



Diversity in Construction

The skills shortages affect the UK construction industry. Gaps need to be filled to build new homes, tackle the housing crisis and develop the homebuilding sector. The UK construction is the significant part of the whole UK economy. Simply, there are not enough homegrown workers to fulfil the Government plans and build better living environment in the UK.

According to the Federation of Master Builder's (FMB) latest State of Trade Survey, the confidence and workloads for small builders in London took a downward turn towards the end of 2017. Con-

tractors from London often mention that they have problems to find skilled workers. Not long ago London was the first city where migrant builders used to arrive for. at the first place.

Key results from the survey include:

With regards to workloads, expected workloads and enquiries, the overall indicator for the performance of London's smaller building firms dropped by four percentage points in Q4 2017 compared with the previous quarter;

- Fewer construction SMEs predict rising workloads in the coming three months, down from 41% in the previous quarter to 38% in Q4 2017;
- 87% of builders believe that material prices will rise in the next six months, up from 82% in the previous quarter;
- More than two-thirds (68%) of construction SMEs are struggling to hire bricklay-

ers, and 63% are struggling to hire carpenters and joiners – the highest since records began;

- Nearly two thirds (61%) of construction SMEs expect salaries and wages to increase in the next six months.

Barry Mortimer, Director of FMB London, said: "London's SME builders start 2018 in choppy waters with uncertainty in the air. Growth is slowing, material prices are rising and it's becoming increasingly difficult for builders to find the skilled workers vital to their everyday existence. More than two thirds of construction SMEs are struggling to hire bricklayers and this has increased by nearly 10% compared with the previous quarter of the year. What's more, nearly as many are facing difficulties hiring carpenters and joiners. Indeed, these shortages are reflected in soaring wages for core trades. Anecdotally, some employers have re-



ported paying carpenters in the capital more than £70,000 a year, up from £45,000 just 18 months ago."

Mortimer concluded: "In order to meet the Mayor of London's ambitious housing targets we need a vibrant and growing SME house-building sector. Houses do not build themselves and London's building firms are particularly concerned about the growing difficulties in finding skilled workers. London is especially reliant on EU migrant workers with 70% of firms in London and the South East employing them and so as we approach Brexit, the capital's builders are right to be concerned about skill shortages. Construction is without any shadow of a doubt an industry of clear strategic importance to the economy. Without a fully charged-up construction sector, it will be impossible to meet our housing targets in London. Addressing the sector's acute skills crisis, as raised by the latest FMB State of Trade Survey, must be a priority. The Government

must take note of the worsening construction skills shortage with Brexit looming large on the horizon. London's construction sector could well grind to a halt post-Brexit unless Ministers implement a sensible, flexible immigration system."

The uncertainty connected with Brexit is not encouraging migrant construction workers to come to the UK or new entrants to start the career in this industry. The recent collapse of the construction giant Carillion left over 100 apprentices and even more workers unsure of their future. Polish builders, from whom private building sector benefited between 2005 and 2010, are no longer interested in job offers in the UK as other EU states, like Germany, provides similar job opportunities and salaries, while the cost of living there is cheaper.

If UK's ambition is to be a leader in the construction, the skilled workforce is the priority. The implementation of highly advanced technologies like drones, bricklaying robots, augmented reality tools

etc. is not enough. The investment in training and apprenticeship is vital. Nevertheless, the industry experts know well, that without migrant workforce the industry faces stagnation.

The diversity in the construction workforce is the powerful engine of the UK construction industry. There are common fears that there is not enough space for immigrants, who drains NHS and UK's resources, but on the contrary, there is never too many people to work. EU migrant workers are skilled, resilient and hard-working.

There is the variety of construction careers and jobs to choose. Not only EU migrants are highly valuable for UK construction industry but also refugees from Syria who often are skilled. Some agencies are specialised in helping refugees find placements. For instance, the council in Ashford, Kent, took on 250 Syrian refugees and local business Concept Training is helping some to improve their skills in bricklaying and carpentry.