employment. A summary of the people and organisations who have contributed to the study are summarised in Table 1.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the summary of secondary sources contained within this report does not constitute a thorough analysis of the available migration statistics. For a more general analysis of migration data see Salt and Millar (2006).

The interviews were carried out in person at the informants' places of work and comprised:

- *Migrant workers* – a total of 51 migrant workers were interviewed across 11 sites in London and the South East, together with three migrant workers who were based in Birmingham. Further detail on the nature of the migrant worker sample, the kinds of projects they worked on and their employment status is included in Appendix A. The interviews explored the workers' motives for working in the UK, their level of appreciation of healthy and safe working and details of their work experiences since arriving in the UK;
- *Employers and supervisors* – seven employers were interviewed and five completed questionnaires at both strategic and operational (project) levels to establish the emerging challenges and issues inherent in employing and managing the expanding migrant workforce. In addition, 10 health and safety managers completed a short survey on the challenges of migrant worker employment;
- *Other stakeholders* – a range of other relevant stakeholders were interviewed or completed a questionnaire. These included representatives of two client organisations, a trade association, a trade union, the Major Contractors Group, the Institution of Demolition Contractors and an employment agency.

	Interviews	Questionnaire	Total
Migrant workers	55		55
Employers	7	15*	22
Other stakeholders	6	2	8
<i>Total</i>			<i>84</i>

**Table 1: Informant summary** (\*includes the questionnaire survey of 10 health and safety managers)

The average length of the migrant worker interviews was around 30 minutes. The majority of the informants were interviewed alone, although in some cases a translator was present when their English was limited. In several cases the migrant workers were interviewed in pairs, although individual responses were recorded for the purpose of analysis. All but one of the interviews were recorded, although none of the data presented in this report has been attributed to either individuals or to the companies for whom they worked in order to preserve the anonymity of those volunteering to take part in the study.

Separate instruments were developed for migrant workers and employers and other stakeholders. The basic format and approach for the migrant worker schedules

replicate those of the HSE-funded research exploring Migrant Workers in England and Wales (McKay *et al.*, 2006). These questions have been supplemented and revised to reflect that particular context of the construction sector in consultation with the Board. The primary focus of these questions is on health, safety and welfare. This includes accidents and ill-health, cultural attitudes, welfare provision, discrimination and racism, working hours and holidays, family issues, migrant worker 'voice' and union representation. All questions were open ended which enabled the informants to answer from their own frame of reference. Related questions were also devised for the other stakeholders.

It should be noted that the research team have sought to provide complimentary knowledge to that generated by the ongoing and extant work of other bodies such as ConstructionSkills, the HSE, the Home Office and the Rowntree Foundation. As is indicated above, a substantive study has recently been published which has investigated to some extent, migration in the construction sector and the health and safety of migrant workers. It was commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive (McKay *et al.* 2006) and investigates migrant worker health and safety risks. Although this was not a construction-specific study, it included interviews with 20 migrant construction workers and the recommendations that it develops are highly relevant for the sector. It should be noted, however, that the recommendations provided here are founded on an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of migrant workers within the sector and construction employers. As such, the guidance provided should complement that already provided by these other reports and those emanating from this research.

It is important to state the limitations of this study and methods adopted. First, the focus of the study is solely on recent migrants to the UK, with a particular focus on those from the Central and Eastern European accession states (the A8). The study does not consider long-term residents who were born in other countries but who have chosen to be domiciled in the UK, although interviews have been held with a limited number of migrant workers from other countries to determine whether their experiences reflect those of Central and Eastern European workers. Secondly, the geographical focus is on London and the South East of England, although where possible implications emerged for other areas of the country these have been discussed. Thirdly, the qualitative approach adopted means that any assertions as to the wider applicability of the findings would be spurious. Whilst this limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised, the recurrence of the emergent themes discussed by the interviewees suggests that many of the issues raised may well resonate with other migrant construction workers currently working in the industry. Finally, access to smaller projects was not possible, and so it should be emphasised that the projects affording access to their migrant workers were relatively large. It is likely that the major organisations managing these projects would have well-developed health, safety and welfare policies and procedures.

## **Migrant workers in the UK construction industry**

This section comprises a concise review of the labour market and socio-economic context which has underpinned the increased focus on the employment of migrant workers. It summarises the analyses of a series of recent reports on migration-related issues with relation to both construction and the wider economy. The topicality and media coverage of these issues has generated a great deal of interest following the entry to the EU of the eight Central and Eastern European (A8) countries and a number of research studies have been conducted which together provide a backdrop to the more detailed analysis of migrant worker experiences detailed later within this report.

### **The construction labour market context of the South East**

The construction industry is enjoying one of its busiest periods of the past 20 years (Fordham 2007). Industry output is growing throughout the UK and across all of its main sectors. According to ConstructionSkills (2007a), the industry is likely to continue to grow over the next five years at around the same level as it has for the last decade. Although all sectors of the industry are expected to grow to 2011, infrastructure and public housing are likely to be particularly strong. In terms of employment, the total labour requirement is expected to rise from just over 2.4 million in 2005 to over 2.8 million by 2011. This will create a demand for over 87,000 new entrants annually to replace those who leave the industry and meet future demand growth. Industry opinion of the severity of skills shortages supports these statistics. In a recent study commissioned by the CIOB (Campbell 2006) more than three quarters of the sample had experienced problems with recruitment in 2006, with the most acute problems being in finding craft/trade workers.

Of all of the UK regions, Greater London and the South East are likely to experience the highest demand levels. This is due in part to the concentration of work associated with the Olympics, which has been projected to create over 33,000 jobs in the industry by CITB-ConstructionSkills (see Majekodunmi 2006). By 2011 the South East will account for over 41% of construction output, up from 38.4% in 2005. Major developments such as the Thames Gateway are likely to fuel further growth for many years following the completion of the Olympics projects. This is evidenced by recent tender price increases in London which have risen by 8% over the last year, the steepest rise since 2000 (Fordham 2007). The net result of this growth is likely to be a further tightening of the industry's labour market. ConstructionSkills forecasts suggest that construction employment in Greater London will grow by 13.5% between 2007 and 2011 (just under 13,000 new workers per year). Similar new entrant requirements are also predicted for the South East outside of London.

Given the difficulties in attracting new entrants to the industry and the length of time that it takes to up-skill new entrants, the inevitable corollary of this growth is likely to be an increasing reliance on migrant workers within the region. This is tacitly

acknowledged within ConstructionSkills *Actions for Skills* strategies for both Greater London (ConstructionSkills 2007b) and the South East (ConstructionSkills 2007c), which both prioritise the effective integration of migrant workers. These range from supporting workers in completing the Construction Health and Safety Test to developing packages of measures to integrate them into UK construction sites.

## Migrant workers in the UK labour market

There are no universally accepted definitions of international 'migration' or 'migrant' as these differ in accordance with the dataset used (Green *et al.* 2007). For the purposes of this study they are defined as people born outside of the UK who have voluntarily and temporarily settled in the UK for reasons of gaining employment<sup>5</sup>. An influx of such migrant workers in the UK is nothing new. There have been several waves of immigration to the UK since the end of World War II. In the immediate aftermath of World War II migrants were recruited from Western and Eastern Europe to assist with reconstruction (Green *et al.* 2007). Many employers recruited cheap and flexible labour from Ireland and the New Commonwealth during the 1950s and early 1960s. Caribbean immigration reached a peak in the early 1960s but migration from the Indian sub-continent for work and family reunification continued at a rapid rate until the early 1970s.

Recently, the UK government has espoused the principle of 'managed migration' where it is seen as a solution for replacing workers who are retiring and not replaced by the indigenous population due to falling birth rates (Green *et al.* 2007). An increasingly powerful force behind migration to the UK has been economic integration in the EU and the steady reduction in barriers to the free movement of labour and capital. Ten new members joined the European Union in May 2004 (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). Although existing member states had the right to regulate access to their labour markets from all but Malta and Cyprus, the UK was one of only three member states (alongside Sweden and Ireland) who granted virtually unrestricted access to its labour market for migrants from the A8. All citizens had to do was register with the Worker Registration Scheme and pay a modest registration fee to the Home Office (Home Office 2006). Self-employed workers were not required to register at all<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <sup>5</sup> The term 'migrant worker' is often used as a description of someone of *temporary* status, but one who seeks employment in order to provide economic sustainability. Thus, migrant workers can be defined as "*individuals who arrive in the host country with the intention of finding a job*". A key distinction needs to be drawn between those who move voluntarily and those who are forced to do so (EMDA, 2007). Forced migration can also be termed 'humanitarian migration' as the basic human rights of the migrant are often being violated by other people, usually in a wider context of political or racial unrest. The focus of this research is on voluntary migration, defined as being driven by needs other than escaping persecution, although in practice the underlying reasons for migration can be difficult to discern.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that UK migration policy is under review and a points-based system is due to come into operation this year (Salt and Millar 2006). The five-year strategy for asylum and immigration effectively consolidates entry routes into five tiers: Tier 1 - highly skilled; Tier 2 - skilled workers with a job offer; Tier 3 - low skilled workers filling specific temporary labour shortages; Tier 4 - students; Tier 5 - youth mobility and temporary workers (see Home office 2006b).

Economic migration to the UK has grown rapidly in recent years, particularly since the accession of new member states of the European Union from May 2004. Clearly, the situation with regards to migrant inflows is fluid and is subject to rapid change. Moreover, the complexity of the migration process and difficulties with definition hamper the derivation of statistics to measure the impact of migrant workers (Rees and Boden 2006). Indeed, it is important to note that no comprehensive source of data on migrant workers exists from which an accurate picture can be derived. Although the 2001 census is comprehensive in terms of establishing country of birth and ethnicity, it does not record how long respondents have been in the UK and does not include recent migration data. However, by combining a range of datasets a composite picture can be built up which provides an indication of the size and scope of migration within the UK. These include the International Passenger Survey, data from Work Permits UK and the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Table 2 summarises the total inflow of foreign migrants in 2005 by route of entry taken (c.f. Salt and Millar 2006). This reveals that the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) is now the most popular official route for labour migration into the UK. The WRS does not provide data on the duration of stay of migrant workers and excludes the self-employed. As such, this is likely to provide an underestimation of those taking up work in construction. It is thought that at least 500,000 migrant workers have come to the UK from the A8 countries alone since accession to the EU in spring 2004 (Home Office 2007).

	Number	%
Worker Registration Scheme	194,953	48.6%
Work permits	86,191	21.5%
EU15 and EFTA	35,200	8.8%
Working Holiday Makers Scheme	20,135	5.0%
Highly Skilled Migrant Programme	17,631	4.4%
Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme	15,455	3.9%
Domestic servants	10,100	2.5%
UK ancestry	8,260	2.1%
Sectors Based Scheme	7,401	1.8%
Au pairs	2,360	0.6%
Science and Engineering Graduates Scheme	2,699	0.7%
Ministers of religion	530	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400,915</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 2: Foreign labour inflows by route of entry, 2005** (c.f. Salt and Millar 2006)

In terms of the countries from which migrant workers originate, the largest foreign-national group in the UK continues to be the Irish, though their numbers, have fallen from their peak a couple of decades ago (Zaronaite and Tirzite, 2006). The outflow of

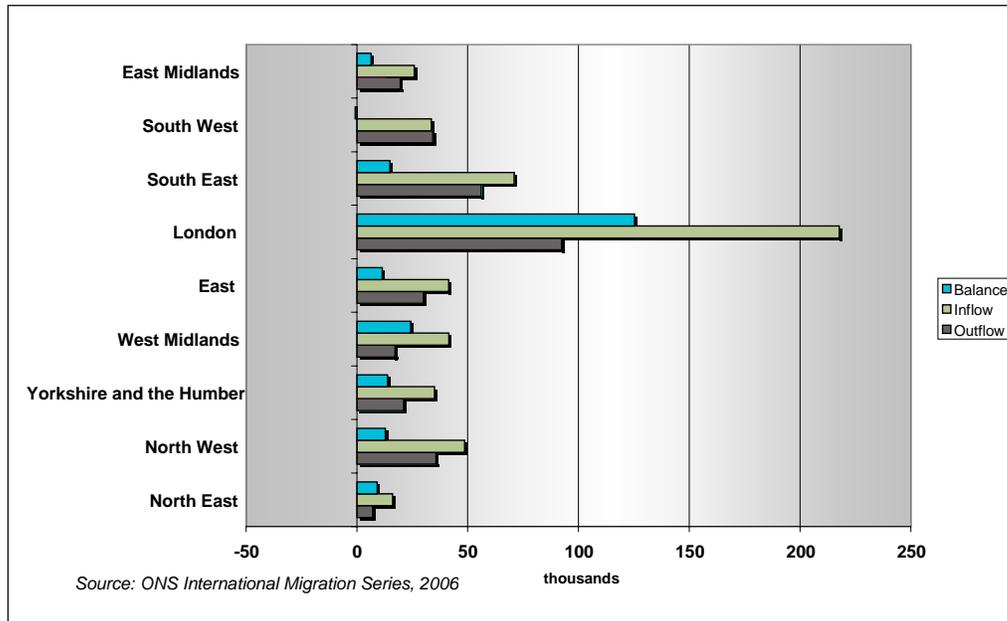
Irish workers has contributed to labour shortages in the UK, with the result that construction firms have sought to replace them with workers from Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. Nationals from other European countries make up almost half of our foreign population (1.2 million), with significant numbers coming from Asian countries such as India (159,000) and Pakistan (76,000), the United States (135,000), South Africa (99,000), and Australia (76,000). Polish workers have recently been identified as the largest single national group of entrants that the British Isles has ever experienced (Salt and Miller 2006). Some 61.5% of the 194,000 A8 citizens that were approved to work upon registration (see Table 2) were Poles.

According to the Home Office (2007), the top five occupational groups for registered workers applying for a work permit between May 2004 and September 2006 were administration, business and management (35%), hospitality and catering (21%), agriculture (12%), manufacturing (7%) and food, fish and meat processing (5%). Although the administration, business and management is broad and will include some construction employment, construction as a category is notable by its absence in the top five. This contrasts with the findings of a study commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in which migrant workers were interviewed before and after EU enlargement in 2004, revealed that around *one third* of male European migrants in the UK work in the construction sector (see Stewart 2007). This suggests that many are working on a self-employed basis or are operating outside of the formal Worker Registration Scheme (see below). What is clearer is that the vast majority of workers entering the UK since May 2004 and applying for work permits are young, with 82% being aged between 18 and 34 (Home Office 2007).

The geographical distribution of foreign workers also appears uneven, with Greater London accounting for some 45% of the total in 2005 (Salt and Millar 2006). Figure 1 shows the international migration flows in England for 2006 and reveals the dominance of London and the South East for both immigration and emigration (EMDA 2007)<sup>6</sup>. The net inflow for London and the South East is far greater than for the remainder of the English regions.

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<sup>6</sup> International migration estimates are based on the International Passenger Survey, which consists of voluntary interviews with travellers at airports, sea routes and the Channel Tunnel. Migrants are defined as those planning to stay in the UK (or leave the UK) for at least a year.



**Figure 1: International migration flows in England, 2006 (EMDA 2007)**

The LFS is the only source of data on foreign nationals living in the UK (Salt and Millar 2006). An analysis of LFS data reveals that the total number of foreign citizens in the UK rose steeply between 1999 and 2005 to reach over 3 million. The numbers in work rose similarly to over 1.5 million which equates to 5.4% of overall employment. LFS data also confirms that the foreign workforce generally possesses higher level skills than the domestic workforce, but it does not show a uniform picture across all industries and sectors. This suggests that the various foreign groups play different roles in the UK labour market (Salt 2004). Salt notes that recent immigration trends suggest that foreign inflow is now more concentrated in the lower skilled end of the labour market. This suggests that even highly skilled migrants are willing to take low-skilled work within the UK.

## Migrant workers in the UK construction sector

Despite the construction industry's long history of employing migrant workers, as with the national picture, there is a general paucity of data in official statistics on the position of migrant workers in construction (ConstructionSkills, 2005). Informal recruitment practices for migrant workers abound within the sector which further clouds an already hazy picture with regards to the labour market composition. As was noted earlier, recent surveys have revealed a much higher representation of migrant workers in the industry than official statistics suggest. Given that there is no single source of data on migrant workers, a composite picture has to be constructed using a range of datasets. This renders comparisons and measurements problematic and so

inferences derived from this analysis should be treated with caution (see McKay *et al.* 2006; EMDA 2007).

A series of factors complicates the picture when trying to estimate migrant labour flows within construction. For example, as was discussed above construction differs from most other sectors which employ large quantities of migrant workers in that many are self-employed (Dench *et al.* 2006: 22). Migrants from the A8 accession countries do not need to apply for a work permit if they are self-employed which effectively ignores much of the short-term migrant population that are likely to work in low skill positions within the construction industry. It is also possible to enter the UK on a self employed basis and then find employment which would render such migrants invisible to the existing statistics (Anderson and Rogaly 2005). Furthermore, construction employment is unusual in that it is project-based which leads to a corresponding flexibility in labour arrangements. Most of the labour is employed contingently through subcontracting chains, or construction workers are hired as if they are fully independent, or self-employed, by different sub-contractors who feed up their supply of workers to larger sub-contractors (McKay *et al.* 2006). These problems are in addition to the abundance of 'undeclared' labour which evades any official labour market statistics (see Gribling and Clarke 2006). The industry has been identified as one of the main sectors where illegal working is a problem (Anderson and Rogaly 2005).

Salt and Millar (2006) present data derived from Work Permits UK which shows the work permits and first permissions granted by industry from 1995, to 2005. Some of these data are reproduced in Table 3 for 2000 and 2005. This reveals that construction accounted for just 2.4% of this inflow in 2005, well up on 2000 but much smaller than for other sectors such as health and medical services (26.1%) computer services (18.1%) and administration, business and management services. As suggested previously, this is likely to underestimate the actual numbers working in the industry; the recent study commissioned by the Rowntree Foundation found that that one third of male European migrants in the UK work in the construction sector (see Stewart 2007). Similarly, a survey commissioned by the Considerate Constructors Scheme in 2004 revealed that there are over 100,000 people working on sites in the UK for whom English is a second language (see Anderson *et al.* 2004: 26). This infers that most workers are either self-employed or are working in the informal economy. Nonetheless, the extent of the employment of migrant workers appears somewhat lower than is generally perceived.

	2000		2005	
	Number	%	Number	%
Health and medical services	14,516	22.5	22,477	26.1
Computer services	12,726	19.7	15,616	18.1
Administration, business and management services	9,026	14.0	10,129	11.8
Financial services	6,997	10.8	6,526	7.6
Hospitality, hotels, catering and other services	1,751	2.7	6,494	7.5
Education and cultural activities	3,832	5.9	6,404	7.4
Entertainment and leisure services	4,235	6.6	4,260	4.9
Manufacturing	2,747	4.3	2,970	3.4
Construction and land services	751	1.2	2,037	2.4
Others	7,989	12.3	9,278	3.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>64,570</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>86,191</i>	<i>100</i>

**Table 3: Work permits and first destinations granted by industry for 2000 and 2005** (Abridged from Salt and Millar 2006)

Although it is not possible to determine the route of entry or immigration status of the survey respondents, the LFS enables an estimate to be made of the total number of migrants in the construction sector at any time. Between Q1 of 2000 and Q4 of 2006, the number of foreign-born construction workers rose by some 96%. Most of the increase has occurred since late 2003. There has been a concurrent rise in the number of British construction workers over the same period indicating that recent migration into the sector has expanded the size of the workforce rather than displacing the domestic workforce. In terms of the countries from which foreign construction workers in the UK originate, workers from the EU15 (the original EU members before the entry of the accession states) make up over 24.2% of all foreign workers in the sector, with the largest single nationality group being Irish. Workers from the A8 countries, Malta and Cyprus comprise 36% of all foreign workers, but some 52.1% of recent arrivals in the sector. Less than 9% of recent arrivals are nationals of the pre-2004 EU states. This supports the assertion that migrants from Central and Eastern Europe are being used to replace returning or retiring Irish construction workers.

The *Accession Monitoring Report* (Home Office 2007) lists applicants to the WRS by their specific occupation. Table 4 reveals the number of A8 nationals registered to work in construction-related jobs between July 2004 and December 2006. 'Building labourer' is the most common job category reported. Geographically, London is the main area where HSE construction inspectors have noted migrant worker activity (McKay *et al.* 2006). Those from the other regions reported that they had encountered migrant workers on construction sites relatively infrequently. This supports the general trends in migrant worker flows noted previously.

Trade / profession	Registrations	Trade / profession	Registrations
Architect	285	Maintenance (electrical)	180
Architectural technician	300	Maintenance (gas)	15
Bricklayer/mason	1,240	Maintenance (water/sewage)	25
Carpenter/joiner	3,430	Painter and decorator	1,105
Civil engineer	435	Plumbers, heating and ventilating engineer	280
Construction materials delivery	135	Rofer, roof tiler and slater	110
Constructor, road	215	Site manager	130
Constructor, roofing	230	Site supervisor	165
Constructor, steel	685	Skilled machine operator	940
Electrician	530	Skilled vehicle operator	100
Engineer, electrical	175	Supervisor	10
Engineer, gas	15	Supplier, construction materials	40
Floorer and wall tiler	180	Surveyor	115
Handyman	1,720	Welder	3,175
Labourer, building	14,130	<b>Total</b>	<b>30,095</b>

**Table 4: Successful applications to the Worker Registration Scheme by occupation, July 2004 – December 2006** (Home Office 2007)

Industry opinion as to the positions occupied by migrant workers in the UK industry supports the statistical picture presented above. The CIOB opinion survey (Campbell 2006) revealed that 90% of industry practitioners responding felt that there had been a perceivable increase in the numbers of migrant workers during 2006 with the vast majority coming from Eastern Europe. The majority were seen to be working in craft, semi-skilled or labouring positions. Migrant workers were seen as being very rare in management occupations where recruitment was seen as particularly difficult. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that employing cheap migrant labour has been an effective strategy filling some skills gaps and in ensuring the availability of some of the lower-skilled construction occupations (see Anderson *et al.* 2006).

The literature also presents some insights into the nature of recruitment and employment of migrant workers in the industry. The most likely method of accessing work for migrant workers is through word of mouth (McKay *et al.* 2006). Although employers initially tend to use recruitment agencies, as the number of migrants in the workplace increases, supply through agencies is generally replaced by word of mouth

recruitment directly to the workplace. Few checks are made on migrant workers' skills and qualifications for undertaking the work they were doing, even in cases where workers perform skilled and potentially dangerous work, e.g. scaffolding (McKay *et al.* *ibid*). Despite anecdotal evidence of the prevalence of migrant workers on construction sites in the UK, there is no data on undeclared work done by migrants (Gribling and Clarke 2006). According to Gribling and Clarke's study (*ibid*) however, it is easy to find work illegally as a migrant worker if there is already a migrant community working on sites. Anderson *et al.*'s (2005) extensive study of migrant workers for the Joseph Rowntree revealed that some 22% of the migrants surveyed were found to be illegally resident. This means that they entered the UK illegally or overstayed/changed the reasons for their stay allowed under the visa or visa waiver scheme. Notably, they found that in construction there was evidence of migrant workers obtaining CIS cards using fraudulent documents. This means that they could claim self-employed tax status despite their immigration status not being self-employed. Construction workers complained about not having sick pay or holiday pay, even where this was a product of their decision to claim self-employed status. The exploitation of migrant workers who work undeclared is supported by other studies. Fitzgerald (2006) for example found that migrant construction workers in the North East did not receive wage slips, have employment contracts or were paid below UCATT negotiated sector rates. In response, the DTI have recently begun to give information to foreign workers on their rights and unscrupulous practices before they enter the country (Building 2007a).

In terms of the integration of migrant construction workers beyond the workplace, the recent Rowntree Foundation report provides an in-depth examination of migrant worker experiences beyond the workplace (Spencer *et al.* 2007). Their study included an examination of construction workers, of which 92% of those that they interviewed were working in London. It provides some interesting insights into the plight of such workers with regards to their social relationships, access to advice and support, accommodation and use of their leisure time. The research reveals that only 3% of construction workers have accommodation provided by their employers, and that they tended to pay the highest weekly rents out of all of the workers that they examined across several sectors within which migrant workers are prevalent (agriculture, construction, hospitality and au pairs). Many of the migrants were working below their education and skills level and many therefore had little in common with others doing the same job. One in four of the construction workers spent most of their time with those from their own countries and only 40% spent any leisure time with British people. The report also reveals some inter-cultural tensions between some different migrant groups. The overall impression is that many migrants find it difficult to assimilate themselves into the British culture, although as is noted within the report, assimilation is often associated with the loss or suppression of cultural differences, which is not necessarily desirable.

## Health, safety and welfare of migrant workers in construction

As well as being the largest industry in terms of the numbers employed, it is also one of the most hazardous. In the last 25 years over 2,800 people have died in the UK from injuries they received as a result of construction work, which equates to around 80 people per year (HSE 2007). The main causes of injury include falling through fragile roofs, ladders and scaffolds, being struck by excavators, lift trucks, overturning vehicles and being crushed by collapsing structures. Despite encouraging statistics in recent years which have shown a downward trend in fatalities and serious injuries from 2001/2 to 2005/6 (see HSE 2006), recent figures from the HSE, the number of deaths on UK construction sites has risen during 2006/7. This increase has been attributed to the large number of immigrant workers on construction sites, where language barriers have led to difficulties in enforcing health and safety policies (Owen, 2007). Despite this assertion however, there is no current method of identifying whether there are any specific additional or increased health and safety risks for migrant workers (McKay *et al.* 2006). Existing Health and Safety Executive (HSE) programmes and recording systems only report a limited number of workplace incidents and there is no systematic way of identifying whether someone is a recent migrant. In addition, it is acknowledged that there is considerable under-reporting of accidents with only 30% of reportable accidents actually reported to the HSE (Davies *et al.* 2007). This is particularly true amongst self-employed workers that are prevalent in construction – their reporting rate is only 12%. It follows that the unregistered, casual worker sector would have an even worse, if not non-existent record. As mentioned earlier, a significant proportion of migrant workers are either self employed or casually employed. It is therefore extremely likely that reported accidents involving migrant workers are very much the ‘tip of the iceberg’.

These issues render a purely quantitative assessment of migrant worker experiences and safety spurious. Consequently, it is currently impossible to establish definitively whether migrants are in a higher risk category than local workers. This notwithstanding, an in-depth study has recently been completed by McKay *et al.* (2006) for the HSE. This study included interviews with 20 migrant construction workers and a survey of employers. This has provided some insights into the health and safety issues surrounding migrant worker employment. A relatively high proportion (one in four) of those surveyed had either themselves experienced an accident at work or had witnessed accidents involving migrant co-workers, suggesting a higher level of accidents than would be experienced by UK workers. Migrant interviewees also said that they would often not report accidents that had occurred, as they were concerned that employers might view them as a risk and dismiss them. In the case of those who were working without documents, a fear of deportation was also given as a reason for not reporting accidents. More than a third of the migrants interviewed had not received any training in health and safety and for the remaining two-thirds the training that had been offered was generally limited to a short session at their induction. A widespread lack of knowledge of basic health and safety procedures, including fire safety, also seems to exist (McKay *et al.* *ibid.*).

McKay *et al.* (2006) summarise the challenges facing migrant workers with regards to health and safety which include *inter alia*: the relatively short periods of work in the UK; the limited knowledge of UK health and safety systems; the ability to communicate with co-workers and supervisors, particularly in relation to their understanding of risk; the access to appropriate training, particularly where their English proficiency is limited; and the lack of knowledge on health and safety rights and how to raise them. Their study also revealed that migrant workers were more likely to be employed in working patterns and conditions which were likely to contribute to health and safety risks (particularly fatigue, stress and musculoskeletal problems). Migrant construction workers also appear to have different perceptions of risk from their UK counterparts. Evidence from other European countries suggests that the lack of awareness with regards to health and safety regulation, together with the inappropriate deployment of such workers to dangerous site tasks, puts them at higher risk than their indigenous colleagues. Aslesen and Oedegaard (2007) investigated the effect of EU enlargement on health and safety in the Norwegian industry. They found that the general Western movement of Eastern European labour was having a marked effect within Norway in terms of an increase in migrant labour (which now account for around 4% of industry employment) and this, in turn, was detrimentally affecting health and safety management. Such workers were found to lack knowledge of the Norwegian health and safety regulations and suffered from language difficulties. This was exacerbated by the tendency for migrant workers to be deployed to the more dangerous operations on projects (such as on roofs, in excavations and in the demolition of existing structures). This, they argue, reflects their status as less reliable, low status cheap labour.

An obvious factor that can accentuate the risks to migrant workers is their lack of English language skills (McKay *et al.* 2006). On construction sites where changing conditions often require quick reactions to verbal communications, the inability to speak and/or understand English has been recognised as creating a particularly high risk to health and safety (Construction Confederation, 2002). A recent study carried out in Australia showed that nearly half of migrant workers interviewed admitted to having misunderstood work-based instructions as a result of their poor English, and two thirds acknowledged that they had made a mistake at some point as a result of this (Trajkovski and Loosemore, 2006). The HSE study revealed that, in the UK, some construction companies had established methods of communication and translation and consequently, those migrants working for them were assumed to be relatively well informed. Another trend was for migrants from particular communities to work together on site jobs as sub-contractors. In this case one bilingual worker would act as the 'foreman' and, based on their English language skills, would channel all information between employer and migrant workers. A potential danger of this approach is that migrant workers naturally revert to their first-language in order to communicate with their colleagues. This creates 'linguistic ghettos' in the workplace which further inhibit integration and second language acquisition (Trajkovski and Loosemore 2006).

According to a recent Home Office report, some construction employers have experienced difficulties in trying to integrate migrant workers (Dench *et al.* 2006: 35).

Hence, to begin to address the health and safety risks facing migrant workers a number of initiatives have been developed to support employers:

- The Engineering Construction Industry Association (ECIA) has produced guidance for its members on employing or managing non-English speaking workers (ECIA, 2005). This guidance is not prescriptive, but sets out general good practice which can be adjusted to fit with the particular needs of projects. The guidance includes advice on working with non-English speaking workers in terms of communication, supervision, training and competence certification.
- The Federation of Master Builders has also worked with the HSE to translate its leaflets into Polish and has worked with the London Construction Skills Forum to pilot a ten-week training course for Polish construction workers. Competence in English has also been shown to reduce the chances of migrants being exploited by employers (see GLA 2005).
- The TUC and HSE have developed a joint guide for workers which is translated into some 20 languages (TUC/HSE 2007). This concise guide provides practical on employee rights and responsibilities along with numbers for accessing advice on employment issues.
- The Major Contractors' Group (MCG) have launched a multilingual safety initiative to reduce the number of site accidents involving migrant workers. This comprises a 20-minute DVD which can be played in Bulgarian, Romanian and Polish.
- A group of London-based companies have produced a set of ethnical guidelines for employing migrant workers on Olympics projects. It includes guidance for verifying foreign qualifications against UK standards and how to obtain CSCS cards for foreign workers (see Construction Manager 2007).
- The European Construction Institute has published guidance on managing global construction projects (Bust & Gibb, 2006). The focus is on international projects. However, these projects use a considerable number of 'third country nationals' and the issues of language, culture and local practices are equally applicable to UK projects with migrant workers.

Although all of this guidance is helpful, most of it is oriented at employers seeking to employ migrant workers safely and equitably. It is unclear as to the extent to which this guidance is being utilised within the sector and whether the guidance addresses the particular challenges confronting migrant workers themselves, aside from language issues.

## **Research findings**

The preceding section has outlined the current picture with regards to the employment of migrant workers in the construction industry. It has revealed the concentration of migrant labour in Greater London and the South East and some of the challenges that this presents the construction sector in terms of their safety, health and welfare. This section now presents the findings of a series of interviews conducted with migrant workers, employers and other relevant stakeholders with a view to examine in more depth the health and safety implications of migration, particularly in relation to migrant workers from the A8 accession states. The results of a survey of senior health and safety managers are then presented.

## **Background context**

The interview sample is discussed in the methodology section and is summarised in Appendix A. It should be noted that it proved more difficult to secure access to migrant workers than had been originally envisaged for a number of reasons, some of which are pertinent to the outcomes of this study. Firstly, the situation with regards migrant employment is somewhat fluid, with workers often being based on projects for extremely short periods. The temporal nature of migrant worker employment and the itinerant nature of the migrant worker population, even on major projects, underscores the difficulties in making meaningful training interventions. A second problem was that many project managers have little idea of the nationality or employment status of the operatives working on their projects. This is unsurprising given that most work for subcontract organisations, but is problematic in terms of identifying where migrant workers are located and negotiating access through the major contracting organisations. It may also have implications for the extent to which such managers can account for the particular requirements of the workforce. A related difficulty is that these managers have little sense of the front-line issues facing these workers, particularly in terms of their health, safety and welfare.

## **Interview and questionnaire findings**

The interview findings have been collated and presented under sections which reflect the major themes discussed in the interviews. It is important to note that the migrant workers interviewed were selected by the contractors who afforded us access to their sites and interviewed at their workplace in work time. It is possible that will have affected some of their responses to the issues raised. Furthermore, these projects were operated by international companies of high standing and so the health, safety and welfare facilities are likely to be better than many other sites. Finally, the fact that some of the informants had limited English language ability (with some being interviewed through an interpreter) may have adversely affected the depth of their

responses to the interview questions, thus affecting the identification of underlying causes and issues.

### **Prevalence of migrant workers**

In order to ascertain the extent to which migrant workers were employed on the projects examined a discrete survey was conducted of four of the larger sites in the London area for which site records on the composition of the workforce were available. Table 5 summarises the data for the four sites studied and reveals that an average of 85% of general labourers, 44% of trades workers and 22% of specialist workers were migrants. Although this is a limited cross-sectional picture, it does suggest that larger sites use very high levels of migrant labour. Although figures were not available from the other projects studied, managers and supervisors reported similarly high levels of migrant labour. Whilst these projects were all relatively large, they all employed much higher levels of migrant labour than the statistical picture presented above suggests. Another interesting observation was, however, that subcontractors tended to employ either all migrant labour or all UK labour. Thus, the distribution of workers across sites is likely to be very uneven.

	Percentages on each project				
	1	2	3	4	<i>Average</i>
General labour	95	70	75	100	85
Trades work	80	10	24	60	44
Specialist work	60	5	1	20	22

**Table 5: Percentage of migrant workers based on four case study projects in central London**

### **Migrant worker country of origin and skills background**

The 54 workers interviewed (who were all men) had migrated to the UK from 16 different countries, mostly from Eastern Europe (37) and predominately from Poland (21). The remainder were from other European countries, Asia and Sub Saharan Africa. The length of time since first coming to the UK ranged from one month to 13 years with a mean of 4.25 years. For those that were employed, the mean length of time spent in working for their current employer was 2.25 years. There was, however, some confusion on the part of the migrant workers in terms of understanding their own employment status (see below).

Figures 2 and 3 summarises the skills background of the informant group. This shows that only 30% (16) of the workers had gained any prior construction experience while working in their home country. Of the 70% who had no prior construction experience,

11 had no work experience at all having travelled to the UK on finishing their studies either from university or school. Discussions with the migrant workers revealed that there was a culture of assisting friends and colleagues with work on their homes which effectively meant that most workers had at least a basic knowledge of building construction. Figure 4 shows the diversity of backgrounds of those interviewed which included informants from retail (6) driver / mechanic (6) professional (5) and other trades backgrounds (10). Eight workers had been sent to the UK by their foreign employers.

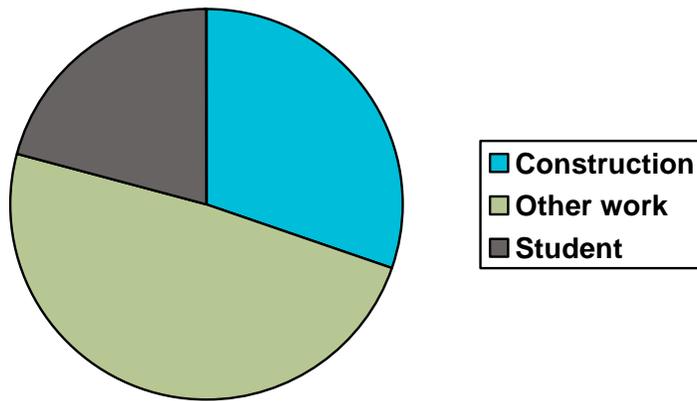


Figure 2: Interviewees’ professional background prior to migrating to the UK

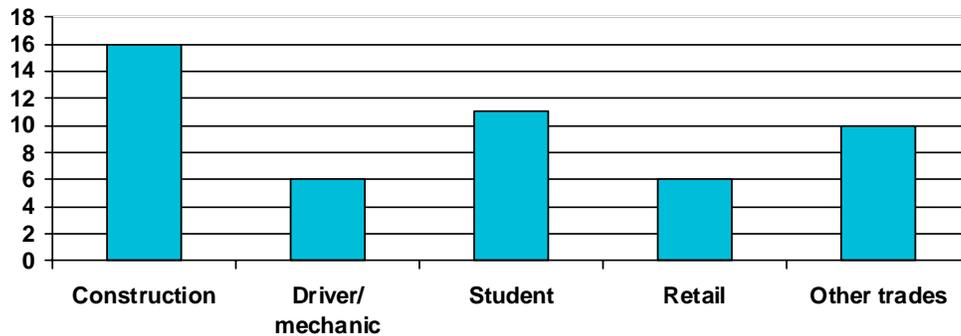


Figure 3: Interviewees’ work experience prior to migrating to the UK

Most employers denied employing migrant workers without construction experience citing their possession of CSCS cards as evidence. However, as one employer noted, this was not always case:

*‘When I asked a subcontractor for slinger / signallers he would send a worker on a course for 4 days then send them to site. One worker*

*had no appreciation of work on a construction site and couldn't even be understood on the radio.'*

*(Construction manager)*

Over 75% (41) of the workers had worked exclusively in construction since migrating to the UK. The remainder had found employment in the service or retail sectors before moving to construction work.

*'I have done lots of different jobs. I work in Pakistan Airlines - in check in - and also in some warehouses before this.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

*'My first job was on cricket ground in Central London - Lords. I work there four months in sales merchandise. After this job I work three weeks in Chelsea Stadium - same job - and after that I start work here.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

### **Workers' reasons for migrating to the UK**

All but three of the interviewees stated that their motivation to come to the UK was to find work. One informant had come to study and two others came here to avoid 'troubles' in their home countries. Many of those interviewed said that there were great financial advantages to working in the UK compared to their home countries. As such the majority of the workers can be described as economic migrants. Table 6 shows the relative average wages for the UK compared to the main countries from which the migrant workers originated. Even accepting that the cost of living is significantly less in most of these countries, it is still clear that there are significant financial incentives for workers to come to the UK. Many of those interviewed were sending a large proportion of their earnings back home to their families where it is worth much more than it would be in the UK.

*'I would like to stay long time because it's my decision..... we have less salary [at home] than in the UK and I came to UK with very little English to find job.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

*'In my country if you study, you finish and the money you can get is, well, nothing. Over here you get the same in one week as we get in one month.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

*'They think we are cheap workers, but it's very high standard for us.... we get six times what we can get at home.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

National minimum wage in Euros (adult rate) 2004

<b>Country</b>	<b>Hourly</b>	<b>Monthly<sup>7</sup></b>
UK	7.14	1160
Poland	---	190
Slovakia	0.93	162
Lithuania	0.71	145
Romania	0.40	69
Bulgaria	0.36	61

**Table 6: Comparison of national minimum wages between the UK and typical home nations of migrant workers<sup>8</sup>**

In terms of the longer-term intentions of the workers, 30 said they wanted to continue working in construction in the UK, and only two who wanted to stay in the UK didn't want to stay in construction. Ten wanted to continue working in construction but did not intend to stay in the UK in the long-term. These were mainly workers employed by foreign companies that had come over to work in the UK because their company had sent them. Eight interviewees did not want to stay in the UK or to continue working in construction.

Several workers had family with them who were setting into living in the UK. This provided them with an added incentive for staying in the long-term.

*'I think I will stay because my family are here. Wife's here, daughter's here – she go to school three years now. Got house here.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

*'Me and my missus, we don't decide - every year we say one more year, one more year. Now she start talking about mortgage, so maybe we stay for long time.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

<sup>7</sup> Calculated from the hourly rate using a basic 37.5 hour working week

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from European Foundation for the improvement of Living and Working Conditions - Eurofound ([www.eurofound.europa.eu](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu)) EIROnline, July 2005, Minimum wages in Europe

## **Why migrant workers are employed**

All of the employers, agencies and trade union representatives suggested that migrant workers were required because of the current skills shortage in the UK. However, they went on to add that, essentially, migrant workers were cheap, flexible and had a different, more positive attitude to work. It was this attitude that was appealing to the industry.

*'Migrant workers, I think, have a different mentality to English people, especially the younger generation of English people. Half past seven they're here working..... and breaks - you can set your watch by them.... Migrant workers are more reliable than the English.'*

*(Construction employer)*

*'I find on finishing trades they [migrant workers] are generally very good. The finishing trades are good, they do good quality.'*

*(Construction employer)*

Migrant workers themselves corroborated this view in stating that, despite being cheaper to employ, that they were better than UK workers in some ways.

*'... we are definitely cheaper workers, but we do very good quality with finished product and we are working conscientiously compared to British workers.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

This finding is interesting given that so few came to the UK with formally recognised skills. This infers that migrant workers were able to rapidly assimilate into UK projects and apply their skills within their new work context.

## **How migrant workers are employed**

Most of the Major Contractors Group (MCG) members (who managed the projects where most of the interviews were carried out) subcontracted most of their onsite activities. As such they had little direct involvement with their employment. The employment agency interviewee<sup>9</sup> said that the construction companies who they worked with provided them with guidelines for what they wanted. They provided the

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<sup>9</sup> The research team attempted to contact several labour agencies but all bar one stated that they had 'no comment' on this subject.

construction companies with details of the nationalities that they employed. Most of them stated that they were employed by subcontractors (42) with only four being employed by the main contractors directly. The remainder stated that they were self-employed or employed through a labour agency. Aside from a group of eight informants who were employed by sub-contractors based in their home country, further questions revealed that a number of those who stated that they were employed by subcontractors were actually self-employed or had been employed through a labour agency, but had tended to work with the same companies for a long period time. Some of the migrant workers seemed confused as to their employment status or the implications that this had in terms of their rights and responsibilities. The trade union representative suggested that many migrant workers are bogus self-employed and so have no employment rights. They asserted that migrant workers were often used to undercut pay and conditions afforded to domestic workers. This would obviously make their effective integration problematic (see below).

### Typical work roles for migrant workers

Half of the workers interviewed were employed in unskilled general labouring positions (28), one third were employed in construction trades (mostly bricklaying, concrete finishing and dry lining) with the remainder employed in specialist cladding and/or engineering roles (see Figure 4). Several workers had made the transition from general labourer to semi-skilled or skilled trades roles during their time in the UK. Of the 24 workers that had been in the UK for five years or more, 12 were carrying out unskilled work, and 16 of the 30 workers that had been in the UK less than five years were in labourer/ general operative roles. Thus, there did not appear to be a correlation between length of stay and the occupational status of the migrant workers interviewed.

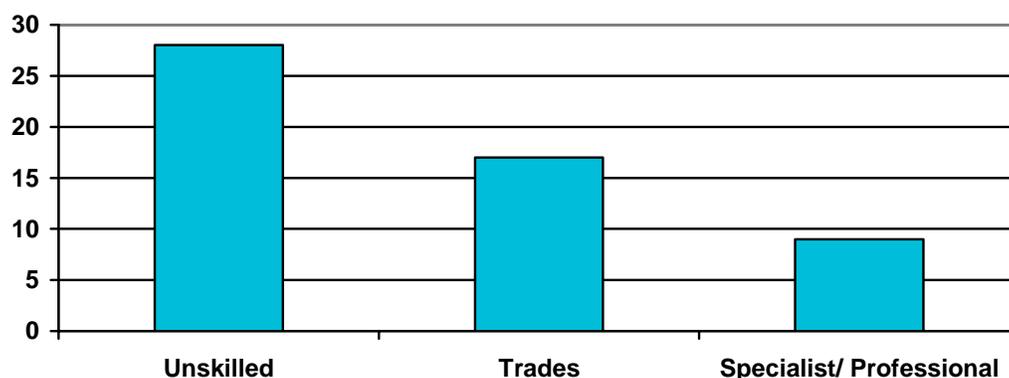


Figure 4: Current work type of migrant workers

There was a tendency for migrant workers not to be used to their full potential. For example, a mechanical engineer was being employed as an engineers assistant (chain man) and a qualified electrician as a general labourer. This appeared to be

either because of their poor English language skills or a lack of recognition of their qualifications.

Several migrant workers suggested that they had worked in more hazardous areas of work than their UK counterparts. For example, in some demolition work migrant workers were being used for 'hand demolition' rather than using machines. The trade union representative also suggested that migrant workers tended to be deployed to the 'worst jobs' and tended to work on more dangerous sites where health and safety was poor.

### **Migrant workers' opinions on UK construction**

The workers were asked what they thought about the construction environment that they had been working in here in the UK. Whilst responses were varying, it around a third of informants made positive references to the safe working conditions and a similar number were complementary about the nature of the work environment in comparison to their own countries. Under 10% of those interviewed had negative views of the UK industry, and many of these comments related to the nature of their work or to aspects outside the control of the employer such as the weather conditions. Most of the workers interviewed were working 10 hour days which was not seen as excessive in the context of the construction sector.

There was no evidence that migrant workers were experiencing different welfare provision compared to their UK equivalents and most were generally positive about the standard of welfare provision on their sites.

*'It's all well maintained and it's all neat, tidy and clean, in most of the areas. Health and safety is high, top level, top standard, the social conditions are also very, very good.'*

*(East European migrant worker through interpreter)*

*The only area of welfare that did elicit some negative opinion was in relation to employers' awareness of migrant workers' cultural sensitivities and personal needs. Several informants suggested that, given the numbers of migrant workers employed, there is scope for these things to be taken into account.*

*'The company provide us with accommodation outside of work. I've got just one little thing to add, I'm sharing my room with someone else which shouldn't happen. I would like to have my own room in the house or to share with someone else from Poland.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

*'They could make some Polish food in the canteen, which would be nice, so we wouldn't have to make our own food the day before we come to work.'*

*(East European migrant worker through interpreter)*

In terms of migrant worker representation and voice, when asked who they went to with problems most (29) said their manager, foreman or supervisor, followed by unions (six) and interpreters (four). Only three of the workers were actually members of a union. This meant that there were no effective channels for migrant workers to voice concerns or for employers to consult their migrant worker population. Many saw a need for collective representation, particularly given the problems of communicating concerns in a different language.

### **The challenges facing migrant workers and their employers and how they are being addressed**

#### Racial tension and discrimination

Although most workers said they had no major concerns or worries about work, some of their responses indicated that they had experienced difficulties with regards to their integration into the UK industry. Specifically, there appeared to be a degree of reluctance to accept migrant workers amongst some of the domestic workforce. These tensions had sometimes manifested themselves in incidents of bullying, harassment or discrimination.

*'I don't want to use a big word like racism... but you feel they are... treat you like stranger, they don't treat you like themselves.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

*'Sometimes you have people..... horseplay, fun, you know..... everybody does it and then that's it.... the only thing is when you go to the toilet and you have people scribbling things on the wall, you know, it happens almost every site I've been. People write things about where you're from and this-that, this-that.'*

*(African migrant worker)*

*'With some of them it's easy [to communicate]. With some of them not easy. Some of them don't really like work with foreigners. Some people can be racist.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

Both the trades federation representative and the trade union representative expressed the concerns of their respective members who had suggested that migrant

workers were undercutting them when tendering for building work. This had created some resentment towards migrant workers and the companies that employed them.

In addition to the tensions between UK and migrant workers, some problems had occurred between migrant workers themselves, particularly in relation to tensions and disputes between workers and staff from the Balkan states.

*'I get along well with the Ukrainians and Russians but not so well with Albanians and Romanians.... they're overconfident and think they're above you.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

*'Here there are plenty of people from different countries, lots of Polish people but I prefer to work with the English people. I don't like working with the Polish and Russians and the Lithuanians and especially the Polish people. This is my thinking.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

#### Communication, language and integration

Communication was the main disadvantage of employing migrant workers according to the employers. Several employers discussed the impact that poor English language competence had on their ability to deliver on site training to migrant workers, or bemoaned the additional costs of having to provide translation services.

*'There's additional costs involved I suppose.....when we do inductions we have got to translate it into Romanian language - there's an additional cost there to get them to know what we're talking about.'*

*(Construction employer)*

Employers explained the arrangements being made for those workers with little or no English. These included providing interpreters, arranging for an English speaker to work in each 'gang', deliberately mixing gangs of migrant and UK workers, 'buddying' UK & migrant workers, translating signs and instruction materials, making training and assessments available in the migrant workers' own languages, running English language classes and even encouraging periodic social events for migrant workers in order that they could mix with UK workers. The primary method of employers was to designate a number of English speakers per group and to provide translators to convey health and safety information, particularly at induction. The employment agency interviewed also claimed that they always ensured that there were one or two English speakers in every five-person gang.

*'The 'one in four' English speakers rule has evolved from experience. In the past gangs of Indian workers would arrive at a project four in a*

*car. The driver would usually be able to speak English to have been able to pass the driving test. This arrangement seemed to work satisfactorily so it has been adopted here with Eastern Europeans.'*

*(Health and Safety Manager)*

In some cases, the interpreters had to pass a test to ensure their interpreting skills were satisfactory.

*'I work as interpreter as well as a labourer....we have to do exams from BAA, for them to see if our English is good enough to be interpreter.'*

*(East European migrant worker)*

These strategies were appreciated by migrant workers who saw them as a rapid route to integrating them into the industry. There was a concern amongst some, however, that this did not necessarily encourage the development of English language skills amongst migrant workers.

Some projects had developed intriguing methods to resolve the language issue. One suggestion to help communication on site was to use mobile phones to gain access to interpreters. Employers considered that, whilst this was certainly not a preferred solution, it could be a useful interim option to deal with sites which suddenly become populated with large numbers of foreign workers.

*'Haulage companies used in demolition have about a third of their drivers from Poland and they communicate through interpreters, accessing them via their cab radios – the English supervisor has to talk to the interpreter on the radio, who then translates the instruction to the worker!'*

*(Construction employer)*

Formal English language classes were identified by workers as being important for improving their language skills. Nine of the workers had attended such classes on previous projects. However, on the sites visited, none of the employers interviewed actually offered English classes for migrant workers. Some employers considered English language courses to be a good method of assisting migrant construction workers to adapt to construction work.

*'On a previous job the contractor realised our English was poor so they put us through ten, two-hour English classes.'*

*(East European migrant worker – interviewed through interpreter)*

Of the workers who said they had not attended any classes, many claimed that long hours and travelling meant they had no time to attend classes, whilst others thought it more effective to learn through work. One interviewee reported that an employer had

organised a language class for after work on a Friday – not surprisingly, few people attended. The trade union representative suggested that in his experience few employers provided English language training, and that most of these types of courses were provided by voluntary groups or within the migrant community.

All of the sites visited in London and the South East had multinational workforces as is indicated above. Employers commented that migrant workers were more likely to work in groups of the same nationality and take breaks together. However, when the workers on these sites were asked how they found working with people from different countries, most stated that it made them feel more comfortable because they were all working together as foreigners. Some workers, on the other hand, felt that mixing them in with native English speakers would make a positive contribution to their integration. The ‘buddying’ system was seen as particularly effective in this respect, but workers suggested that social events between migrant and domestic workers were also beneficial to social integration. Tellingly, however, when workers were asked if they had opportunities to speak English outside of work, almost half stated that they did not speak English in their ‘home’ environment.

## **Health and safety attitudes, training and certification**

### Health and safety awareness and attitude

There were clearly very different approaches and attitudes to safety in the migrant workers’ home countries in comparison to the UK. The migrant workers commented that they were not used to having a safety manager or needing licenses to work. They were also unfamiliar with method statements or the role of inspection bodies such as the HSE. As such, the health and safety context was seen as much more stringent in the UK and the workers were very happy with the approach adopted by the companies for whom they worked.

*‘It’s all well maintained, tidy and clean... health and safety is high, top level, top standard, the social conditions are also very, very good.’*

*(East European migrant worker through interpreter)*

*‘In the UK we use proper PPE, helmets, eye protection, ear protection, hi vis, boots, everything... and we are told about assembly points, fire procedures, what to do in case of fire, entrance, exit, everything.’*

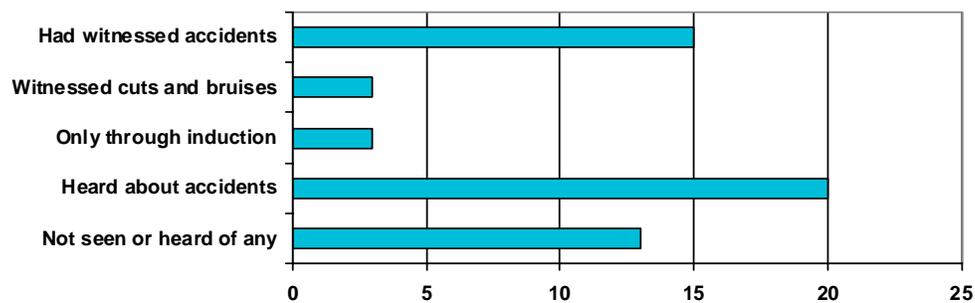
*(East European migrant worker)*

*‘It’s very thorough - we have lots of checks - I remember that the induction man asked me if I got any diseases. Like problems with my heart or if I’m completely blind without my glasses or if I had any problems with my skeleton, with my bones, if I have problems with my blood, do I have any allergies.’*

(East European migrant worker through interpreter)

In general, there was a high level of confidence that their safety would be safeguarded by the contractors managing the projects on which they worked. Indeed, the migrant workers generally viewed health and safety training as the responsibility of employers, but most did not seem to understand their rights or responsibilities. None of those interviewed said that they had voiced concerns over health and safety issues. Indeed, they were generally less likely to demand that certain actions were taken, particularly if they believed that their job might be at risk.

Many workers had either witnessed an accident (15) or had heard about accidents on their projects (20) since they had been working in the UK. However, none of the workers said that they felt at greater risk than their UK co-workers. Some workers were only aware of the risk of accidents through the training that they had received during site induction (see Figure 5). Indeed, not all of the migrant workers perceived that their work was particularly hazardous. For example, when asked if the work they were currently doing affected their health, the majority (41) said that the work that they did was *beneficial* to their health and that it helped them to keep fit. Of those that said that it had a negative affect on their health (13), some thought they might have problems in the future (four) and others had already experienced health problems related to manual handling, headaches, sore hands, aching knees and colds. They had little awareness of some of the longer-term effects of construction work such as hand arm vibration syndrome (HAVS).



**Figure 5: Migrant workers' awareness of accidents**

With respect to broader employee welfare issues, none of the migrant workers overtly discussed being affected by occupational stress. However, it was clear that some workers were feeling fatigued by the long hours that they were expected to work.

The employer representatives interviewed were not aware of specific accidents involving migrant workers, but several had witnessed unsafe behaviour amongst migrant workers, generally because they lacked knowledge of UK health and safety legislation and procedures. However, they also stressed that migrant workers were often better than their English counterparts at complying with the rules once they knew them.

*'There are health and safety issues with the number of migrant workers working in construction now. Migrant workers do not have the same degree of health and safety awareness because they are not used to our practices and degree of health and safety that goes on here.... this could be why the accident rate has increased this year.'*

*(Construction industry representative body)*

*'From my perspective their perception of risk is not as good as English guys. But, having said that, if you talk to them and they understand it, they will do it.'*

*(Construction employer)*

Interestingly, one of the client representatives stated that they had deliberately sought to establish whether accidents on their project had been caused by migrant workers, but they found no evidence that they were anymore of a risk to themselves or their co-workers.

#### Health and safety training and certification

A large proportion of the workers interviewed (28) had received no health and safety training before coming to the UK. Of those that had received training, this had either been received at school or was related to other industries or from military training. In contrast, all of the workers interviewed had received some health and safety training, mostly in the form of site induction programmes while in the UK. The majority of employers tended to concentrate on getting the safety message across at the induction stage, using interpreters where needed and testing the workers to make sure they understood. On one major project, a filter system had been used on new workers and those with any difficulties would then have a one-on-one induction process. As was discussed above, the MCG have produced a health and safety DVD to be used for inductions in ten different languages. This used extensively on the projects studied. The induction or Injury Incident Free (IIF) training was commended by most of those interviewed.

There was little evidence of refresher training being provided for workers on the projects studied, although health and safety policies were rigorously enforced on every site. The workers interviewed had all been supplied with their own personal protective equipment (PPE). Some employers referred to toolbox tools which they promoted in their projects. These were accessed by many of the migrant workers interviewed, although the majority were delivered in English.

In terms of health and safety certification, virtually all of those interviewed either already had a CSCS card or were working to obtain one. Most people referred to using the guidebook to prepare for the test (25), with the remainder using resources on the internet or being supported by those who had already passed the test. Workers were able to obtain translated versions of the guide book and sit the test with

audio translations of the questions (some of the workers commented that there was a scheme that enables workers to sit the CSCS health and safety test in Poland). As language competence was considered so important by employers to ensure good safety behaviour, it is ironic that the CSCS card was seen as denoting the safety competence of construction workers despite the test not being taken in English.

### Migrant worker welfare facilities

The migrant workers were generally happy with the welfare facilities that had been afforded to them and in many cases they had exceeded their expectations. However, there was some variability in the facilities provided with some projects seemingly providing little for those that they employed.

*'Some sites the welfare facilities are bad but on this site it's really OK. The toilets, the canteen, the drying room are really good.'*

*(African male)*

*'When we was in the other compound we had a locker per person, everything was perfect, clean, everything no problem. Now they need the space, they put change us to new compound but now there are too many people and they haven't got facilities for so many people, have to share locker, no water to wash hands.'*

*(East European migrant worker through interpreter)*

Several workers who were employed via agencies complained that they received little support from them and they showed little concern for the welfare of the workers on their books.

*'The agency have nothing to do with us. If you're sick they don't care.... I mean you're working for them so whatever happens I think they should take some responsibility, make sure they check that you're OK. But they don't do that.... the company I'm working for, I remember I was off sick here for two weeks, they don't pay sick pay, they don't do anything and they don't even ask if you're OK.'*

*(African male)*

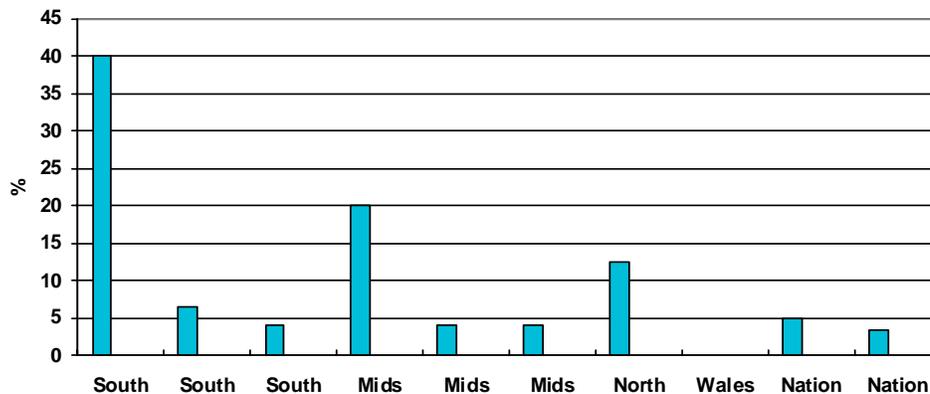
### **Survey of health and safety managers**

In order to further understand the strategies used by employers to safely integrate migrant workers, 10 senior construction health and safety managers were surveyed with five key questions:

- Percentage of workforce that are migrant workers;

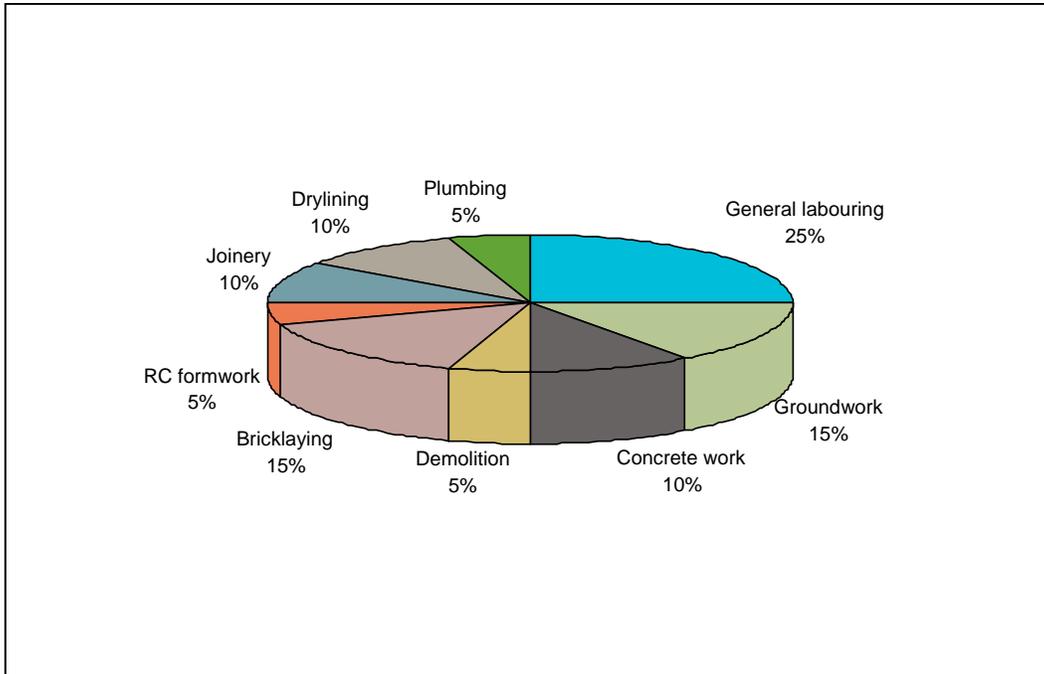
- Expected future increase or decrease in migrant workers;
- Trades and roles where migrant workers mostly work;
- Strategies for ensuring that migrant workers understand health and safety issues and responsibilities; and
- Health and safety management consequences from increasing numbers of migrant workers.

It should be recognised that this was a relatively small scale survey intended to identify areas for follow-up research. This notwithstanding, when combined with the data from the migrant worker interviews reported earlier, this does help to clarify the picture that is emerging. The interviewees were answering on behalf of the companies or regions within companies for which they had responsibility. Figure 6 shows the proportion of migrant workers as a percentage of the total workforce by the geographical location of the companies. By far the highest representation (40%) was an organisation which worked predominantly in London and the South East. However, it should be noted that Midlands and Northern-based companies are also reporting significant percentages of migrant workers. All of the respondents considered that there would be an increase in the numbers of migrant workers over the next few years.



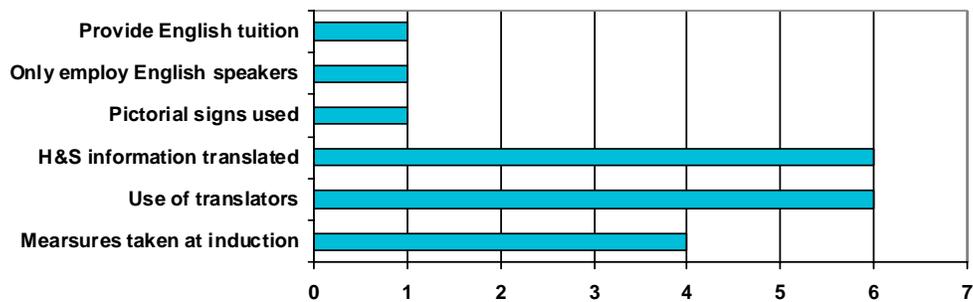
**Figure 6: Percentage of workforce that are migrant workers**

Figure 7 presents data on what sort of job roles migrant workers tend to be given. In accordance with the worker interviews, the largest group are employed in un-skilled or semi-skilled work (55%) with the others spread across a number of trades.



**Figure 7: Trades and roles where migrant workers mostly work**

Figure 8 shows the various interventions adopted by employers to ensure the safe working of their migrant employees. Again, in support of the interview findings, the most common interventions were in the translation of information, the provision of translators and in induction measures. Only one of the companies surveyed offered English tuition. Signs and notices using pictures rather than words were only raised by one respondent, although this has now become a more general practice in other areas of the industry.



**Figure 8: Strategies for ensuring that migrant workers understand health and safety issues and responsibilities**

Communication difficulties were again raised as the most significant consequence of the increase in migrant workers, particularly with regards to their understanding of risk

and the appropriate use of equipment. Friction in mixed migrant groups was also raised, possibly in connection to concerns about discrimination & prejudice.

## Summary of interview findings

There are a significant number of migrant workers on construction projects in London and the South East, most of whom appear to work in general labouring. The 54 migrant worker interviewees mainly came from the A8 states, predominantly Poland. They had a mixed employment history with less than a third of the workers having any construction experience before migrating. Conversely, most employers claimed that they only employed workers with prior construction experience and cited the CSCS card as their entry filter. This appeared to be an ineffective control measure in the context of this sample. Workers had come to the UK for a number of reasons, but mainly to better themselves or their families financially. Workers future intentions in terms of staying in the UK or in construction were mixed, but many had intentions to stay on in the longer term.

Migrant workers are employed mainly because there is a shortage of suitable UK construction workers, but they are also typically cheaper to employ and mainly have positive, hard-working attitude. Most of the workers were employed through subcontractors, however, it was believed that a considerable number of these had actually been obtained through labour agencies or were self-employed. The labour agencies proved to be almost impossible to interview on this subject and migrant workers themselves seem confused as to their own employment status.

Although most workers said they had no concerns about their work, a number of issues emerged on further questioning relating to language, safety, working conditions, job security or lack of promotion opportunities. Although most workers claimed that they had suffered no discrimination based on their nationality, there was some racism evident in the day to day experiences of a number of the workers. There was a perception amongst some UK companies that the migrant workers were undercutting UK firms due to their cheaper labour rates and this led to overt resentment. Some of the more overt racism however, was actually between migrant workers from different countries.

Poor language and communication skill was the most cited employer reason for not using migrant labour. However, most of the migrant workers interviewed were able to communicate in English. Clearly, where migrants lacked functional English, they were putting themselves and their fellow workers at risk, and many of those with poor English language skills expressed a desire to learn it. Success levels in terms of language training were mixed. Strategies to address language problems were wide-ranging and viewed as positive approaches by the migrant workers interviewed. Although not discussed directly by the informants, competence in English has also been shown to reduce the chances of migrants being exploited by employers (Audit Commission 2007).

Some of the workers had witnessed accidents on UK sites, but there was no evidence that they felt any more at risk than the UK workers. Views on health and safety awareness and attitude were mixed, with many employer perceptions being that migrant workers were less safety aware than UK workers. However, there was not much substantiation of this view and many of the criticisms levelled at migrant workers could also be applied to UK workers. Workers' understanding of their rights and the responsibility that their employers had on health and safety was also mixed. This could lead to the failure of a worker to challenge poor health and safety practices, particularly if they believed their job was at risk.

Health and safety training was discussed, in particular the pre-start induction and the CSCS card. Practices varied considerably, but it became obvious that employers' faith that the possession of a CSCS card demonstrated construction, health and safety and language competence was largely ill-founded. Retention of knowledge from the inductions was patchy, with fire safety information being the most memorable. It is important, however, that health and safety inputs provided in site induction are regularly refreshed in order to reinforce key messages.

## Policy recommendations

When combined with a secondary analysis of published migration data and the recommendations of other reports on migrant construction workers alluded to above, this analysis has provided a basis for generating a series of evidence-based policy recommendations in trying to address mitigate health and safety issues. These have been arranged as recommendations for action (A) or lobbying (L) by:

- ICE
- Government
- Industry employers
- Other stakeholders (eg other institutions, ConstructionSkills, Unions)

Whilst many of these recommendations would have beneficial impacts as stand-alone actions, many are mutually reinforcing and so they should be viewed as a package of measures.

Generic issues	ICE	Govn	Emplyrs	Others
Create a multi-stakeholder forum to exchange knowledge and coordinate good practice regarding migrant workers	A			A
Signposting to the plethora of advice and guidance on good practice regarding the safe employment of migrant workers - ICE networks offer a route for dissemination and diffusion of this good practice	A	A		A
Extend ICE migrant worker study beyond London and South East	A	A		A
Prevalence of migrant workers	ICE	Govn	Emplyrs	Others
Establish and monitor the extent and nature of migrant labour in construction <i>- primary research and greater access to administrative data</i> <i>- Use existing mechanisms and surveys to collect additional data</i> <i>- Include other regions as well as London and South East</i>	L	A		A
Establish nature and extent of undocumented migrant workers	L	A		
Migrant worker background	ICE	Govn	Emplyrs	Others

Establish and monitor the background of migrant construction workers

- *skills, experience, competencies – including health and safety*
- *Investigate labour providers in UK and A8 countries*

L A A A

Develop strategies to draw benefit from additional education and skills of many migrant workers

- *establish skills profile of migrant workers benchmarked against UK qualification structure*
- *Ensure recognition of migrant worker skills and competence through Onsite Assessment And Training scheme*

A

#### Migrant worker employment

ICE Govn Emplyrs Others

Address illegal working and employment by unregistered employers

- *Lobby for development of a construction worker registration scheme*

L A A

Review role and influence of labour agencies

L A

Strengthen requirement on employers, including labour agencies to ensure competence of their workers

L A

Establish and monitor type of work given to migrants, especially where more hazardous

L A

Review working conditions and welfare provision for migrant workers

- *Consider whole package of migrant worker employment, including accommodation, social aspects etc*

L A

#### Racism and bullying

ICE Govn Emplyrs Others

Provide clear, unambiguous information and develop strategies to emphasise the positive role that migrant workers play, along with their rights and responsibilities

- *Extol the benefits of a diverse construction workforce*
- *Encourage employers to develop ways of enhancing the social integration of the workforce*

A A A A

Develop effective industry and organisational measures to prevent racism and discrimination, addressing the particular needs of construction

A A A A

#### Communication and Language

ICE Govn Emplyrs Others

Identify priority languages

L A A

Continue with the CSCS test in various foreign languages

L A

Ensure that CSCS is not used, on its own, to establish the competence of migrant workers

L A A A

Include an English language competence test as part of CSCS to a level consistent with understanding risk and responsibilities with agreed action to be taken where language skills are found to be deficient	L			A
Make language training available to all non-English speaking workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- organised at an accessible time</li> <li>- workers released from work to attend</li> <li>- delivered from a construction perspective (ie including technical terms etc)</li> <li>- offered at different levels</li> </ul>	L	A	A	A
Extend multi-lingual induction delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expand MCG initiative to include literature</li> <li>- Consider employment of multilingual safety advisors</li> </ul>	L		A	A
Train supervisors and induction teams to improve their cultural awareness and competence in communicating to migrant workers	L		A	A
Train supervisors and managers in the priority languages	L		A	A
Include priority language courses in degree programmes	L	L	L	A
Translate signage, labelling and instructions into priority languages	L		A	A
Further develop text-free signage and training material	L		A	A
Review effectiveness of induction, training, signage and instructions	L		A	
<b>Integration</b>	ICE	Govn	Emplyrs	Others
Encourage union membership where appropriate to improve integration and to provide a collective voice for migrant workers	A		A	A
Develop integration strategies for all workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in work through buddying, joint working etc.</li> <li>- out of work by signposting migrant workers towards the support networks available</li> </ul>	L		A	
<b>Health and safety</b>	ICE	Govn	Emplyrs	Others
Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the employer and the principal contractor with regard to migrant workers competence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To avoid the excuse of 'passing the buck' to an agency employer</li> </ul>	L	A		
Adapt current accident reporting systems (eg RIDDOR and company in-house) to include information on nationality	L	A	A	
Ensure risk assessments take account of migrant labour issues where they are prevalent	L		A	

*Health, safety and welfare of migrant construction workers in the South East*

Ensure migrant workers are represented on H&S committees etc.

L

A

Provide package of information for all migrant workers on their rights and responsibilities

L

A

A

## **Conclusions**

The report has summarised the findings of a relatively small exploratory study of the experiences of migrant construction workers operating in London and the South East. Although exploratory studies such as this inevitably raise more questions than they answer, this work has provided a number of insights which offer a platform for the ICE to take a lead on addressing issues surrounding migrant worker employment and integration in the future.

Although deficiencies in the official statistics and the transient and informal nature of the industry combine to cloud the picture with regards to migrant worker employment, there are clearly many migrants from the A8 countries working in construction, particularly in London and the South East. If the large projects studied are reflective of the picture within the region, the prevalence of migrant workers is likely to be greater than official statistics suggest. Typically, these workers are flexible, hard working and conscientious and their valuable contribution to the productive capacity of the sector is widely acknowledged by employers. However, many of these workers enter the UK with no construction experience and/or little health and safety knowledge. Typically, they do not have a very good understanding of roles and requirements to protect the health and safety of themselves and others.

The language ability of migrant workers remains the key problem in terms of their health and safety and additional efforts are required to facilitate their language development if safer working is to be engendered in the future. Strategies to address language problems included the provision of interpreters, arranging for an English speaker in each 'gang', mixing gangs of migrant and UK workers, buddying UK and migrant workers, the translation of signs training and instruction materials and even periodic social events for migrant workers. However, other issues must be simultaneously addressed if migrant workers are to better integrate into the sector. For example, there is evidence of racism and prejudice which is aimed at migrant workers and of inter-racial tensions between different migrant groups. Overcoming these issues requires efforts on the part of the industry to help in ensuring the social integration of migrant workers and not simply their safe employment.

Many of the employers and projects studied in this research can be said to provide exemplars of good practice in terms of migrant worker employment. Most workers were happy with their work and their working conditions and welfare provision. However, examples of good practice appear fairly isolated and there is little learning between projects. The extent to which the good practice identified is being applied to smaller projects remains questionable. A key concern is that no single agency or institution appears to be taking a lead on migrant worker issues. Whilst many institutions, trades unions and Government departments have taken on a share of the responsibility for migrant worker issues, there remains a need for a pan-industry body to coordinate research and good practice in this area and to disseminate good practice throughout the industry. This would lead to more joined-up policy and to a more widespread awareness of migrant worker needs in the future. ICE could take a

lead in creating and developing the terms of reference of such a forum as part of their commitment to supporting the safe employment of migrant workers in the industry.

## Recommendations for further research

The recommendations section identifies a number of key areas for further research aimed at understanding migrant worker employment:

- *Establishing the extent and nature of the migrant workforce* – a thorough cross-sectional study of the profile of migrant workers operating in London and the South East would provide an indication of the prevalence of migrant workers which could be reconciled against official statistics. It could also provide some data on the extent of undeclared labour within the sector. In addition, ICE could extend the migrant worker study beyond London and the South East to cover the whole of the UK. This would reveal the extent to which the region requires special measures with regards to migrant worker employment or if good practice might be transferable to other areas of the country;
- *Establishing routes to employment* – further work is required to understand the routes through which migrant workers obtain employment in the UK and the determinants of their employment status. This would provide insights into where interventions are likely to be most effective in terms of providing health and safety inputs to such workers;
- *Good practice exemplars* – there is an acute need to collate, contextualise and synthesise the substantial body of good practice guidance available on migrant worker employment. Whilst signposting employers to the various examples of good practice guidance is a useful first step, ultimately a universally accepted good practice guide is likely to have more impact within the industry. It is also important to develop existing generic guidance and good practice to have specific relevance to the construction context in collaboration with appropriate industry stakeholders;
- *Developing a better understanding of social integration* – this study was limited to examining migrant worker experiences in the workplace. This has restricted the ability of the researchers to gain an understanding of the social context of the migrant worker population and the extent to which this impinges on physical and psychological wellbeing. A future study should aim to engage with migrant workers away from the workplace in order to reveal the barriers to their social integration and how they might be overcome.

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## Appendix A: Summary of the migrant worker participants

No.	Project description	Location	Migrant Worker interviews
1	<b>Hospital</b>	Inner London	9
2	<b>Housing project</b>	Cambridge	4
3	<b>Information centre</b>	Inner London	4
4	<b>School</b>	Outer London	5
5	<b>Office block</b>	Inner London	4
6	<b>Airport</b>	Outer London	11
7	<b>School</b>	Outer London	2
8	<b>Shopping centre</b>	Surrey	3
9	<b>University</b>	Inner London	5
10	<b>Museum</b>	Inner London	4
11	<b>Sewage treatment works</b>	Birmingham	3