

Labour in-migration in construction industry of Sri Lanka

The construction industry is considered as an ideal economic regulator of many countries. It is a labour intensive industry. It faces many challenges and some of them arise through migration of work force to and from the construction industry. However, very little has been studied on labour migration in Sri Lanka. This study aims to identify the behavior of labour in-migration in construction industry of Sri Lanka. In-migration has been defined as labourers migrating to construction industry from other sectors changing their previous employment. Data were collected through on-site structured interview survey of 310 construction labourers belonging to crafts and related and elementary occupational categories. The sample consists of 8 main trades from 7 contractor organizations.

Profile of the sample provides demographic information and present job details of construction labourers. Results indicate that 65.5% of construction labourers have migrated from various sectors. Only 34.5% of labourers are originally from construction. Agriculture is the highest sector of origin of these laborers followed by personal services, trade and hotel industry, respectively. Majority of migrated labourers have selected painting trade followed by plumbing, tiling and masonry, respectively. Further, survey identified 6 major reasons for changing the previous industry. Some of these reasons are specific to the particular industry. Benefits and remuneration is the most frequently cited main reason for in-migration. Nature and condition of the previous job is the second in rank. Third is closure or failure of the previous company. A considerable number of migrated labourers have also identified career development potential in construction as a reason for in-migration.

Survey revealed that 15% of craft and related work force have undergone a formal training related to their work. Others have obtained the necessary skill through informal training and experience. The percentage of workers who have obtained formal training varies with the trade. The percentage of trained labourers among migrated work force is always less than the non-migrated work force for all trades. In trades like masonry, carpentry, tiling, plumbing and air-conditioning it is less than half. It can be inferred from above observation that workers who have started their career in construction have had an opportunity for training either at the inception or at the early stages of their career. This opportunity was not there for the migrated work force due to lack of on-the-job training facilities available in the Sri Lankan construction industry. The courses offered in most training centres are for new entrants. Further training and on-the-job training courses are virtually non-existent. Most of the migrated labourers preferred part time courses in the same trade enabling them to improve their skills.