



# Labour mobility post-Brexit:

a sectoral and multi-scalar approach to changing migration regulation,  
impact on labour processes and social dialogue

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# This paper- overview

“How are different actors (workers, migrants, employers, state...) responding to changes in labour mobilities in the UK, and how are their responses influencing the management of migrant labour at multiple scales and along supply chains?”

- **“Putting (migrant) labour in its place”**: LPT view on the place of labour in global production networks + Literature on management of migrant labour
- **Statistical analysis and secondary data (workforce + migration trends)**
- **Mapping exercise**
  - UK Government introduces new visa in some sectors
  - Employers responses
- **Multi-scalar/sector approach**: Feedback on theoretical framework and research plans

# ESRC project: "Labour Mobility in Transition"

A multi-actor study of the re-regulation of migrant work in 'low-skilled' sectors

Year 1  
Oct 21–Sept 22

Year 2  
Oct 22–Sept 23

Year 3  
Oct 23–Sept 24

WP1: Employer Survey  
national scale

June-September 2022  
***Sectors: Warehousing, Social Care,  
Hospitality, Food manufacturing***

WP2: Workplace cases &  
Sector Interviews regional

May 2022-June 23  
*3 case studies per sector*

WP3: Sector specific  
workshops multi-scalar

October 2022-September 24  
*Engagement with old and new actors*

# Literature

## Labour Process Theory and Global Production Networks

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**Need to “Put labour in its place”** (Newsome et al. 2015) in geographical accounts of value/production chains

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**Social composition of labour** and influence of institutional/regulatory change (Henderson, Coe, Cumbers)

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**Labour indeterminacy and ‘double indeterminacy’** (Smith 2006) **at core of LPT** and "relative autonomy of workplace" (Edwards 1990)

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**Multi-scalar analyses overlooked migrant agency** (beside gender and race) and state **migration policy** (post-Brexit state “re-gaining control”)

## Research on migrant labour in low-paid sectors + employer/worker strategies

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Local and international firms using migrant labour: **specific social characteristics of the workforce, sector + migrant exit strategies** (Andrijasevic, Sacchetto & Pun, 2020)

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Use of **agency workers** to expand labour pool and **respond to new government regulation**

+ new groups of migrants employed **directly** to reduce turnover, lower costs

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Employers' **serial switching** to new sources of labour from different EU regions as migrants integrate locally and raise pay/security expectations (MacKenzie and Forde 2009).

# Migration into the UK after Brexit



# Brexit policy changes: impact on migrants

## EU nationals in the UK before Jan 2021

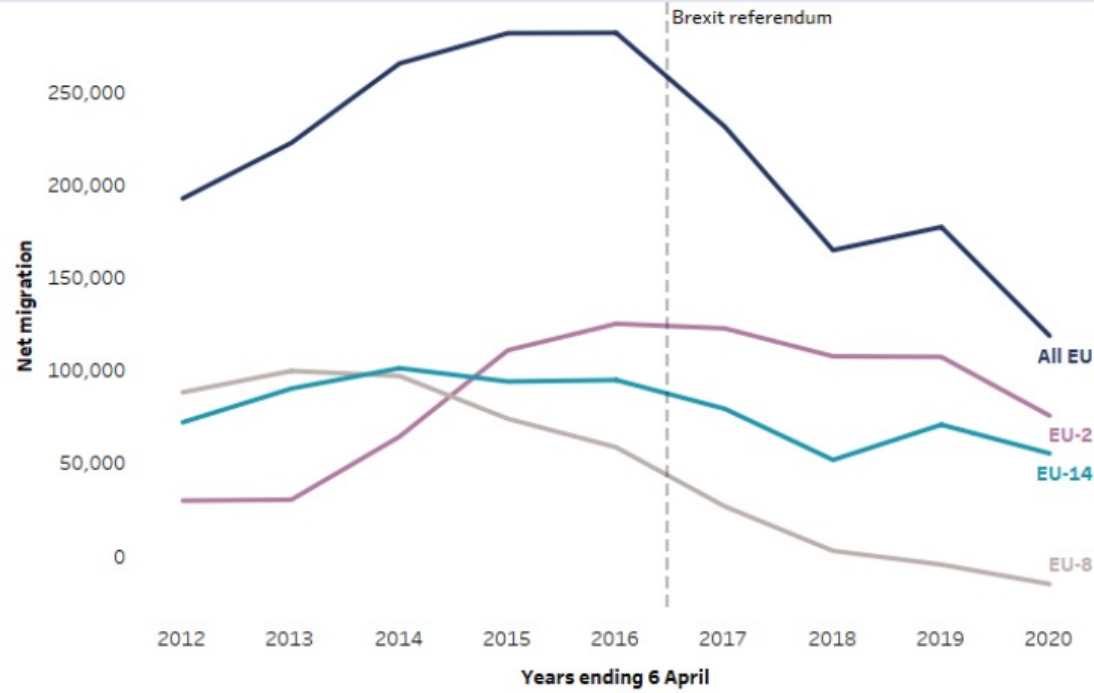
- Have to apply to the **EU Settlement Scheme**
- Two-tier system: **pre-settled vs settled status**.
- Settled status = indefinite leave to remain
- Pre-settled status = limited leave to remain (contested welfare rights)

## All new arrivals from January 2021

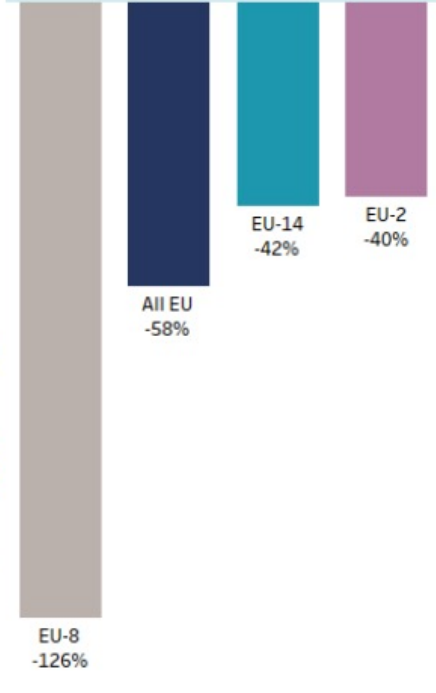
- End of free movement: '**Point Based System**' for everyone (including EU nationals)
- All need an **employer sponsor**
- **English** language at required level
- Job at required **skill level**
- **Salary threshold** £25, 599 or in designated shortage occupation £20,480
- Highly skilled and global talents favoured
- **Temporary visa schemes**: butchers, poultry workers and HGV drivers
- Existing **temporary visa scheme for seasonal agricultural workers**
- **New Care worker scheme**

# Migration into the UK

Estimated net migration of EU citizens to the UK, per year, 2012 to 2020  
Financial years ending 6 April



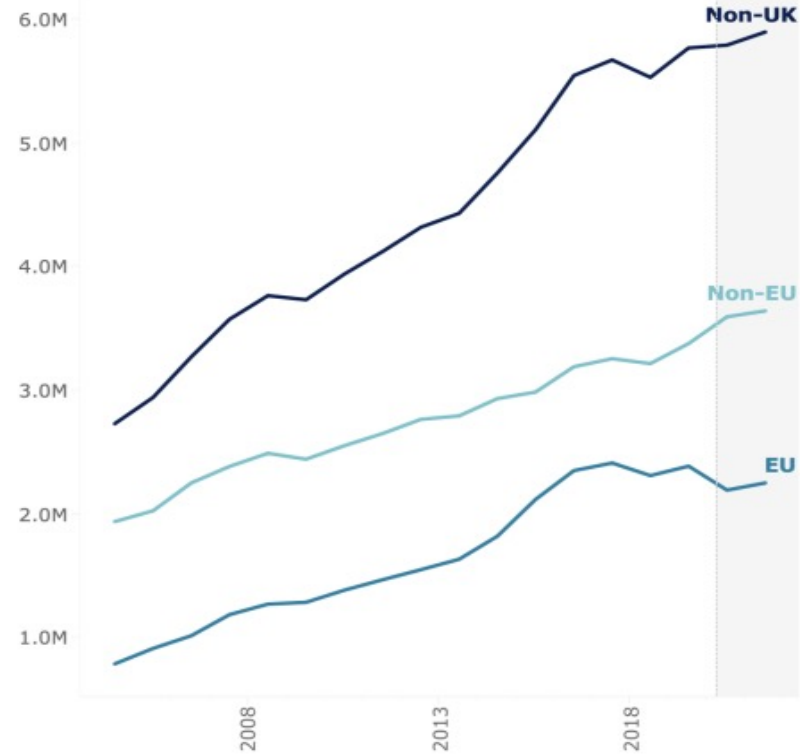
Decline in EU net migration, 2016 to 2020



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS, RAPID data (2021).  
Notes: Includes only the long-term migration of those moving or leaving the UK for at least one year.

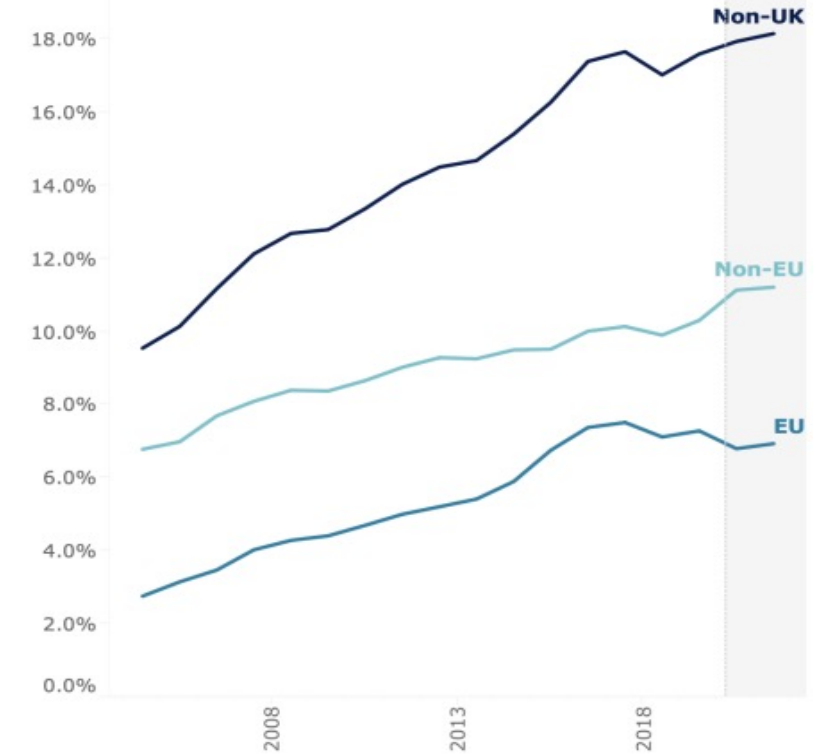


### Non-UK born workers in employment, 2004-2021 Age 16+



- Quarter 1
  - Quarter 2
  - Quarter 3
  - Quarter 4
- London
  - UK

### Share of people in employment who are not UK born, 2004-2021 Age 16+



- Quarter 1
  - Quarter 2
  - Quarter 3
  - Quarter 4
- London
  - UK

Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS Table A12 *Employment, unemployment and economically inactive levels by country of birth* (published on 16 November 2021)

Note: in this figure, the employed population comprise all those age 16+ who, in a short reference period, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit as employees, self-employed, or under a government employment and training programmes. Unpaid family workers are also included in the employed category.



## Unemployment rate by country of birth, 2004-2021

Age 16+

*Not seasonally adjusted. Comparisons across years should be made using the same quarter*



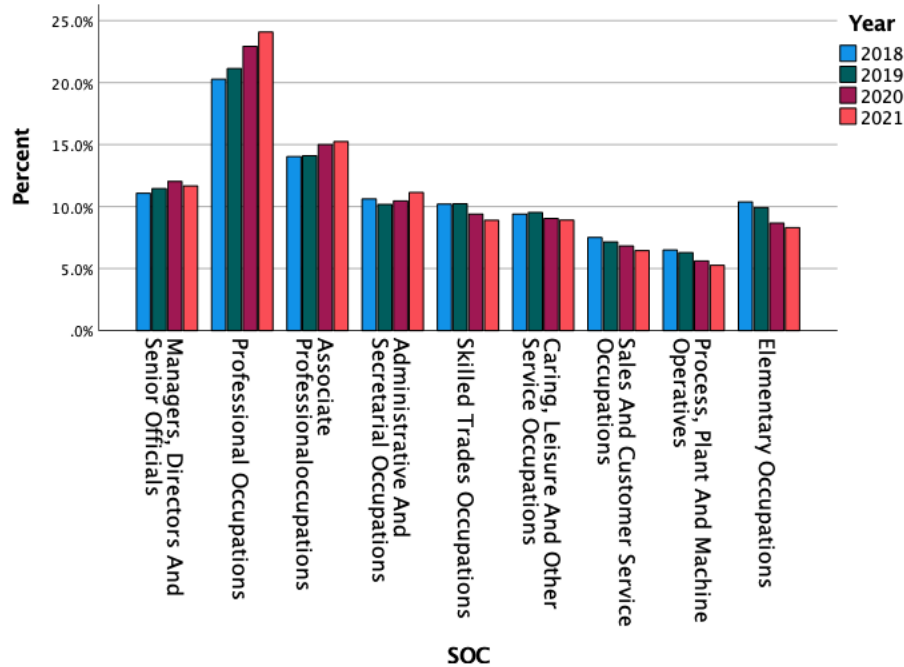
Source: Migration Observatory analysis of ONS Table A12 *Employment, unemployment and economically inactive levels by country of birth* (published on 16 November 2021).

Note: the unemployment rate is the share of unemployed workers among the active population (employed and unemployed) in the labour force. The inactive population (e.g. full-time students, retirees or people staying at home to care for family members) are thus excluded.

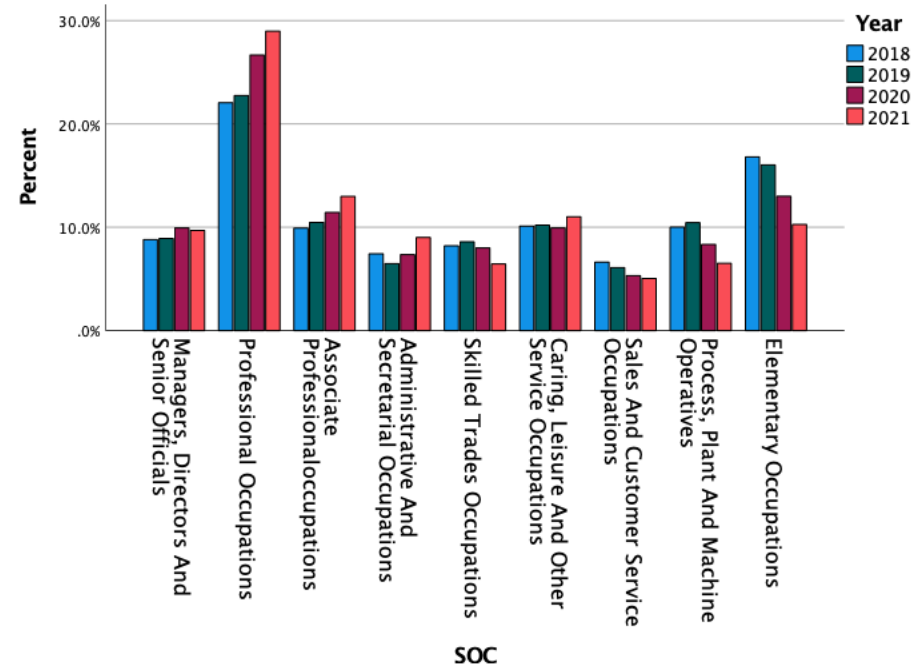


# Workers/ jobs by sector LFS: decrease of workers in elementary occupations

## Whole workforce

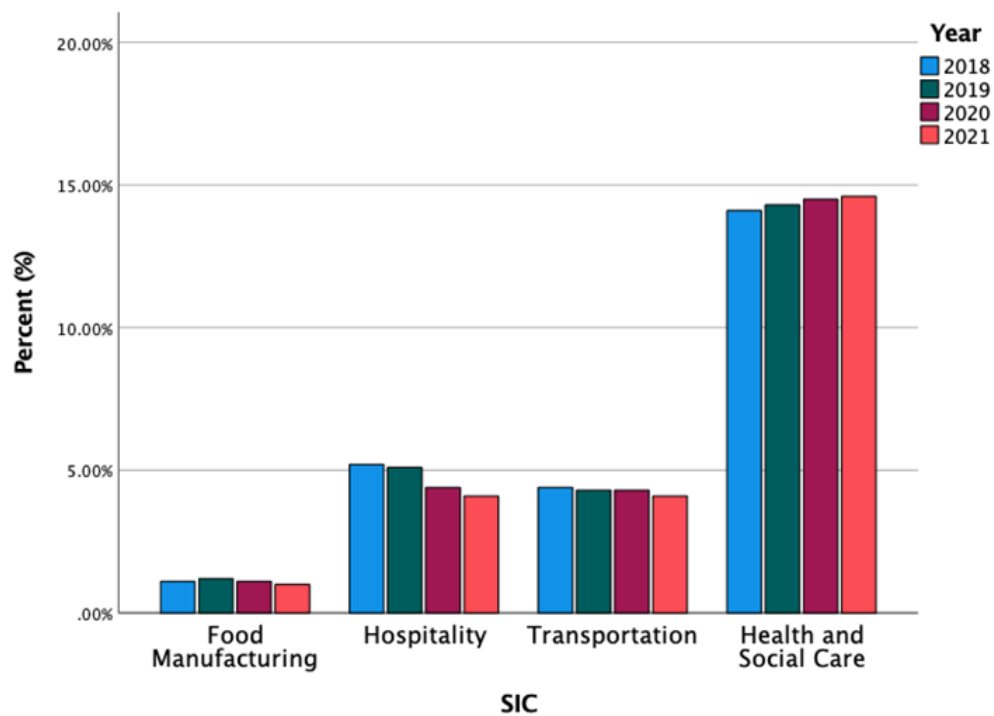


## Migrant workers

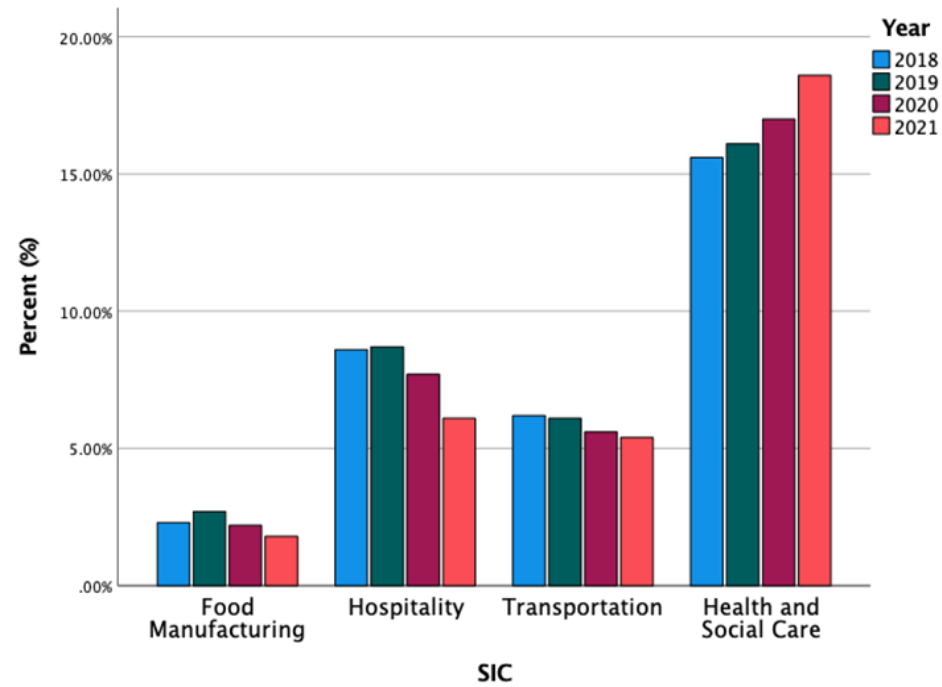


# Workers/ jobs by sector LFS

Whole workforce

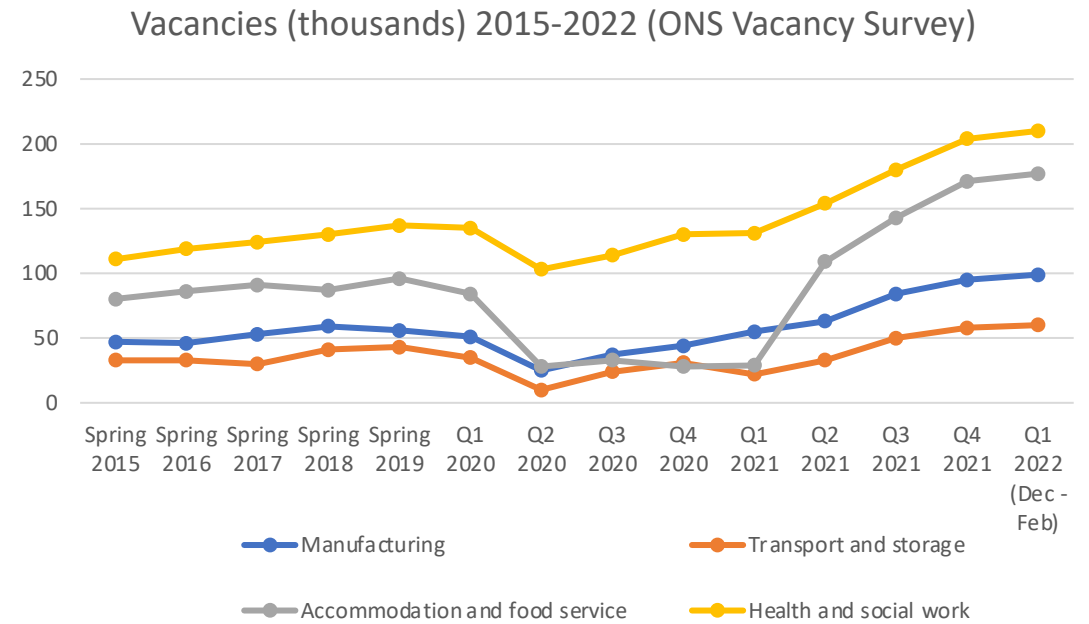
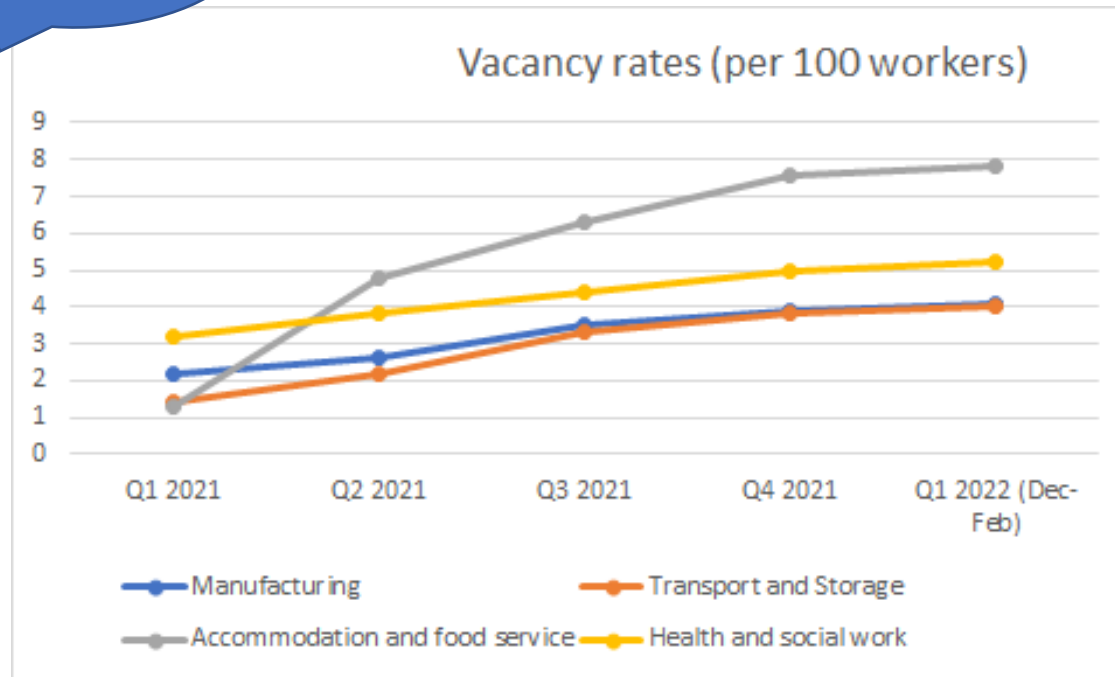


Migrants



# "THE MISSING MILLION": A LABOUR CRISIS

OUR  
4 SECTORS



# Mapping Employers' substitutive strategies

What we  
know so  
far?

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Increase use of automation and digitalisation in most sectors

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Diversification of the workforce

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Signing up bonuses

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Increased interest in hiring from overseas

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Higher wages

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Trying to influence government policy, e.g. lobbying for new visa schemes

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Aiming to improve the image of the sector to make it more attractive as a career choice, e.g. flexible working

# Concluding remarks...and feedback?

- Drop in workforces in low paid sectors: Pandemic + “Brexodus”
- The relevance of a multi-actor/multi-scalar approach to the study of migrant labour
  - Sectoral dimension as under explored “scale” by labour geographers and LPT
  - Lower net migration shows **agency of migrant labour** in shortage crisis
  - Nature of work and **changing labour composition** crucial to understand "workplace/local labour regime" amidst labour mobility transitions and **crisis of labour reproduction** (also beyond the workplace)
- Workplace scale still central but to be analysed in context of supply chain and 'mobility' crisis
- Design too ambitious? Multi-scalar+ multiple actors?