

Migration in the Construction Industry and Factors Driving Worker Movement

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Abstract - This study is a detailed examination of various factors behind the decision of construction workers to migrate. These factors include economic, social, and political motivations behind such a decision. In this regard, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods was used. Whereby surveys were conducted on more than 600 construction workers, and over 300 open-ended interviews were also performed. The findings indicate that the economic factors motivate construction workers to migrate, with higher salaries were the leading reason behind migration. It should be noted that there exists a significant positive relationship between salaries and migration distance, where a correlation coefficient of 0.9 was observed between these two variables. Political reasons and immigration policy regulations also encourage migration. Moreover, the results of the study were proven by visual information: the most popular reasons for migration, as shown in a pie chart, were "Higher Wages", "Better Job Opportunities", and "Family Reunion"; a heatmap proved the connection between the two variables: wages and distance; and there is a correlation of 0.7 between job stability and working conditions. This means that this research can be used by both policymakers and stakeholders from the construction industry to develop policies regarding the integration of migrant laborers into the construction market. Through providing evidence on the interaction of social, political, and economic factors that affect the decision-making process, this research makes up for the lack of literature on the subject under consideration.

Keywords: Migration, Construction Industry, Labor Market, Economic Incentives, Globalization, Working Conditions, Labor Shortages

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration process is complex and has had considerable effects on the social and economic structure of various nations around the world. Migration entails movement from one location to another in search of better living standards and opportunities for employment, among other factors (Taran, 2001). Migration processes play a significant part in the organization of human labor and skills in the global economy and aid in developing the economy of the nation where migration takes place (İçduygu & Karaçay, 2012). The construction industry has been profoundly affected by this trend. Being a manpower-intensive industry, the construction

industry requires flexibility of labor due to the nature of its activities. Such activities include the construction of residential, commercial, and infrastructural buildings (Lillie & Greer, 2007). Changes that take place in the sector require flexibility of human resources, which, in many cases, has been addressed by recruiting migrant workers who have the necessary skills and are ready to work under different conditions (Aswani & Bhat, 2022; Shepherd et al., 2021). Patterns of migration in the construction sector have changed over the past few decades due to globalization. This rise in the labor movement is made possible because of the easy importation of goods and services (Taran, 2001), international market integration, and low-cost or specialized labor available in developing nations due to economic differences. In addition, technology demands have an influence on labor demands and skill sets.

Knowledge of factors influencing migration is important for various reasons. Labor migrants are still productive and make contributions to the construction industry and their new country's economy (Abdul-Aziz, 2001). However, they become vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace, poor safety regulations, and a lack of employment legislation (Van Ginneken, 2013), highlighting the importance of ethical practices in the industry (Yu, 2022; Frangi & Bosch, 2024). Knowledge of these issues allows addressing labor needs while protecting the migrants and maintaining ethical practices. In addition, the study looks into past experiences for insight into migration practices in construction (Akram Syed Zakaria & Amtered El-Abidi, 2021) and analyzes the current situation within the globalized economic world, considering employment opportunities and economic motivations, governmental policies, and industry response to migrants' challenges (Wandahl et al., 2023).

As far as these issues are concerned, this paper will try to add to what already exists in the field of knowledge about migration in the construction industry. Therefore, this paper will try to identify all the relevant processes and justify why they should be analyzed in order to come up with a number of solutions addressing different kinds of issues, such as

economic, social, and ethical issues. Eventually, the goal here is not only to improve the construction industry but also to promote the rights of the migrant workers and progress towards better conditions for the construction industry.

In this section, we emphasize the significance of migration in the construction sector and its socio-economic impacts. In Section 2: Literature Review, the most important factors influencing migration are discussed, which include economic, social, and political factors. Section 3: Materials and Methods elaborates on the methodology used to conduct this study. It is a combination of a survey questionnaire and interviews. Section 4: Key Drivers mentions the most influential factors that encourage people to migrate. Section 5: Challenges Faced by Migrant Workers presents the problems experienced by migrant laborers. Section 6: Government Policies & Construction Industry Response covers the policies formulated for migrant workers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The migrant workers employed in the construction sector are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and dangerous working conditions. Forms of abuse that can occur in such situations range from wage theft to forced overtime and dangerous work, made worse by discrimination and other types of maltreatment by the employer and/or the recruitment agency (Golden & Skibniewski, 2010). Most employees become entrapped into debt bondage as a result of high costs of recruiting migrants and processing their visas, and passports being held until the debts are repaid (Sami Ur Rehman et al., 2022). This phenomenon is common in areas where there is temporary labor migration, particularly the kafala system that exists in the Middle Eastern region, tying employees to their employers. Moreover, a lack of proper training in occupational safety and insufficient protective equipment, such as helmets, gloves, and harnesses, contributes to the occurrence of risky conditions. Migrant workers tend to be tasked with risky jobs, such as building high structures and excavating underground. Consequently, their injury and fatality rates are much higher compared with those of locals (Gultekin et al., 2024). Construction of facilities during the FIFA World Cup, for example, in the case of Qatar, has shown the dangers that face such workers.

The protection of migrant workers is either insufficient, fragmented, or inadequate to guarantee them justice when they are victims of abuse or working in hazardous environments (Farbenblum, 2017). Even in the presence of regulations, there are no effective measures to enforce them, and factors like linguistic differences, lack of knowledge about their rights, expensive legal costs, and the threat of being fired prevent workers from making any complaints. On

the contrary, the kafala system makes movement more challenging due to the dominance of the employers over permit processes and change of employment. The result of this is that the migrants become unable to claim for their rights and seek justice.

Another aspect of the working conditions of the migrants working in the construction industry is that they experience social isolation, discrimination, and prejudice which might affect negatively their mental state and health (Jadotte & Ramos, 2016). Communication becomes hard due to the lack of adequate language proficiency and cultural awareness which will make them ignorant about health and legal services. Migrant workers suffer from inequality in terms of income, social services, housing services, and career opportunities. Separation, xenophobia, and living in isolated spaces further isolate the workers from health, education, and socializing services.

According to existing literature, economic differences, shortage of labor, and social networks constitute major factors driving movement in the construction industry. Migrants in this particular sector tend to move to areas that have better wages and favorable working conditions due to their economic status, and there are also factors of politics influencing movements. This is in line with what would like to investigate through the research, where economic, social, and political factors will be discussed.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The mobility of the construction workforce is not a modern-day issue but a process that has occurred over the last century and is indeed the creator of many economies and city lives (Kaur, 2010). The mobility of workers, individually and in groups, is thus demand-led and is influenced by the cyclical pattern of urbanization and infrastructural development. The paper has shown that migrant workers have filled these labor demands in the past by participating in the development of such important infrastructural projects and supporting their home countries' economy through the sending of remittances. Over 600 construction workers comprised the sample population for the survey, guaranteeing a good sample that would give an insight into migration experiences and issues affecting migration from many parts of the country. The sample was sufficient to offer an insight into various aspects of the issue under investigation. In the case of the open-ended interviews, 300 people were used, depending on their migration experiences and the nature of their jobs in the field. They were used since they offered in-depth information on migration, especially the reasons why they migrated in economic, social, and political aspects.

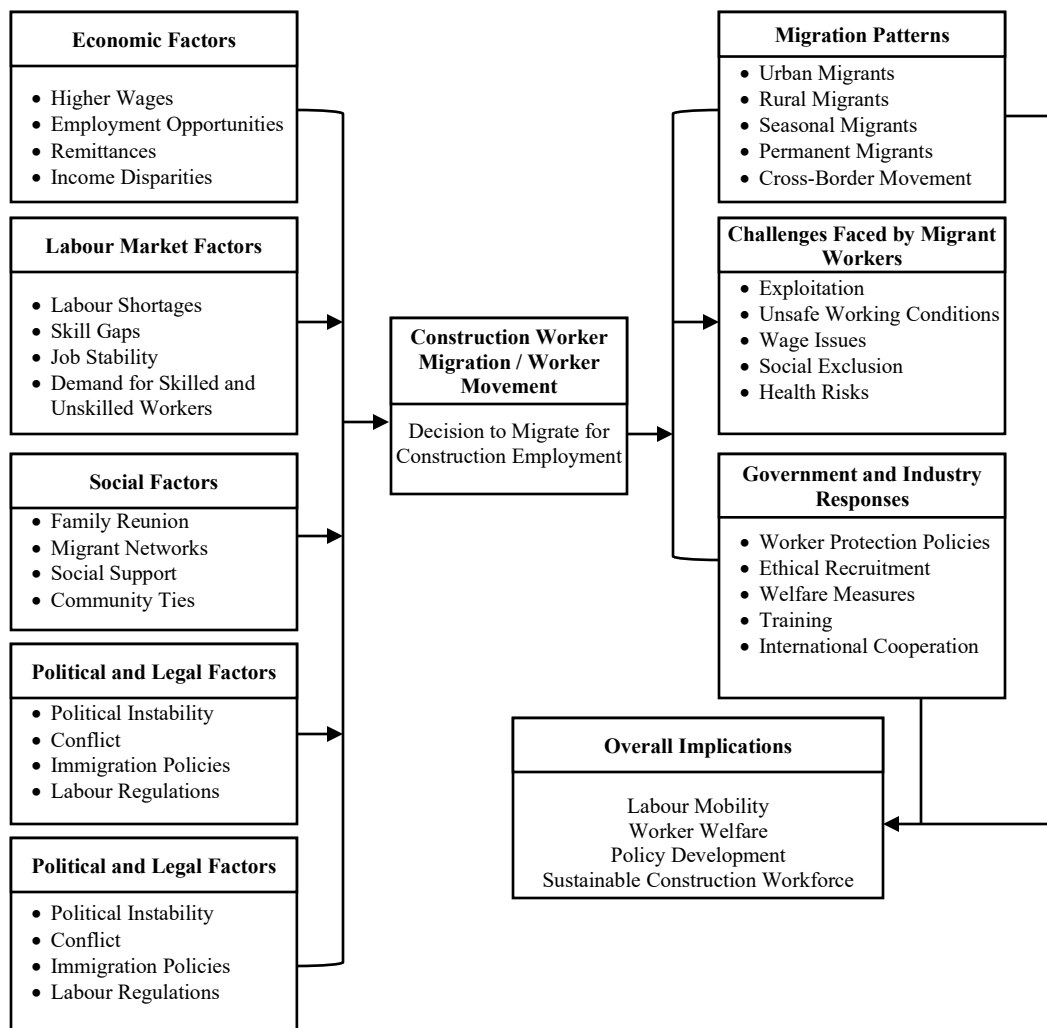


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework on Migration in the Construction Industry

Fig. 1 represents the conceptual framework of migration in the construction industry. In this regard, there are several factors influencing migration in the construction industry. These factors include economic factors, labor market factors, social factors, political factors, and globalization factors. On the other hand, there are also implications resulting from migration in the construction industry, especially concerning worker welfare and policy making. These implications include the challenges of exploitation and safety concerns in the construction industry.

3.1 Historical Context

Traditionally, the construction sector has used mobile labor to fulfill the needs of massive constructions, and due to shortages of the local labor force (Lyu et al., 2025). In the 19th and 20th centuries, infrastructure developments in Europe and North America led to high demands for workers, which were fulfilled by immigrants from Europe and workers from other non-industrial parts of the world. Chinese and Irish workers were employed to build the American transcontinental railway system, whereas Southern and Eastern Europeans moved into industrial towns in Europe. The rebuilding process following World War II required

additional labor, which resulted in the utilization of laborers from Turkey for Germany's development of its cities, roads, and industries in the 1950s and 1960s.

3.2 Modern-Day Trends

The issues that affect global mobility in the construction industry include urbanization, globalization, and imbalance in the labor market. There is increased urbanization in GCC countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, which has created a need for construction. This has led to the inflow of workers from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa into these countries due to the availability of construction jobs. Developed countries such as the USA and Canada depend on construction laborers from Latin America to perform construction jobs in residential and commercial buildings. Globalization has eased mobility, and multinational construction firms have benefited from global labor mobility.

3.3 Regional Patterns of Migration

Migrant labor movements have a regional context, which depends on economics, labor laws, and political stability. For instance, in the Middle East, the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia use the labor force from South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia to construct infrastructure and oil industries, and also to host mega events like the FIFA World Cup games. In Europe, labor migration involves Eastern European labor migrating to Western Europe under the free movement policies stipulated by the EU regulations. North America makes considerable use of the labor force coming from Latin America due to housing and commercial construction in California and Texas.

3.4 Economic and Labor Market Drivers

Migration is motivated by wage differentials and remittances. Low-wage workers from developing countries, especially from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, migrate to GCC countries, earning more than several times their wages

despite difficult working conditions. There is an excess of labor in developing countries that causes the movement of people out of those countries, as developed countries lack skilled laborers and employ foreign workers. The social network results in chain migration since the migrants rely on their social connections in order to find employment and accommodation.

3.5 Challenges and Table of Migration Drivers

Construction sector migrants suffer from exploitation, risky working conditions, weak labor laws, and social discrimination. Some of the recruitment companies impose excessive commission charges on the migrants, thus putting them in debt. In addition, the Kafala system in the Gulf states binds the migrant workers within their work contracts. An efficient migration policy should consider not only economic factors but also the interests of the migrants. Below are some of the tables that represent migrant reasons and trends (Table I and table II).

TABLE I COMPARISON OF FACTORS DRIVING MIGRATION

Factor	Urban Workers	Rural Workers	Seasonal Migrants	Permanent Migrants
Average Wage (per day)	\$15	\$10	\$12	\$14
Distance from Home (km)	50	150	200	300
Working Conditions	Moderate	Poor	Harsh	Moderate
Safety Measures	High	Low	Low	Medium
Job Stability	High	Low	Low	High
Main Push Factor	Housing Costs	Lack of Jobs	Seasonal Employment	Better Opportunities
Main Pull Factor	Higher Wages	Better Infrastructure	Proximity to Jobs	Permanent Employment

TABLE II FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRATION PATTERNS

Factor	Urban Migrants	Rural Migrants	Seasonal Migrants	Permanent Migrants
Average Daily Wage (USD)	\$15-20	\$10-15	\$12-16	\$14-18
Distance from Home (km)	20-50	100-300	200-400	300+
Working Hours	08-10	10-12	12+	08-10
Living Conditions	Shared	Rented Apartments	Temporary Shelters	Own or Rented Houses
Education Level	High School or Higher	Primary School or Below	Primary School or Below	High School or Higher
Main Push Factor	Housing Costs, Unemployment	Agricultural Failure, Low Wages	Seasonal Employment	Lack of Local Opportunities
Main Pull Factor	Higher Wages, Urban Lifestyle	Infrastructure, Higher Wages	Temporary Job Opportunities	Job Security, Urban Lifestyle
Job Security	Moderate to High	Low	Low	High
Safety at Work	High	Low	Low	Moderate
Health Facilities Access	Good (Near Hospitals)	Poor (Far from Facilities)	Limited (Employer-provided)	Good (In-city access)
Social Support Networks	Family/Community Nearby	Family Distant	Family Distant	Family Nearby
Migration Trend	Increasing	Fluctuating	Seasonal (High in Harvesting Periods)	Steady

IV. EXPLOITATION AND UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

Workers in the construction sector who are migrants are subject to exploitative labor and dangerous working conditions. Some forms of abuse are withholding payment of wages, long hours at work, dangerous working conditions, and

unfair treatment from either the employer or the recruitment company. Workers fall victim to debt bondage because of exorbitant recruitment costs and the requirement of visa payments; their passports are confiscated until they clear the debts. Dangerous working conditions are made worse by inadequate occupational safety education for the workers and

poor protective equipment, such as helmets, gloves, and safety belts. High-risk jobs are given to migrant workers, such as building tall structures and mining, resulting in more injuries or deaths than those experienced by locals

5.1 Weak Labor Laws and Limited Legal Protections

In most cases, the legal protection accorded to these employees is inadequate or not effectively enforced; therefore, the employees have no choice but to remain silent about the abuse and working environment at their workplaces. Labor laws may be established and enforced, but this is done through ineffective mechanisms, and the employees lack access to justice due to language problems, ignorance of the law, and high legal fees. The kafala system in the Middle Eastern countries further exacerbates these challenges. The workers continue to be vulnerable and exposed to exploitation without any form of protection because of the many legal hindrances.

5.2 Social and Cultural Exclusion

Apart from facing these physical and legal obstacles, the migrant workers endure other forms of harassment, such as social exclusion and discrimination. This negatively impacts their psychological well-being. Language and cultural barriers limit their ability to communicate, receive instructions concerning safety, and obtain legal representation. Wage inequality and inability to access accommodation services is another major challenge to these employees since they are denied access to promotion. Prejudice and xenophobia further make these workers vulnerable to social and economic exploitation.

5.3 Health and Well-Being

Occupational health hazards and submissions to physical and mental disorders are quite common among migrant construction workers because of their working conditions, accommodation, and restricted healthcare. Construction work is rigorous and often undertaken in dangerous conditions, and for extended periods, resulting in both physical and psychological injuries.

5.3.1 Physical Health Risks

Challenges faced by migrant construction workers include physical health vulnerabilities that are as follows: musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory diseases because of exposure to dust and chemicals, and heat stress in extreme climate countries. The risks are raised higher by poor and or unavailable health care or health insurance, since many of these migrant workers cannot pay for treatment when they have injuries or fall sick. As a result, construction workers in the hot climate zones like the Middle East rarely have a chance to have proper rest, food, or water, and are not protected against heat. This has caused so many heat strokes and other heat complications among the migrant workers due to labor intensity.

5.3.2 Mental Health Challenges

In general, the psychological condition of migrant workers is very unsatisfactory, although they suffer from stress and anxiety in their work or living environment. Loneliness, fear of losing a job, financial crisis, and being far away, away from family, can all lead to mental problems such as depression and anxiety disorders. Also, their legal limbo and potential for deportation may worsen these mental health issues, complicated or not. A cross-sectional study exploring the issues that have direct impacts on the lives of construction migrants includes the following: Human rights abuses, lack of safe workplace, weak legal rights, social exclusion, and health hazards remain characteristics of MWs throughout the developed and developing nations. Meeting these challenges calls for collective endeavors of governments, employers, and international organizations to accord decent treatment and protection to migrant workers, and with full and equal access to needed services.

Such steps as labor law revision, developing the mechanisms of enforcing these laws, encouraging brokers and Recruiting Agencies to act ethically, and increasing the access of migrant workers to health care and social services that are so important for them as members of construction crews. Apart from being a matter of equity, their social protection is also pertinent to the development of the industry that depends much on their labor. Fig. 2 shows how many out of 300 migrant workers belong to each of the North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa regions. The continent of Asia is shown to have the largest number of migrant workers. This clearly shows that there is a considerable proportion of migrant workers within this region compared to other regions. North America is the second in terms of the number of migrant workers, whereas Europe, Australia, and Africa are third and fourth, respectively. Fig. 3, a pie chart, illustrates the percentage distribution of reasons driving workers to migrate. The most significant reason is Higher Wages, followed by Better Job Opportunities and Family Reunion. Fig. 4, the histogram showing the age distribution of migrating workers in the construction industry. Fig. 5 is the line chart displaying the monthly migration rates of construction workers. It shows how the number of migrating workers fluctuates over the course of a year, with a peak during the mid-year months. The heat map represented in fig. 6 indicates the correlations among some of the factors that affect migration likelihood. The correlation between Wages and Distance is very strong, being equal to 0.9, which means that higher distance from home is correlated with higher wages. This result matches the prediction of higher wages for migrants traveling farther from their native countries. Additionally, the correlation between Job Stability and Working Conditions equals 0.7, which confirms the assumption about job stability being connected with favorable working conditions.

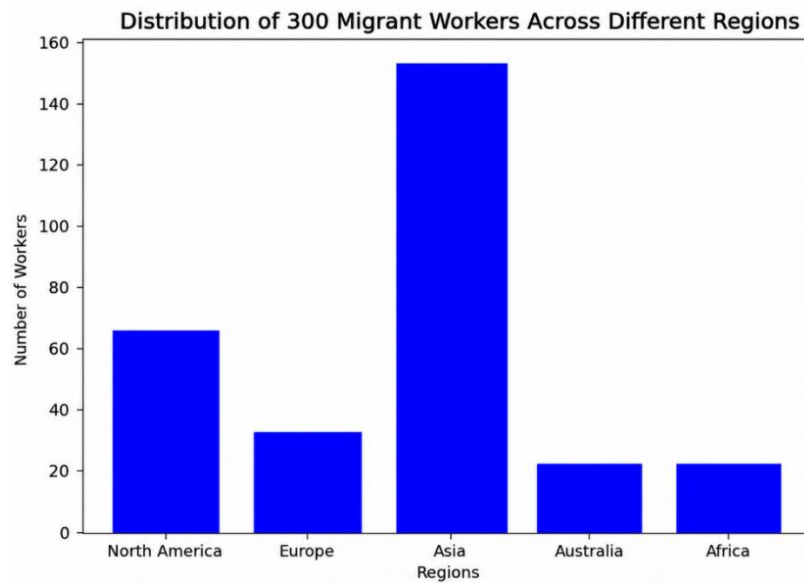


Fig. 2 Distribution of Migrant Workers Across Different Regions

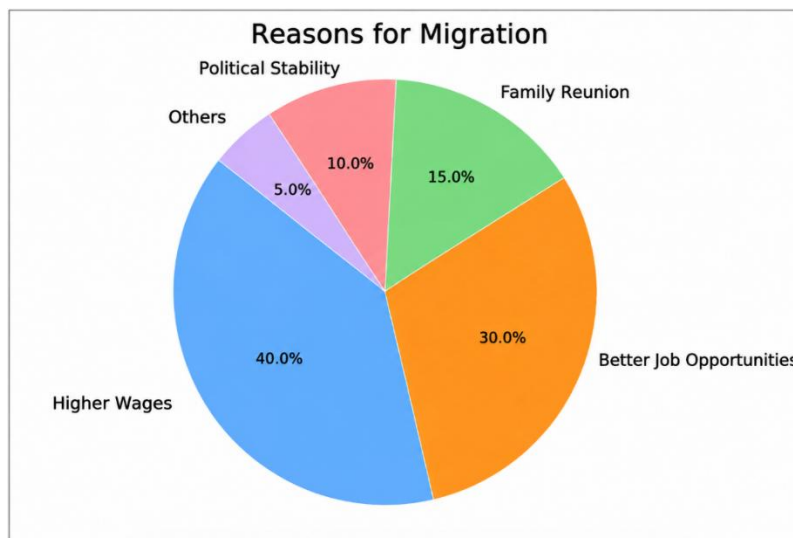


Fig. 3 This Pie Chart Illustrates the Percentage Distribution of Reasons Driving Workers to Migrate. The Most Significant Reason is "Higher Wages," Followed By "Better Job Opportunities" and "Family Reunion"

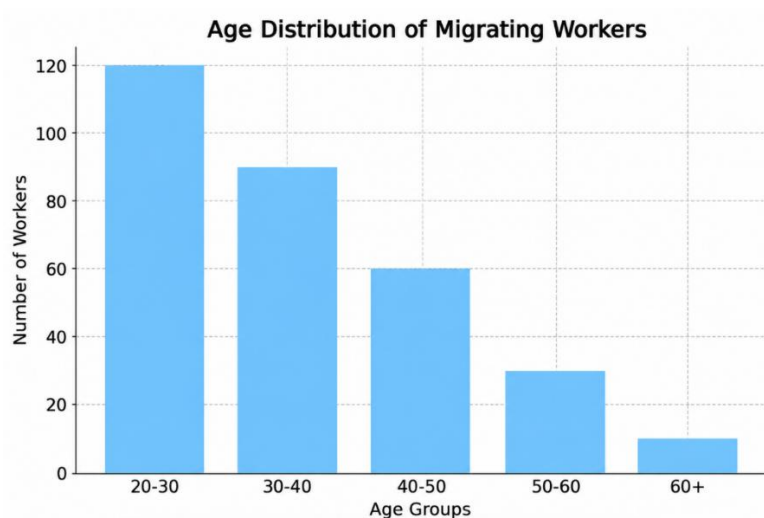


Fig. 4 The Histogram Showing the Age Distribution of Migrating Workers in the Construction Industry

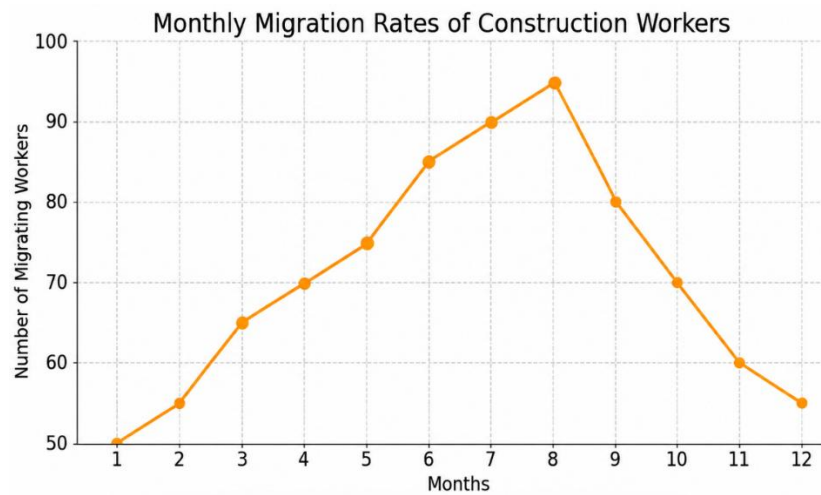


Fig. 5 Line Chart Showing Monthly Construction Worker Migration, Peaking Mid-Year

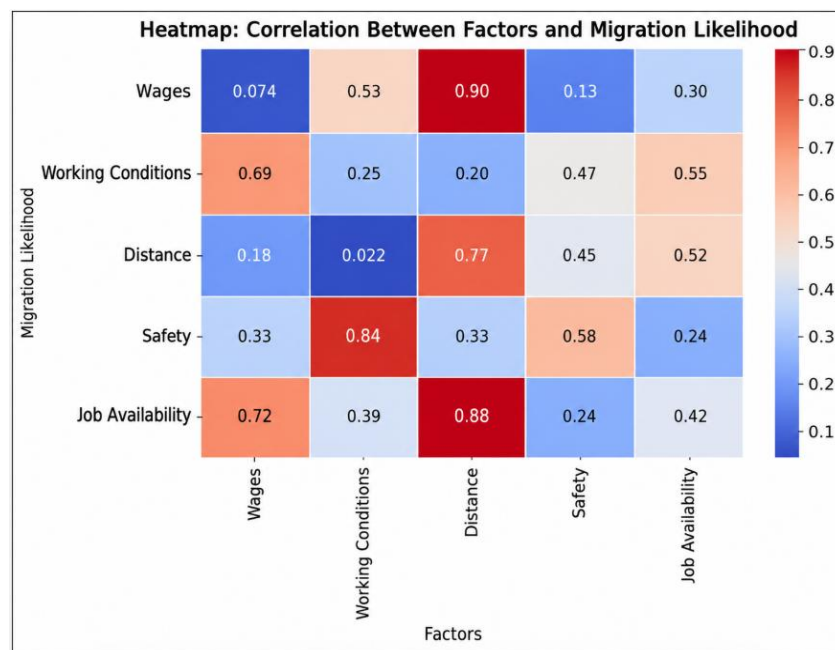


Fig. 6 Heatmap Showing Correlation of Factors Like Wages, Conditions, and Distance with Migration Likelihood; Color Intensity Indicates Strength of Correlation

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INDUSTRY RESPONSES

Major issues confronting migrant workers in the construction sector have led policymakers and the various construction players to design measures intended to sensitize employers and workers, enhance the standards of workers, and protect migrants' rights. Fear responses also differ across countries and regions based on the labor market conditions, migration rate, and policy. In the following section will analyze the major government policies and industry measures in relation to the states of the migrant workers in the construction industry, including immigration legislation, labor regulation, industry code, and international initiatives.

6.1 Government Policies: Immigration and Labor Rights

The role of the government cannot be ruled out since it plays an important role in shaping the status of migrant workers

through the formulation of labor laws and policies which safeguard the interest of the migrants. Immigration policies are responsible for the influx of migrant workers who depend on employment requirements and socio-political conditions for admission. Especially, in the GCC nations such as Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, TLM workers operate under the kafala system where the workers are tied to the sponsor employer. However, there have been certain efforts towards reform in the form of wage protections and employer switching. Canada and Australia have formulated special immigration streams to attract migrant construction workers. This includes the Canada Temporary Foreign Worker Program and Australia's Skilled Migration Program that ensures an adequate supply of labor while supporting economic growth. The EU ensures the mobility of labor and allows poorer EU citizens to work in richer member states. Moreover, various directives like the Posted Workers

Directive ensure equal working conditions compared to those of nationals. However, there are certain limitations within this framework, such as inadequate enforcement of inspection systems and migrant fear of employer repercussions.

6.2 Industry Responses: Ethical Standards and Corporate Responsibility

The construction companies, too, must assume responsibility regarding the well-being of migrant workers. In terms of responsible and ethical recruitment, ensuring the safety of workers, and adopting social responsibility activities, the construction companies are being urged to do so. Activities like “Building Responsibly” include efforts to ensure legal recruitment, occupational safety and health, and equal treatment of laborers throughout the supply chain. IRIS certification ensures that the recruitment agencies adhere to ethical recruitment procedures and safeguard the workers from paying heavy fees and receiving misinformation. Some prominent construction companies have developed programs concerning the welfare of the workers, which involve housing, healthcare, nutrition, and recreation.

6.3 Global and Regional Cooperation

The need for international and regional cooperation is critical in dealing with problems encountered by migrant construction workers. International organizations like the ILO have developed international labor standards, including the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), which ensures workers' rights, wages, and safety. Decent Work Agendas ensure occupational safety and foster employer-employee communication. Bilateral and multilateral arrangements between the sending and receiving nations minimize the dangers of migration, regulate recruitment charges, enforce labor laws, and offer a means for resolving disputes and repatriation. For example, the Philippines has made

agreements with the nations of the Middle East, Europe, and Asia to safeguard Filipino migrant construction workers.

6.4 The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)

This common forum provides a forum to share experiences in managing international labor migration for all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and the private sector. Lectures from a development-mother perspective where the construction industry creeps in owing to its dependency on cross-border workers and solutions that are shared toward ethical recruiting, coupled with the protection of their rights.

Finally, therefore, it can be concluded that current government policies and industry responses to the problems highlighted for migrant workers in construction are not static, but have developed over the years due to the imperatives of scarcity of labor force, economic disparities, as well as exploitation of workers. Although certain countries have advanced further in changing immigration policies along with employment rights, still a long way to go to protect the rights of migrant construction workers. It should be noted that ethical recruitment and corporate responsibility, as well as international collaboration, are critical aspects of the general attempts to enhance the situation of migrant workers in this important sector (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). Enhancing the existing enforcement measures, encouraging higher accountability on the part of the constructors in matters concerning employment, and bringing the actors together will be important in creating structural change in the construction industry. Fig. 7, the simulation chart compares the projected income growth of migrant workers versus local workers over a 10-year period, demonstrating the financial trajectory for both groups. The income simulation concentrates on the group of skilled labor migrants in the building industry, who earn relatively high salaries compared to local laborers. The analysis of this group shows the financial benefits that skilled migration provides.

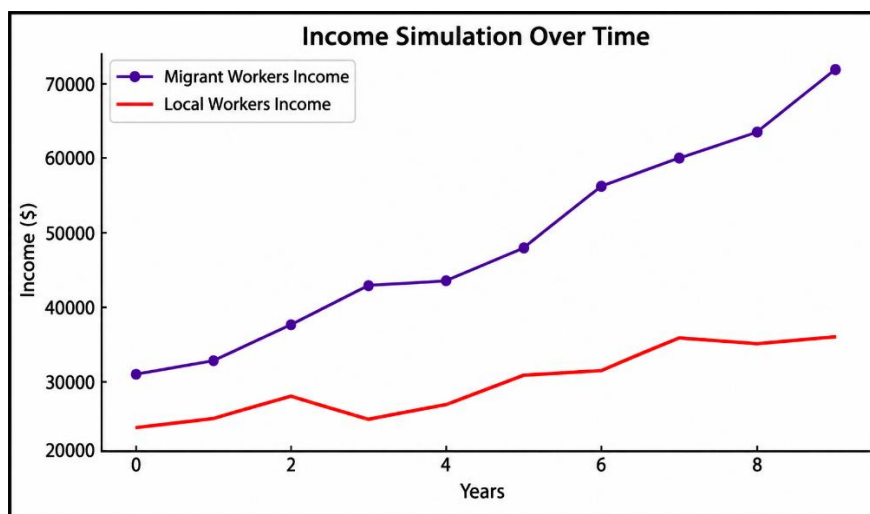


Fig. 7 The Simulation Chart Compares the Projected Income Growth of Migrant Workers Versus Local Workers Over A 10-Year Period, Demonstrating the Financial Trajectory for Both Groups

VI. DISCUSSION

Migration of workers in the construction sector is a function of a variety of socio-economic-political factors, with the main reason being economic motivation, that is, the attraction of higher wages. The study has successfully captured the essence of the effects of globalization and economic disparities at regional levels in causing workers to migrate, especially those from industries where there is periodic demand for labor. It clearly points out the significance of the role played by the migrants in resolving labor shortages, especially in countries undergoing rapid urbanization. Social networks and political instabilities are other factors affecting migration.

However, some limitations of this research should be acknowledged. First, despite its rather extensive nature, the sample used for the analysis might fail to fully capture all the peculiarities associated with construction migrant workers in terms of regional distribution and specialization. Another limitation is that the paper is primarily dedicated to the economic consequences of migration and pays little attention to the social impact of migration experienced by workers in question. Future research could explore psychological and social issues faced by migrant workers and analyze how they cope with being away from home. Further investigation of the ways technological progress can change the nature of the construction labor market could be fruitful.

Implications of the study for policymakers and other relevant stakeholders are crucial. There is a need for labor policies that not only protect the rights of migrants but also satisfy the demand of the industry for an adaptable workforce. The government and construction firms need to work together to improve the working conditions for the migrant workers, give them adequate wages, and recruit them through ethical means. Furthermore, it would be necessary to create laws for the inclusion of migrant workers in the construction industry.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this research paper, the various motivating factors leading to migration in the construction industry have been investigated. Some of the main results include economic motivations as the main reasons for migration. In other words, higher wage rates in foreign destinations become the major reason why people prefer to migrate. In particular, employees from low-wage countries, such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, are inclined to migrate because they see better-paying jobs in the Middle East due to a lot of construction work there. The next motivation is related to social aspects, such as reunification with families and migration networks. Finally, political instabilities of home countries motivate workers to migrate as well.

Insights derived from statistics shed light on how economic differences have an essential effect on causing people to migrate. The analysis showed a strong positive correlation of 0.9 of wage increment leading to higher migration distances showing that people will move farther in search of better

wages. The study also indicated that higher wages and improved employment were the top motivating factors when it came to migration, and there were also other factors such as family reunification and political instability. There is a great need to develop migration policies that consider the social and economic causes of migration. Additionally, there was a great need to protect the migrants since their interests were not considered.

Further research should address the topic of the influence of migration processes on the health and social inclusion of workers in receiving countries. In addition, research related to the potential for using technological improvements to diminish the need for migrant workers is another area worth exploring. Further investigation of the socio-economic effects of labor migration on workers' families can also be beneficial. These findings suggest the importance of cooperation between policy makers and representatives of the construction sector in developing ethical recruitment policies. It is important that labor laws are improved to ensure fair wages and decent work conditions for migrant construction workers.

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Ethical Consideration

In the present study, issues of ethics would include the need for informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity. As a way of safeguarding the participants' rights, in this proposed research study, there will be an option for participants to withdraw from the study without consequences.

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