



## THE RATIONALITY PARADOX OF MIGRANT WORKERS ON PRECARIOUSNESS CONDITIONS IN UNITED KINGDOM

**Adrianus Lengu Wene**, Department of European Studies, School of Strategic and Global Studies, University Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, [mrandre1705@gmail.com](mailto:mrandre1705@gmail.com)

**Nur Fatwa**, Department of European Studies, School of Strategic and Global Studies, University Indonesia Jakarta, Indonesia, [nurfatwa@ui.ac.id](mailto:nurfatwa@ui.ac.id)

---

**Abstract** - This paper aims to analyze the rationality paradox of migrant workers in the UK for precariatization in UK. The socio-economic conditions in UK during the last decade have shown a kind of insinuation that the labor free market is not an appropriate and effective facility in advancing the country's economy, particularly in improving the standard of living of migrant workers. Literature studies show that the labor market in the UK has resulted in conditions of precariousness, exploitation and injustice for migrant workers. Anomaly of this problem is that migrant workers still hold on to their jobs even though they are exploited. With the theory of rational choice and through an interdisciplinary approach, it is found that first, this anomaly is caused by the identity paradox of migrant workers as '*homo oeconomicus*'; secondly, as a result of this paradox, the economic factor becomes a rational choice, natural from the impossibility of other alternative options involving emotional, moral and psychological sides; third, the absence of legal immigration documents, low skills, limited access to justice, dangerous immigration status, and the need to work for the physiology and conditions of the UK government's '*state of exception*', are the real antecedents of the consequences of being '*homo sacer*'..

**Keywords:** migrant workers, socio-economic conditions, homo oeconomicus

### I. INTRODUCTION

In his historical materialism, Karl Marx argues that the whole course of history sees human material production as a historical basis and sees mental production or mental life and culture as its influence [6]. Karl Marx's thesis is still very contextual with the working class's current conditions, including the conditions of migrant workers, even though new variants have emerged which have been transformed according to changes in the movement of international economic activity. In short, the name represents the identity of the precariat class, namely the working class, who is vulnerable to being exploited by the free labor market through the contract system and the outsourcing system. In the neoliberal globalization project, the free labor market becomes a gray space that strongly supports entrepreneurs and investors to take exploitative actions and accumulate modern slavery. Exploitation and all forms of injustice in the labor market are also seen in migrant workers in the UK. Even though migrant workers experience exploitation and all forms of injustice in several industrial sectors in the UK, migrant workers continue to do their jobs, although seen from the trend of migrant workers moving to UK for work, it still shows a positive trend. Epistemologically, three factual conditions are interrelated and form a problem triangle. First, the hierarchy of needs that migrant workers in the UK wish to fulfill cannot be found in their home country - as a motive. Second, the UK labor market's real reality becomes a trap for migrant workers instead of ideal reality. Third, the rationality of migrant workers for favorable pre-employment conditions - as a production effect on the acceptance of empowering mental, psychological states. This paper presents the ontology of society, why the economy has become the rational choice of migrant workers in the precarious condition that befell them in UK.

### II. METHODS

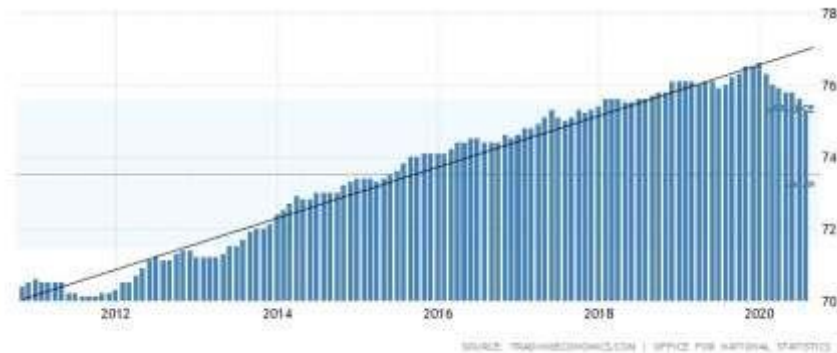
This research uses the descriptive qualitative method. Analyzing data through electronic media, books, and scientific journals with discussions on migrant in UK. Qualitative methods facilitate a researcher to study an object of study in-depth and in detail. The Study uses primary and secondary data with qualitative descriptive analysis [2].

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Trends in Migrant Workers in the UK

The UK is a developed country with a per capita income level of 43688.40 USD in 2019 [10]. This figure is sufficient to describe the UK's standard of living fairly well. Trading Economics data also shows that the UK employment rate averaged 71.40% from 1971 to 2020 and reached an all-time high of 76.60% in January 2020 despite falling to 75.30 percent in August 2020. One of the declining factors was the Covid 19 epidemic that hit the UK (Figure 1).

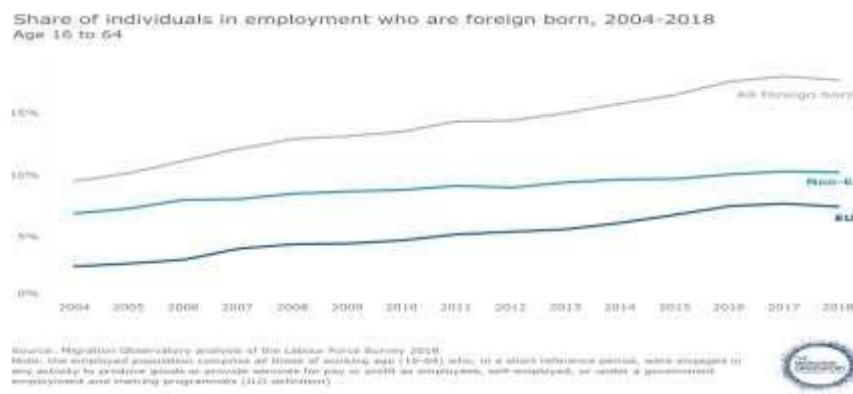
**Figure1, United Kingdom Employment Rate**



Source: [Tradingeconomics.com](https://tradingeconomics.com)

Many migrants work in the UK because of the great job opportunities. From data released by the Migration Observatory in 2019, it is known that the percentage of workers in the UK who were born overseas has increased over the past 15 years (Figure 2).

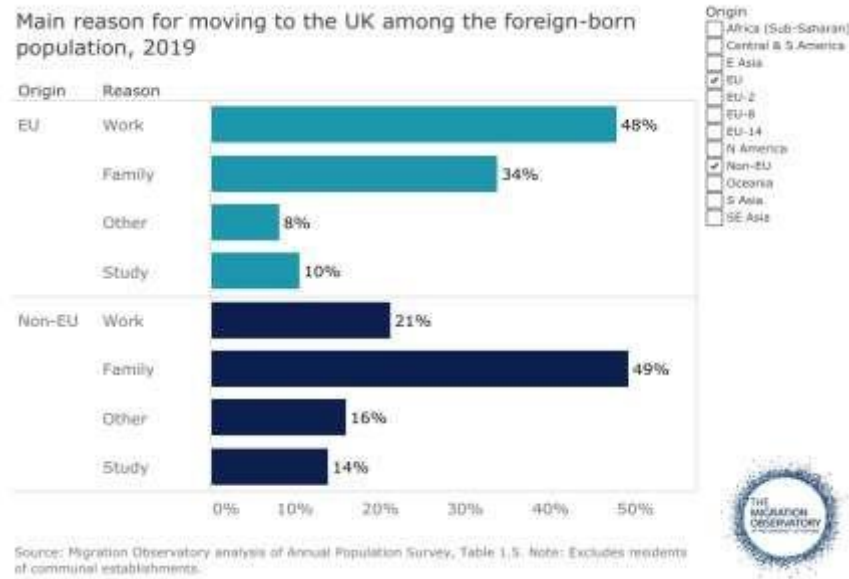
**Figure 2, Share of Individuals in Employment who are foreign born, 2004-2018**



Source: [Migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

The two figures above are two variables: employment and migrant workers, which are relevant to one another. This means that the trend of hard workers becoming migrant workers is linear in UK jobs. It also underlines that opening up employment opportunities in the UK as an attraction for migrant workers can be a complex problem for local UK workers, the UK government, and migrant workers. Judging from the 2019 Migration Observatory data, migrants migrate to the UK come from various regions for various reasons (Figure 3).

**Figure 3, Main Migration Reason To The UK**



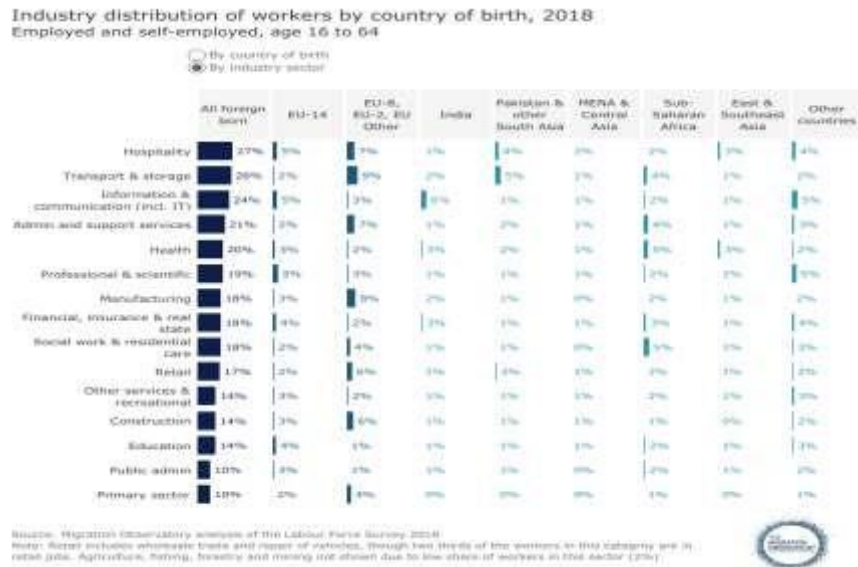
Source: [Migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

Figure 3 above explains the reasons for migration to the UK. It can be seen that the most common permission granted by EU migrants is to change jobs as much as 48%. For migrants from the European Union, employment is the main reason, in particular for migrants from new EU member states, with a proportion of 59% of EU-8 migrants (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) and 62% of EU-2 migrants (Bulgarian and Romanian). Meanwhile, the most common reason cited by non-EU migrants was family (49% of those born outside the European Union), followed by work at 21%. One fact is that many non-EU members come on family visas, more likely to live permanently with people arriving on work or student visas (Migration Observatory, 2019). Also, the countries of origin for the largest migrant producers in the UK include Poland (14%), Romania (7.2%), India (5.9%), Ireland (5.1%), Italy (4.9%), Portugal (4.0%), Pakistan (3.3%), France (3.1%), Lithuania (3.0%) and Spain 3.0%. The development trends of migrant workers in the UK labor market are paradoxical. In that sense, access to work in the UK labor market is actually a vulnerable expectation trap for migrant workers.

### The Factuality of Migrant Worker Works in the UK

The Migration Observatory in 2018 released data on the distribution of migrant workers by the industrial sector. The data shows that the industrial sectors with a lot of migrant workers are the hospitality sector (27%), the transportation and warehousing sector (26%), the information and communication sector (24%), the administration and support services sector (21%), and the primary sector 10 % (Figure 4).

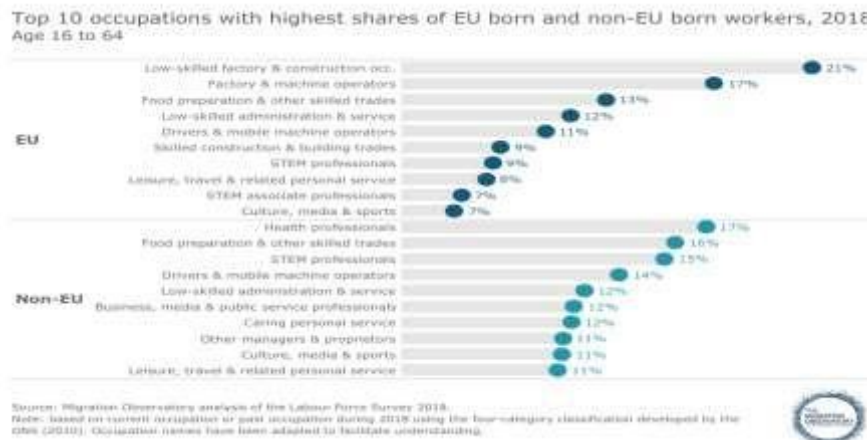
**Figure 4, Job Distribution by Workers' Country of Origin in the UK**



Source: [Migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

Also, in Figure 5, the most types of work come from EU and non-EU countries, where low-skilled factory and construction jobs have the largest share of workers born in the EU (21% of all workers are born in EU countries). In contrast, occupational health workers (high skilled) have the highest share of non-EU workers, namely 17% of the total [9].

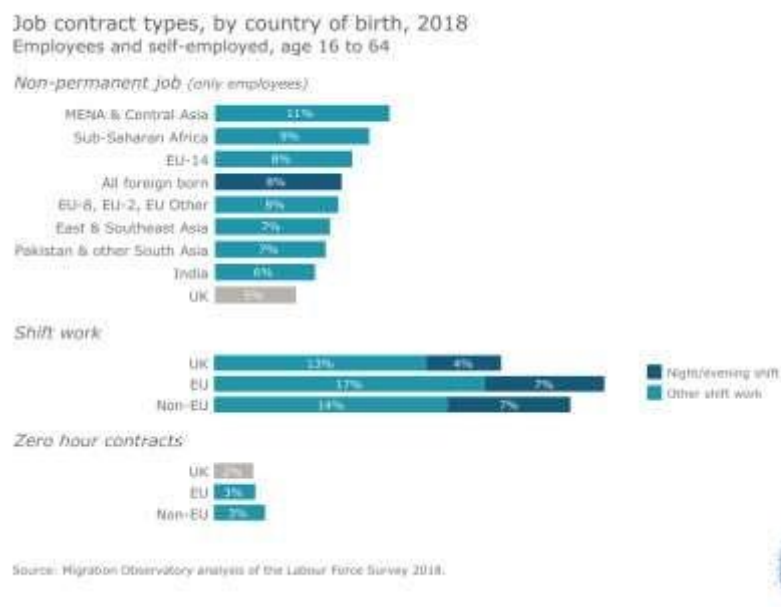
**Figure 5, Top 10 Occupations in UK**



Source: [Migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

The two data above can be important points of several consequences: first, the industrial sector employs migrant workers with exploitable skills. Second, the labor market with *Labor Market Flexibility* allows for vulnerability. The 2018 Observatory's data migration on types of work emphasized vulnerability. Figure 6 below shows the types of contract work performed by migrant workers. It appears that migrant workers do 8% of casual jobs than 5% of local UK workers. About 24% of workers born in the European Union have jobs that involve multiple shifts, compared to 17% of UK casual workers and 21% of non-EU migrant workers. Meanwhile, 3% of migrant workers from the European Union and non-EU and 2% of local UK workers have hourly contracts.

**Figure 6, Job Contract Type**



SourceS: [Migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

Exploitation in the labor market is seen in the vulnerable conditions of migrant workers. The 2017 focus on Labor Exploitation (FLEX) reveals several vulnerabilities. First, labor vulnerabilities that leave workers poor or indebted and desperate for survival, such as unpaid minimum wages, high costs for accommodation, equipment or documentation or holding passports; second, employment relationships that limit access to justice, including long chains of work, casual work, including non-working hours contracts and self-employment; and third, a migrant status which places workers at risk of harassment by irresponsible employers. The weakness of the position of migrants is the status of a binding visa, temporary visas, and access to the labor market with limited welfare provisions [4]. To further address the vulnerability of migrant workers, FLEX issues a matrix showing the vulnerability of migrant workers (Table 1).

**Table 1, FLEX Risk Indicators**

Category	Vulnerability	Resilience
<b>Migrant Status</b>	No or limited right to remain; restrictions on work and access to public funds; registration requirements; tied visas	Right to work
<b>Unionsation</b>	Non-unionised	Unionised
<b>Community</b>	Limited community ties	Strong community support
<b>Contract</b>	Zero hours; short hours; extensive subcontracting	Worker contract hours and terms requirements met
<b>Terms</b>	Self-employment; agency work; part-time work	Employee, full time
<b>Pay</b>	Debts; deductions; mandatory unpaid time; non-payment of national living wage	Living wage
<b>Treatment</b>	Multiple, persistent labour abuses; health and safety breaches; discrimination	Accessible routes to remedy; worker awareness of advice gateways

<b>Oversight</b>	Deregulation; poor enforcement; prioritisation of immigration control	Strong, worker-centred labour inspection and enforcement; firewall between immigration control and labour inspection
<b>Welfare</b>	Homeless; destitute; no recourse to public funds	Access to benefits, housing and ongoing support

Source: [antislaverycommissioner.co.uk](http://antislaverycommissioner.co.uk)

For example, Leicester's exploitation of migrant workers includes unlawful deductions from wages and the absence of holidays. Another difficulty that is vulnerable to further exploitation is that labor courts' claim of rights is an unrealistic option. The large number of migrant workers who are undocumented or have illegal immigration status. Another factor is employers' fear, feeling insecure about making claims in English, or not being aware of their rights [7]. Another case is 'The Morecambe Bay Disaster,' in which 21 undocumented Chinese migrants drowned in the sea and were forced to pick shells [1].

The fact that the crowds of migrant workers indicate several main things, migrant workers find it difficult to access justice in court because their immigration status is not documented or their contract work agreement is not by the rules of labor law. Second, low education and skills make them dare not claim their rights due to the absence of guaranteed employment status and protection from arbitrary dismissal. Third, the effect of low skills, migrant workers find it difficult to get opportunities to perform mobility status. Fourth, it is difficult for migrant workers to voice a collective voice related to their rights through trade unions. Fifth, it is possible that the precondition of migrant workers lies in the ability of the British government to suspend or ignore labor regulations or make calculations for the arbitrary actions of employers or owners of capital while using the issue of *xenophobia* or *Brexit* justification for British society. Migrant workers need to be equipped with job skills and expertise [11] [12]. Migrants can have both positive and negative impacts on human resources, companies, and the state [3]. Migrant worker issues and injustices are often the main topics [5]. Developed countries like the UK get negative issues about the migrant employee [8].

**The Rationality Paradox of Migrant Workers on Precariousness Conditions** The alarming facts that serve migrant workers in the UK are indirectly a result of the ongoing global economic system. The ease of access to available employment opportunities through the flexibility of the labor market has become a paradoxical thing, a guarantee that presents a system of outsourcing or offshoring, which creates insecurity for jobs and also intensifies insecurity in employment. This concept is actually a global neoliberalist project to maximize production and profit by exploiting contract workers like migrant workers. What is important about this problem is the consideration of the rationality of migrant workers in maintaining a job even though exploitative. This description of the problem provides a profound reflection on the idea of a fairly radical economic philosophy about the contradiction of human existentiality as a '*homo oeconomicus*' and also as a '*homo moralis*' and the acceptance of vulnerable conditions as '*homo sacer*' of migrant workers.

As *homo oeconomicus*, migrant workers activate everything that exists in themselves as material that has high economic value. They try to intensify themselves to obtain economic value from the actions or work they do because they are always in a state of dependence with other humans, namely "employer". Self-interest as the main feature of *homo oeconomicus* no longer reflects selfishness, greed in the sense of maximizing profit, but only as a state of abjection which must be accepted by them as their position as subordinate to employers. This abjection shows the low degree of migrant workers due to the absence of legal immigration documents, low skills, limited access to justice, dangerous immigration status, and the need to work for physiology (eating, drinking). This type of '*homo oeconomicus*' is a reflection of the helplessness of migrant workers in front of their employers, in the face of a contract system that binds them in the absence of guaranteed mobility in status and income that can change their self-view, including their standard of living. As Julia Kristeva says, they fall into the abyss of the lowest morality, when their moral judgment is also lost. As a result they allow everything that is themselves to be exploited so thoroughly for the benefit of the employer that their value as '*homo oeconomicus*', as well as '*homo moralis*', becomes valueless or according to the self-interests of the employers. It is this contradiction in identity for migrant workers that leads them to a choice of rationality for the precariousness they have experienced.

In simple terms, it can be seen that the rational choice to keep working despite experiencing exploitation is determined by economic factors despite having better, safer, and fairer preferences for themselves, but it does not allow migrant workers to take other options from several alternative options. Alternative options for precarious conditions can be running away from work, stopping work, or reporting to labor protection services, but limited access as a migrant worker, legally binding work contracts and fulfillment of life

necessities, migrant workers to accept exploited workers. This vulnerable position discourages migrant workers from taking the risk of losing their jobs.

According to Giorgio Agamben, the absence of rights as citizens and even humanity stripped of migrant workers put them in a '*bare life*' condition. They only become '*homo sacer*' as non-British citizens, even in political economy practice; they often become victims of violence. Their rights are neglected and even '*state of exception*' applies where the law applies with certain exceptions in the national interest. In a legal framework, violence and injustice are necessary and this is contrary to the principles of a democratic country like UK which respects equality and justice.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The paradox of rationality that accompanies the vulnerable conditions of migrant workers is a matter of great concern. For this reason, various efforts are needed both from researchers, institutions, institutions, and foundations for the protection of migrant workers in research and every case that befalls migrant workers. The UK government must take preventive measures and protect against acts of exploitation with reference to labor laws and international conventions such as the International Labor Organization; s (ILO) Forced Labor Convention 1930. It is also important to pay attention to migrant workers enter the UK according to appropriate regulations so that migrant workers who do not have official documents or who have illegal immigration documents can be prosecuted by immigration law without reducing or degrading their basic rights. If so, it can reduce the existing vulnerability of migrant workers. Furthermore, for a conceptual framework for the problem of exploitation of migrant workers, a research study is needed that not only emphasizes the epistemology, such as descriptive phenomena around data regarding the conditions of exploitation of migrant workers but also requires an ontological study to radically analyze the existentialism of migrant workers and the '*noumena*' aspect behind the phenomenon of migrant workers which is legible data.

#### REFERENCES

1. Beadsworth, Jack. (2019, December 17). How The UK Immigration System Exposes Vulnerable Migrants To Forced Labour. Retrieved November 13, 2020, from <https://eachother.org.uk/how-the-uk-immigration-system-exposes-vulnerable-migrants-to-forced-labour/>
2. Fatwa, Nur (2020) "The Development of National Islamic Foreign Exchange Bank in Indonesia," Journal of Strategic and Global Studies: Vol. 2: No. 2, Article 1.
3. Fatwa, N. 2020. Strengthening the Role of Sharia Public Banking in the Indonesian Construction Industry: Towards an Atmosphere of Sustainable Urban Development IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science 436(1),01202
4. Focus on Labour Exploitation. (2017). Risky Business: Tackling Exploitation in the UK Labour Market. Research Paper. Retrieved November 14, 2020, from [https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1178/risky-business\\_tackling-exploitation-inthe-uk-labour-market.pdf](https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1178/risky-business_tackling-exploitation-inthe-uk-labour-market.pdf)
5. Hannase, M., Arifah, F., Annas, S. (2020). The Contribution of Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in Improving Educational Infrastructures in Indonesia: A Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Perspective. IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 2020, 436(1), 012027
6. Kebung, Konrad. (2008). Rasionalisasi dan Penemuan Ide-Ide. Jakarta : Prestasi Pustaka.
7. Owusu, Natasha. (2020, July 15). In Leicester and beyond, migrant workers are being exploited. Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/leicester-and-beyond-migrantworkers-are-being-exploited>
8. Tairas, D.R., Kadir, A.R., Muis, M., et al (2016). The Influence of Strategic Leadership and Dynamic Capabilities through Entrepreneurship Strategy and Operational Strategy in Improving the Competitive Advantage of Private Universities in Jakarta, Indonesia. Scientific Research Journal (Scirj). Volume IV, Issue II, February 2016 Edition. ISSN: 22012796.
9. The Immigration Observatory. (2020, June 18). Work Visa and Migrant Worker in The UK. Retrieved November 13, 2020, from <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/work-visasand-migrant-workers-in-the-uk/>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2020, November 6). Migrants in the UK : An Overview. Retrieved November 13, 2020, from <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-anoverview/>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2019, July 15). Migrants in the UK Labour Market : An Overview. Retrieved November 15, 2020, from <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-inthe-uk-labour-market-an-overview/>

10. Trading Economic. United Kingdom Employment Rate. Retrieved November 12, 2020, from <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-kingdom/employment-rate>
11. \_\_\_\_\_. United Kingdom GDP Per Capita. Retrieved November 12, 2020, from <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-kingdom/gdp-per-capita>
12. Yola, L., Siong, H.C., Djaja, K. (2020). Climatically responsive urban configuration in residential area: Research gaps. AIP Conference Proceedings, 2020, 2255, 0700141
13. Yola, L. (2020). Canyon effects in urban configurations: Tropical context study. IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 2020, 436(1), 012028